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The English Primary
National Strategy in Four Schools:
A Policy Trajectory and Case Study

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The English Primary National Strategy in four schools: a policy trajectory and case study

Abstract

This thesis investigates the multi-faceted approach to primary school improvement, the English Primary National Strategy, in two distinct stages; the first focussed on policy texts and discourses. I tell my story, from being a headteacher, through to becoming a researcher, positioning this research within the context of policy sociology. I examine the historical development of primary education, identifying themes leading to a critical analysis of the introductory Strategy document *Excellence and Enjoyment* (DfES 2003) and subsequent policy initiatives.

The second stage involved developing four ethnographic case studies, three in schools in isolated pockets of deprivation and one in a more affluent area of the English East Midlands. The notion of ‘tripping points’ is developed, identifying incidents and policies which impacted negatively and created tensions in two schools struggling to cope with a multiplicity of on-going strategy developments, alongside inherent difficulties. I highlight unusual circumstances in the third school and explain how creativity and innovation flourished there, with ‘tripping points’ being avoided, whilst in the fourth school few such difficulties were identified and staff were encouraged to develop as learners.

A critical analysis of standardised initiatives imposed upon three schools to meet performance targets identified further issues. The impact of these programmes, along with funding difficulties and concerns about the number and quality of staff needed to further raise achievement appeared problematic.

I argue that, to bring about sustainable change for these schools, far more than pressure, ‘workforce reform’ and efficiencies associated with the Primary Strategy are needed. This research suggests that until these schools have enough staff of high quality, and sufficient resources, the identified ‘tripping points’ will remain. I propose that the centrally controlled system and structure of primary education needs to be changed and the money saved directed towards these and similar schools and communities.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

AfL	Assessment for Learning
BECTA	British Educational Communications and Technology Agency
BERA	British Educational Research Association
CVA	Contextual Value Added
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DES	Department of Education and Science
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DIUS	Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
ERA	Education Reform Act 1988
FSM	Free School Meals
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HMI	Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools
HMCI	Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools
ICT	Information and Communications Technologies
IDACI	Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index
ISI	Improving Schools Initiative
ISP	Intensifying Support Programme
KS1	Key Stage 1 (5-7 year olds)

KS2	Key Stage 2 (8-11yr olds)
LEA	Local Education Authority
LA	Local Authority
LMS	Local Management of Schools
NAHT	National Association of Headteachers
NCSL	National College for School Leadership
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
PPA	Planning, Preparation and Assessment
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
SATs	Standardised Assessment Tasks
SEF	Self Evaluation Form
SIP	School Improvement Partner
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
SMT	Senior Management Team
TASC	Thinking Actively in a Social Context
TES	Times Educational Supplement
TGAT	Task Group on Assessment and Testing
UNISON	Public Service Workers Union

Papers presented & related research

09.03.2006 – 11.03.06 NERA (Nordic Education Research Association)

Annual Conference 'Education widens democracy or ..?' .Orebro University,
Sweden

Paper presented '*Is the National Primary Strategy transforming or ossifying
English primary schools*'

06.09.2006- 09.06.2006 **BERA** Annual Conference Warwick

Paper presented (student conference); *Counting the cost: the financial
implications for English primary schools of implementing and sustaining the
initiatives associated with the National Primary Strategy*

25.03.2007 – 27.03.2007 Discourse Power Resistance 6: Talking Truth to
Power Manchester

Paper presented; *From Payment by Results to Performativity –an historical
perspective*

5.09.2007- 8.09.2007 BERA Annual Conference 2007, - University of
London, Institute of Education.

*Paper presented (main conference); The Primary National Strategy, Choice
& 'New Labour's Poor'.*

04.07.2008- 06.07.2008 Annual BELMAS Conference 2008. 'Equity and
Diversity in Educational Leadership' Aston Business School Birmingham

Paper presented; *Will equity and diversity flourish whilst the Primary
Strategy contains so many contentious 'tripping points'?*

03.09.2008 – 06.09.2008 **BERA Annual Conference 2008**, - Herriot-Watt
University, Edinburgh

Paper presented; *Can the Primary National Strategy ever succeed?*

Related Research Projects

Thomson, P., Day, C., Beales, B., & Curtis, B. (May 2009). NCSL Change
Leadership Project: 12 school portraits: University of Nottingham –
awaiting publication

Day, C., Qing, G., McIntyre, J., Brown, E., & Curtis, B. (August 2009).
Partnerships for Education, Well-being and Work: Models of
University Service in the Community Pilot HEFCE Partnerships
Project: University of Nottingham – report submitted

Chapter 1 The roller coaster ride of education reform: positioning the research and the researcher

Our ideas, our values, our acts, even our emotions, are, like our nervous system itself, cultural products – products manufactured, indeed, out of tendencies, capacities and dispositions with which we were born , but manufactured nonetheless (Geertz, 1973 p50).

1.1 Introduction

The Primary National Strategy, introduced in *Excellence and Enjoyment: a strategy for primary schools* (DfES, 2003a), was presented by the Secretary of State for Education, Charles Clark, as the definitive way forward for English primary education, in May 2003. Key Stage 2 results had plateaued causing government concerns that the literacy and numeracy strategies of 1998 and 1999, despite proclaimed success, were not achieving sustained improvement. To further improve school performance the Primary Strategy appeared to offer, for some headteachers and schools, the opportunity for the development of a more creative and innovative curriculum. However this was alongside a raft of other expectations, legislation, workforce reform and financial support, symptomatic of the Third Way approach of New Labour (Ball, 2008a p88-89) and their earlier ambition of creating a ‘world class system’ of education (Barber, 2001 p36). At the time I was working as a consultant in a number of primary schools where headteachers appeared somewhat cynical about the strategy, with comments such as ‘*First you’ve got to have the excellence and then you can have the enjoyment.*’ This was the starting point for my research into the implementation of the Primary Strategy.

1.2 Developing the research questions

My research has been involved with developing knowledge and understanding of the implementation and impact of the Primary Strategy using critical policy discourse analysis and ethnographic case studies. With the arrival of *Excellence and Enjoyment* in schools, headteachers, former colleagues and more recent acquaintances in the East Midlands, appeared concerned that they were being asked to do what seemed to them impossible, by firstly achieving excellence and then ensuring that enjoyment followed.

It was this apparent contradiction that fascinated me. Were innovative ideas going to be allowed to flourish or was the standards agenda going to override creativity? Could they exist alongside each other? What was the effect of all the other structures and initiatives being introduced as part of the strategy? Would those most knowledgeable about teaching and learning have the time and energy to reinvigorate the curriculum? How would the different elements of the strategy impact upon children? What sort of schools was this strategy creating?

Schools in areas of socio-economic deprivation

The headteachers I heard expressing concerns were in schools situated in areas of considerable social deprivation. Some seemed more successful in coping with the government standards agenda than others. Policy makers have frequently referred to there being highly successful schools in such areas (Barber, 2001 p27; DfES, 2003a p20-21; Ofsted, 2002 p3; see Thrupp & Lupton, 2006 p310-315 for a critique). Other evidence suggests that schools in such areas may struggle to overcome more widespread socio-economic

difficulties within their communities (Lupton, 2005; O'Connor, Hales, Davies, & Tomlinson, 1999; Thomson, 2002; Thrupp, 1999).

To further examine these concerns, in a pilot study, (part of my MA in Research Methods in Education), using contacts already established, I approached the heads of six ordinary, unexceptional schools which had not been categorised as outstanding, ranging in Ofsted terms, from good to satisfactory, with one just out of special measures. Five schools were in areas of low socio-economic status, confirmed using criteria of free school meals and geographical location. These were schools where the Primary Strategy had the potential to make a real difference in 'breaking the mould' of social deprivation. My hypothesis was that if the policy worked in these 'disadvantaged' schools, bringing about sustainable change, it should be expected to work elsewhere. To consider this I also included one medium sized village school with few apparent difficulties. I undertook a series of semi structured, informal interviews with the head teachers. The conversations centred on impressions of their schools both before and after the publication of *Excellence and Enjoyment* (DfES, 2003a) (and were based on the seven chapter headings of '*Excellence and Enjoyment*').¹ Supporting documentary evidence was also collected from each school. From this pilot study it became clear that my research was being done at a fortuitous time (Curtis, 2005).

The combination of a critical analysis of *Excellence and Enjoyment*, interviews and data provided evidence that a number of statutory changes, being introduced in September 2005, could well shape developments in primary

¹ School character & innovation, Excellent primary teaching, Learning – a focus on individual children, Partnership beyond the classroom, Leadership in primary schools and the power of collaboration, Managing school resources: Workforce reform in primary schools, Realising the vision

schools for the foreseeable future. Although the findings from the interviews in this pilot study were not generalisable, they were clearly indicative of the direction and depth needed for further research.

Questions raised by the pilot study

From analysis of the pilot study it became clear that in recent years these headteachers had been creative in balancing resources and in giving teachers more time to work together, as budgets and support staff increased. Some exciting developments, such as cross curricular whole school teaching and learning policies, were being implemented. *Excellence and Enjoyment* quite rightly celebrated such initiatives.

The pilot study not only highlighted evidence of such positive developments but also raised questions about the overall impact and sustainability of the Primary Strategy. This led to the development of my main research and subsidiary questions about the way the Strategy was impacting on overlooked and ignored ‘ordinary’ primary schools in isolated pockets of deprivation.

Research Question

What has been the impact of the Primary Strategy on schools in isolated pockets of deprivation?

Subsidiary questions:

1. Will such schools be able to maintain the momentum of innovation, in a climate of rapid change?
2. Will more ‘excellent’ schools be created or will the majority become entrenched in the implementation of mandated initiatives?
3. Will statutory legislation inhibit or encourage creative development in primary schools?

4. Is funding sufficient to realize the vision?

Why this matters

These questions have resonance for all primary schools, but are particularly important for schools frequently identified by government agencies as failing, under-achieving or requiring special measures.² It is in such schools that the main drive of government policy in addressing socio-economic difficulties through the standards agenda is situated and appears most problematic. However it is not clear whether these schools have the capacity to bring about sustainable change in ways expected by the Primary Strategy. In answering the above questions this research is intended to inform policy makers, politicians, local authorities and schools about the viability of what has been introduced, to celebrate successes and to highlight areas of concern that may be inhibiting further progress towards achieving the Strategy goal of achieving excellence in teaching and enjoyment in learning for all schools.

Situating this research

In the rest of this chapter I set the introduction of the Primary National Strategy (DfES, 2003a) within the context of the development of centralised government control of education in the latter part of the 20th Century. To help understand the impact of these changes on schools, I position myself as a ‘vulnerable observer’ (Behar, 1996) experiencing the emotional roller coaster ride of being a primary school headteacher at the time. I conclude the chapter with a summary of the chapters to come.

² Schools with less than 65% achieving Level 4 in English and Maths were expected to reach at least that level as soon as possible, according to *Excellence and Enjoyment* (DfES 2003), or be subjected to *decisive intervention and support where standards were at risk* (p13).

1.3 A headteacher's tale. Where did all the 'good times' go?

How it all started

I do not come to this research from a position of neutrality. It would be impossible to make such a claim. However I believe that my personal experience enriches my position as a critical policy researcher. Forty years ago a copy of the Plowden Report (DES, 1967)³ was thrust into my hands, as my father did his best to persuade me not to go to art school, and instead to follow his footsteps into teaching. He had recently overseen the closure of the last all age school (5-15yrs) in Lindsey LEA, Lincolnshire and decided to become head of the new junior school instead of the new comprehensive school. To him Plowden offered a much more interesting approach to teaching and learning than the rapidly increasing pressure for exam qualifications developing in secondary schools. His persuasion worked. I trained to be a primary school teacher.

It seemed that teachers could not be trusted

Exciting times were ahead, but, on the horizon, dark clouds loomed as the country headed towards an economic recession in the mid 70s. Politicians and the media looked for someone to blame. 'Progressive' primary schools seemed to be an easy target (Alexander, 2000 p140) in a very disparate system. There was little consistency, even between schools with a progressive label. I was

³ The Plowden Report 'Children and their Primary Schools' a government commissioned, wide ranging review of primary education with the memorable opening sentence to the second chapter. '*At the heart of the educational process lies the child*'. Amongst a wide ranging set of recommendations it promoted 'progressive' education and was originally welcomed, but by the mid 1970s it was vilified by right wing academics and press. It is considered in more detail in Chapter 4.

fortunate to have worked in two schools which were innovative and creative, very much in line with good practice identified by Plowden, whilst others simply followed a 'topic' approach which involved little more than copying pictures out of text books. Not far away, at the other extreme, children in a church school sat in rows, were rigidly taught by subjects, tested each half term, wore uniform (blazers and ties for the boys and skirts for the girls) and stood up whenever a visitor entered the room. Elsewhere, in Islington in 1975, the William Tyndale Junior School debacle, where there was an 'apparent failure of progressive methods' (Davis, 2002 p275) further polarised opinion nationally.

The headteacher I was working for at the time was presenting a series of films about highly successful and innovative primary schools in London for Thames Today (The London ITV regional news and current affairs programme). As soon as the William Tyndale affair became national headlines ILEA (the Inner London Education Authority), stung by criticism of its role, banned such independent media involvement. The rest of the series was cancelled. By this time the autonomy of such local authorities was starting to be questioned by the press and politicians (Davis, 2002 p293). It seemed that ILEA was worried about its future.

It is not surprising that there were concerns about the various directions local authorities and primary schools were taking. Civil servants at the DES were uneasy, particularly worried about 'localized, piecemeal, unsupervised, professionally led and progressively-influenced reform – in primary schools and throughout the state system' (Jones, 2003 p95). Prime Minister Callaghan was motivated to begin the 'Great Debate', in late 1976, identifying key

concerns associated with standards, curriculum control and economic performance, described as a contraction in expectations (Richards, 1999 p13) far removed from the societal optimism of the Plowden era (Cunningham, 1988 p34).

Following ten years of disquiet and a change of government, matters were brought to a head in 1988 with the introduction of the Education Reform Act (ERA). Neo-liberal policies and initiatives were introduced by the Conservatives, which to this day continue to influence and control schools. It is fascinating in retrospect to see how Callaghan's fields of concern developed into Conservative government policy. By this time I had worked my way up through the system, including time as a deputy head and as an advisory teacher running an urban studies centre. Throughout my career I had been encouraged to innovate and think creatively, but I was now increasingly wary of the limitations and restrictions to my independence being introduced by central government in what was '.... a profound change in the basic organizing principles of the English education system' (Ball, 2008b p197). These changes were the foundations upon which the Primary Strategy would be built 15 years later. The next section considers the impact of elements of the ERA, in personal terms, which continue to dominate the effectiveness of policy implementation today.

Engaging with the system: a personal account

In 1988 I was a young, idealist and enthusiastic primary headteacher still clutching my copy of Plowden and using it as inspiration. This story is a first hand account of experiencing the policy moves that established centralised

government control and which have now been strengthened and appear to dominate the Primary Strategy.

The era before the ERA.

I moved from Buckinghamshire to become a primary school headteacher in Nottinghamshire (225 pupils + 40 place nursery) in January 1987, having been interviewed by a panel of 15 councillors and governors at County Hall. During a 10 minute talk to the panel, I presented them with some fragments of human skull and jaw bone, retrieved by an 8 year old boy from a church graveyard spoil heap during a field trip. I explained how it was possible to develop most aspects of the primary curriculum from this find, when combined with the rest of the bone collection on display in the classroom. This work included writing to the vicar to check that it was alright to keep the fragments. I believed (as I still do) in developing a curriculum based on first hand experience. It seemed to do the trick. After the panel had asked a number of questions, including opposing political party councillors trying to outdo each other with such puns as ‘getting to the bare bones of the matter’ and it being ‘a grave issue’, I was duly appointed. A few years later I heard of the use of such artefacts in interviews being dismissed as a gimmick on NPQH (National Professional Qualification for Headship) training.

My brief from the peripatetic head, who ran the school for a term before my arrival, was very clear. A note on my desk simply said ‘All areas of the curriculum need developing’. Two terms later I was fortunate to be able to appoint an outstanding deputy headteacher to help do just that. The most memorable part of that interview was the account of the visit to the local

supermarket with a class of 6 year olds to look at continental foods. This was supported by writing, drawings and a painting of a saveloy.

A strong leadership team was established. There were a number of staff changes, one member of staff being successfully redeployed by the County Council and others subsequently retiring. Classrooms were transformed into learning environments, with interactive displays and artefacts, helped by students from Bishop Grosseteste College of Education, itself closely linked with the progressive ideal, having hosted the annual Plowden conference for several years⁴. Staff took to working enthusiastically from first hand experience. Creativity flourished. All classes went out on educational visits each half term, and eventually all KS2 classes experienced annual residential field trips. In 1988 we became involved in the Nottinghamshire Staff Development Project (Bassey, 1999) with a cover teacher, provided for a whole year, to release members of staff, for half a term each, to research various aspects of personal and school development. Many of the areas which this project investigated, such as the behaviour policy, were significantly improved. Close liaisons were made with our 11-14 high school, initially for a year in maths development and subsequently in science, with teachers regularly visiting each others' schools. We had a modern, purpose built 40 place nursery, catering for 80 part time 3-5 year old children that had already developed a very strong ethos.

It is important to record here that this is only the positive part of the story and it should not be considered a rose tinted view. Not all staff were either able or

⁴ . However even the value of this was questioned by some commentators (Cunningham, 1988 p160)

willing to change; 30% of the children were on free school meals; expectations generally were very low. There was little support for children with learning difficulties, with no teaching assistants in main school. Many parents were apathetic. For their children it was our job *'to learn 'em'*. To begin with, disruptive behaviour was a problem with a small number of children, and staffing changes and illness could soon disturb the equilibrium. The prefabricated aluminium building was already 10 years past its sell by date. There were few resources and décor and furniture were shabby. A nearby village school attracted a number of families from our catchment area. All areas of the curriculum did need developing. On my first visit to the school before my interview a class studying the Romans did not even know that many of them crossed a Roman road, the Fosse Way, every day coming to school. These issues were addressed over the next 10 years but during that time it was externally imposed policy moves which were to have considerable impact on both the staff and children.

The Education Reform Act (ERA) 1988

The Education Reform Act (1988) was the beginning of changes that were to have an on-going effect into the 21st Century. As with most legislation the various elements of this act did not take place immediately, but were gradually introduced over the next few years;

The National Curriculum 1988-89

The establishment of the National Curriculum was the first manifestation of change to impact. Liaison with the high school was abandoned as we attempted to interpret the prescription of subject policy documents into our way of cross curricular planning, to ensure that our visits and field trip programme, needed

to enrich the learning experiences of our children, continued. To begin with it was the core subject documents, English, mathematics and science which arrived; one large folder per subject per teacher. Most staff meetings and Inset days were taken up with drafting and re-drafting our ideas. Other curriculum subject documents arrived throughout the year. New roles, curriculum co-ordinators, were created to manage what seemed to be unmanageable – but this is what we were told to do.

Local Management of Schools 1990/92

The introduction of Local Management of Schools (LMS) seemed to be an exciting opportunity to access funds that until then had been controlled by the LEA. I spent days with the school secretary attending training to understand the budget responsibilities and the setting of budgets, in ensuring that our account was effectively managed with appropriate audit trails, in understanding the technology and in being able to present budget reports to governors. The school secretary became the budget manager but was never sufficiently confident to work independently. This was not the job she had been employed to do and, understandably, she was concerned about the responsibilities and the technology. I was consulted on a daily basis. Having more freedom to direct funding was a positive experience, but the associated bureaucracy was a major distraction and disappointment. Services to support us were lost or had to be ‘bought back’ from the LEA.

At the same time I received further training, with the chair of governors, regarding personnel and employment issues and new responsibilities including the issuing of contracts and redundancy procedures. The following year, because of budget reductions and a fall in numbers, I had to implement

redundancy procedures. As well as being a very pedantic procedure this was an emotionally draining exercise, having to identify and tell two members of the team that they were to be made redundant. Justifying the criteria to union representatives was particularly excruciating. In the end only one redundancy happened, but it was very time consuming and exhausting.

SATs introduction 1991/94

The first trial of KS 1 science SATs 'floating and sinking' in 1991 was very laborious. The County Council refused to implement KS1 SATs in the next year, one of only three councils to do so. In 1994 the DfEE sent out trial KS2 SATs. Governors agreed that, as a familiarisation exercise, children should do them, without preparation or coaching, but the test results should not be published. The papers were externally marked and the results sent to the DFEE, instead of being returned to us, and duly published in league tables in 1995, much to the annoyance of the governing body. As expected, results were poor. Some parents were concerned, understandably. The lesson was learnt. In subsequent years we prepared for SATs. We coached the children and results improved. I led the coaching each year, starting in the autumn term. We did not do optional SATs in other years, feeling that they distracted from all the other activities we were doing. (Today, although not statutory, there is an expectation, by Ofsted, for schools to track progress using such tests.)

A revised National Curriculum 1993

Some of the more unmanageable elements of the National Curriculum were removed following a report by Sir Ron Dearing, but once more many staff meetings were spent adjusting our whole school planning.

Ofsted 1994 -1996

Advice from my headteacher union had been to write to the Secretary of State for Education about issues of concern associated with the ERA. Over 7 years this amounted to almost 60 letters. It came as no surprise that the school was one of the first to be inspected when primary inspections began in September 1994. This was a thoroughly unpleasant experience, the amount of paperwork and documentary evidence required unbelievable and the approach of the lead inspector, a recently retired HMI, somewhat unsympathetic. Following the observation of an exciting drama lesson with a class of six year olds, in which the deputy headteacher had been in role for the whole lesson, the children returned to the classroom to change into their outdoor clothing. As they made their way out to lunch, the deputy breathed a sigh of relief, only to find the inspector still there. There was no acknowledgement of the quality of the lesson or of the effort put into it, or the self discipline of the children throughout the session. She was greeted by; "Excuse me Mrs R. Could you tell me how you teach vowel digraphs?" As English co-ordinator she was, no doubt, expected to answer instantly, thus ensuring that another box on the Ofsted list was ticked. Twenty minutes later the deputy escaped to the staffroom absolutely livid and clearly upset. This was the calmest, most supportive and creative teacher in the school and she had been treated with contempt by this inspector. The only consolation was that in explaining this experience in the staffroom it had sounded as if the inspector has asked her about the teaching of bowel diagrams. To this day that sums up his attitude. Nothing seen during the inspection that was innovative or creative was even acknowledged. We were told to change our approach by putting the National

Curriculum first in our planning and then to fit other experiences around it, if we could. Despite surviving without severe criticism we were emotionally drained for the rest of that school year.

Only the nursery came out with a glowing report and was categorised as excellent – which it was. Interestingly at that time there was no Foundation Stage or early years curriculum. A conversation in the nursery was quite revealing. The nursery teacher was taken aside by an inspector, another retired HMI who, after praising the nursery, whispered to her “Don’t let the bastards get you down.” At this point there was momentary panic. The teacher asked, feeling somewhat perplexed “Who do you mean - the children, the other staff, the parents?” No he replied “The government.”

1996 & HMI visit

On the strength of the nursery report, in early 1996, I took the opportunity to train as a Registered Nursery Inspector for Ofsted to monitor, in private settings, the implementation of ‘Desirable Outcomes’, the voucher driven first stage towards an early years curriculum. I wanted to get a picture of life on the other side. I was one of the first to be trained, before the county council placed an embargo on its employees being involved. The training over three days was excellent, working with a number of nationally prominent early years practitioners who were also being trained. I only did 6 inspections, the minimum to avoid having to pay for the training. The inspections were frustrating because the structure did not allow for any constructive criticism or suggestions for improvement; they were simply judgemental and formulaic.

This experience was helpful when, two years to the day after our inspection, an HMI was sent by Ofsted to see whether we were implementing the statutory

Action Plan, drawn up following publication of the report. We had revised our curriculum planning considerably and the changes were appreciated by this inspector, BUT he told us that we had to now produce specific plans for each subject in order to show 'progression'. Yet more drastic changes were needed. A cross curricular approach to planning was not considered appropriate, so we concentrated on developmental plans for English, mathematics and science, but still maintained our visits and field trips to bring in other subjects. Such things as a whole school Greek week also helped to tick boxes and we did make them exciting and enjoyable. We had addressed other issues with regard to the quality of teaching and ensuring that we did comply with legislation in our daily act of collective worship. The HMI went away happy and gave us a positive report, in letter form. But, against his better judgement, he was obliged to tell us to put the National Curriculum first.

Not all schools were so fortunate. Another local school had been inspected at the same time as us and was also re-visited two years later. Apparently this head had not addressed the issues in the Action Plan and was forced to resign – a salutary lesson to us all.

1997/8 Literacy and Numeracy – strategies to survive

To keep ahead of 'the game' we introduced both the literacy hour and the numeracy strategy a year early. This approach seemed to fit in with the demands of HMI and there were enormous amounts of resources being made available. Watching the strategy training videos was bizarre, with experienced staff being told not only what to teach but also how to teach. More positively it did help to bring the staff together, but the feeling was that the literacy strategy, particularly, was very rigid for the teachers delivering it. However teachers

became afraid that they had to conform. One particularly inspirational young teacher, trained in drama, refused to use drama skills in delivering the literacy hour because there were no exemplars anywhere in the documents, even though we gave permission and really wanted it to happen. Five years later this teacher could have been famous as an exemplar in *Excellence and Enjoyment*... if only.....

1998/1999 Emotionally drained

This was not a good time.

- My mother died unexpectedly in early 1998
- A year later my father also died suddenly
- My Deputy of 10 years left to travel with her husband to work in Hong Kong, away from the pressures associated with teaching here.
- During this period, over more than a year, my wife was hospitalised several times, including Christmas Day, with undiagnosed gall bladder problems. Despite this she kept working. Eventually the problem was diagnosed and key hole surgery arranged. A diet of boiled chicken and rice kept her going, just, for three months.
- The key hole surgery went wrong, resulting in 4 hours fully invasive surgery, two weeks recovery in hospital and a 30cm scar. This was a shock for all concerned
- Our dog died
- A very close elderly relative became ill and over 6 months deteriorated and died

- In May 1999 Ofsted came again. We had a much better report this time but still felt frustrated that our extra curricular provision was barely acknowledged.
- My elderly Aunt fell and broke her hip. She eventually got back home but needed a lot of visits to support her.

I did not realize the toll that these events had taken on me and the effects on my family of my emotionally drained behaviour. I returned to school in September 1999 with my new deputy taking a class for the first time, having been supernumerary for two terms to build up a detailed understanding of the school. Two very good newly qualified teachers also took up posts at this time. Everything seemed positive. All we had to do we produce an Action Plan for Ofsted, as well as responding to at least a dozen new government initiatives, which was becoming the norm.

In the last week in September I came home and was in bed by 6.00 pm with a splitting headache on three consecutive nights. I seemed to get better but on the following Monday morning woke up and simply told my wife I was not going into school. I was diagnosed with post viral fatigue syndrome. I did not return to work. I eventually resigned for the sake of my health and my family. Six other primary headteachers in the district were also on long term sickness leave at the time. The words of Ball sum up my position at this time;

Performativity drives resistance, drives professionalism, inside the practitioner – in doing so the alternatives to responsibility and excellence are either escape or madness (Ball, 2006 p23).

In my case, for a time, it was probably both.

The road to recovery

It was 18 months before I set foot in a school again. By this time my wife had become a headteacher and she persuaded me to come along to an INSET day about brain based learning. I was able to identify with so many things mentioned about learning by the speaker that my interest was re-kindled. I came out of my stupor and started to work creatively in the school and then do some supply work. I developed my own business running themed days using plants which I introduced into schools. I eventually ended up running INSET courses for the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS). This motivated me to seek higher academic qualifications in order to bring a more reflective depth of knowledge to my own experience.

I was fortunate to be accepted onto the MA in Research Methods course at Nottingham University and was able to remain there for my PhD research into the implementation of the Primary Strategy. This has enabled me to develop a strong theoretical framework for this research, using my experience and expertise as a primary practitioner alongside my newly developed research skills. This is considered in more depth in Chapter 3.

1.4 My research – a complicated story

To help understand the multi-layered complexity of policy implementation, in Chapter 2, I amplify my story by considering in detail primary school research since 1988, much of which has examined the same issues that I experienced as a head. I also position this study within the context of policy sociology, particularly using the notion of performativity.

Chapter 3 is concerned with methods and methodology and my transformation from a reflective teacher to reflexive researcher. Critical theory is introduced to

help understand my position. The stages of the research are outlined from critical policy discourse analysis through to cross case analysis of evidence from the schools involved.

In Chapter 4 I critically examine the deep seated origins and subsequent development of primary schooling during the 20th Century, through to the introduction of the Education Reform Act in 1988. Identified themes highlight how a dominant discourse developed and appears to be perpetuating a system and structure which this research suggests may not be appropriate for either meeting government ambitions or the needs of children.

Having set the context of the Primary Strategy, in Chapter 5 the introductory document *Excellence and Enjoyment* (DfES, 2003a) is critically analysed. This reveals evidence suggesting an overriding focus on standards and achievement which does not reflect the stated goal of achieving excellence in teaching and enjoyment in learning. Subsequent analysis of on-going strategy and policy developments shows a tremendous determination and investment by New Labour in attempting to address issues of child poverty and social deprivation, with the discourse of performativity in schools being used as the main driver to bring about wider societal change.

Chapter 6 sets the both the East Midlands regional and specific contexts of the case study schools, three in isolated pockets of deprivation and one in a more affluent area, before considering evidence of social disadvantage across the cases.

Having identified the difficulties these schools are facing Chapter 7 considers evidence of their ability to achieve sustainable change whilst addressing Strategy initiatives. Rather than meeting the ambitious expectations of

government, a number of potential ‘tripping points’ are identified that, in two schools, were hindering progress and frustrating both teachers and children.

In Chapter 8 the place of creativity in recent policy developments is considered critically before exciting and innovative initiatives in two schools are described which challenged the orthodoxy of the Strategy. Concerns are raised about the sustainability of such initiatives within the present performative system where funding is focussed on meeting standards targets.

In Chapter 9 the negative impact of further pressure from the DfES/DCSF to perform through externally imposed initiatives is reported, before looking critically at the funding of primary schools and the financial burdens being placed on the case study schools, as workforce reform and further elements of the Primary Strategy have been introduced. Evidence is produced which suggests, despite government claims that standards and funding issues are being addressed, a silent minority of children are struggling to receive support as other statutory requirements take priority.

Chapter 10 discusses the findings of the research. The identification of potential ‘tripping points’ provides a very clear insight into the problematic positioning of these schools, situated in isolated pockets of deprivation. It suggests that until the quality and number of staff is dramatically increased, along with appropriate resources, data driven improvement will be superficial and ‘tripping points’ will remain problematic.

In conclusion Chapter 11 summarises the contribution of this research to the field and looks at the implications for both policy makers and practitioners. It calls for reform of the system and structure of primary schooling in order to release sufficient funds to sustainably address the deep seated difficulties

identified. Further to this I identify possible areas for further research to build on the findings of this study. Finally I reflect upon what I have learnt on this journey from practitioner to researcher.

Chapter 2 The policy context & related research

From its institutional, scientific-theoretical and moral constitution, research must put itself in a position to accept and thoroughly investigate the political implications it has, if it is not willing to jump through all the hoops at the first crack of the whip (Beck, 1992 p170) .

In this chapter I introduce the concept of performativity and consider research related to developments in primary schools in the post ERA period. It is not surprising to find a considerable body of literature which has looked critically at policy implementation since the Education Reform Act of 1988, as centralised government control of the education system has become ever more firmly established (including Alexander, 1992, 2000; Ball, 1994, 2006; Hammersley, 2002; Ozga, 2000; Scott, 2000; Tomlinson, 2000; Troman, 2000). Having first hand experience of the system at this time has helped in my subsequent research to appreciate the divergent nature of much that has been written and the way in which policy makers and politicians have selectively interpreted evidence to maintain both control and their own credibility. I explain this alongside related research evidence in the second part of this chapter.

Critical researchers use a variety of evidence to consider the impact of policy moves, to question the veracity of what is being expected and to make recommendations to improve the performance of the system, to modify it or even to abandon it. I have drawn from this literature to position my research. Across the whole field it is clear that since 1988, and the introduction of the National Curriculum, Local Management of Schools (LMS), SATs testing and Ofsted inspection, primary education has become dominated by performativity imposed by central government. This has reduced the impact of much

qualitative research and the use of quantitative data has led to simplistic value judgements being made in interpreting how schools are performing.

2.1 Performativity

I now consider the notion of performativity. The words of Lyotard, in 1984, seem almost prophetic, and could be describing the future influence of computer based technology on the education system, with the availability of data through testing, inspection reports, target setting and assessment;

The performativity of an utterance, be it denotive or prescriptive, increases proportionally to the amount of information about its referent one has at one's disposal. Thus the growth of power, and its self-legitimation, are now taking the route of data storage and accessibility, and the operativity of information (Lyotard, 1984 p47).

This fits in well with my personal experience. In 1994, following the publication of our first inspection report, we were informed that it would be stored electronically by Ofsted and used for analytical purposes. This was a foretaste of the new world predicted by Lyotard.

Performativity is not a word which has been used by policy makers and politicians to describe their actions post 1988. It has been developed by ethnographers to consider the education system. Linked to the inter related 'policy technologies' of the market and managerialism, vocabulary more frequently used in business, the following definition of performativity is given by Ball;

Performativity is a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive,

control, attrition and change – based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic) (Ball, 2003 p216).

This succinct definition helps to illustrate the pernicious nature of performativity, particularly when applied to primary schools. It is clearly not straight forward. Performativity is not a singular act but a powerful and insidious way in which subjects are brought into social being (Butler, 1997 p160). Policy makers, politicians and the media have created a new social reality through the performative vocabulary used to describe primary schools.

Performativity becoming internalised

The primary school system of performativity, developed since 1988, is full of the vocabulary of success; a beacon school; exceptional achievement; an excellent Ofsted report; outstanding leadership; good value for money; a high performing school; transformed results; a school turned around; meeting challenging targets. These simplistic terms are associated with quantitative criteria by which schools are judged. The vocabulary of failure is also present; a failing school; unsatisfactory teachers; poor leadership; under performance; missed targets; unacceptable standards; special measures; a lowly position in league tables. The notion of performativity has defined, for primary schools, the ‘competence judged necessary’ (Lyotard, 1984 p49) for success.

There is little wonder that, subjected to this constant barrage, heads and teachers have turned to performative success criteria for praise, helping them survive within a system that could otherwise destroy them (Troman & Woods, 2001 p51). The introduction of the Ofsted SEF (Self Evaluation Form) in 2005 has further helped internalise this process as the ‘regulation and monitoring of compliance is passed down the control hierarchy’ (Power, 1997 p133). During

the pilot research headteachers commented that writing the SEF was '*doing Ofsted's job for them*'. This is not a new phenomenon;

State inspectorates in the UK are slowly redesigning themselves towards a capability for installing and monitoring effective control systems in target organisations (Power, 1997 p133-4).

It took a further 8 years for Ofsted to implement this approach. Headteachers were to be trusted to manage the control systems, internalising what had previously been the external inspection process. Self discipline enforced through self evaluation would further embed performativity whilst at the same time distancing government from the process.

For many experienced teachers and heads such internalisation was problematic. They had to respond and adapt to a multitude of government policies whilst at the same time attempting to maintain their earlier ethos of developing the 'whole child' (Maguire, Wooldridge, & Pratt-Adams, 2006 xii). Memories of this earlier era, being regarded as trusted professionals in the 1970s (Troman, 2000 p4) are becoming ever more distant. During the research period a final act of resistance to this new system for one case study headteacher, about to retire, was refusing to write a SEF, almost two years after its introduction⁵. Clearly this headteacher, a risk taker, although well respected in the local community, could not be trusted to conform, but was personally comforted by the certainty of retirement approaching.

⁵ For the new head this became problematic in the post research period with Ofsted issuing the school with a notice to improve. Governors were considered 'insufficiently aware of standards and achievement issues'.

Performativity: creating risk for schools and parents

Modern sociologists have linked performativity and the associated technologies of marketisation and managerialism to risk. In *Risk Society* (1992) Beck considers that *Risk* may be defined as a ‘systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced and introduced by modernisation itself’ (p21). Concerns expressed by politicians and policy makers about the future positioning of the UK within the global economy have helped fuel the notion of risk in schools. For government, trust in teachers had become a risk to be minimised, as Giddens explains;

Trust presumes a leap to commitment, a quality of ‘faith’ which is irreducible. It is specifically related to absence in time and space as well as to ignorance. We have no need to trust someone who is constantly in view and whose activities can be directly monitored (Giddens, 1991 p19).

The 1988 ERA and subsequent legislation ensured that primary schools were in view and could be monitored. Performativity had helped reduce risk for politicians and policy makers whilst increasing it for teachers and schools.

However, for aspirational parents schooling itself had also become a risky business. No longer was there an established system of local primary schools feeding into community secondary schools. Choice within the quasi –market (Whitty, 1997) now began with pre school provision and continued through primary schooling and escalated in the secondary sector. Failure to find the best school for your child remains an on-going risk. Ball in research considering the middle classes and educational markets describes a perception of ‘the state sector as a risk’ when compared with the private sector (Ball, 2006

p271). Of more concern for this research is the risk position of schools supporting the 'new poor', identified by Bauman as 'flawed or inadequate consumers' (1998 p38) unable or unwilling to take advantage of the education market and possibly unaware of the associated 'risks'.

The necessarian logic of sustaining performativity

The use of performativity, influencing choice and driving the management of schools, has been developed and refined considerably since 1988. Under the Conservative government, up to 1997, structures were put into place 'in which market principles were advanced at the same time as central authority was strengthened' (Jones, 2003 p107). During this period my personal experience, in a school in an area of considerable deprivation was of annually decreasing budgets, redundancies and disillusionment as the performative grip of central government tightened. This was the period of 'high challenge and low support' for primary schools generally (Barber, 2001 p19).

The election of New Labour in 1997 brought with it extra funding. Performativity continued to dominate, but now with 'high support' alongside the challenge, with the ambition of creating a 'world class education system' (Barber, 2001 p23). Ball, quoting Watson and Hay, describes this as the 'necessarian logic' of New Labour which related education very directly to the demands and inevitabilities of globalisation (Watson and Hay 2003 in Ball, 2008a p14-15). Huge investment, particularly the focus on literacy and numeracy, and the associated target setting to raise standards were seen as the way to bring about the desired societal transformation. However the foundation of performativity in primary schools was laid much earlier.

Developing primary school performativity

An HMI survey (DES, 1978) fuelled the debate initiated by Prime Minister Callaghan in 1976 by raising concerns about the nature of 'basic' skills developed in primary schools (Richards, 1999 p37). Much of what was written in this report was taken out of context and used by politicians and the media to criticise progressive methods and to promote performativity, for example;

7.27 In classes where a didactic approach was mainly used, better NFER scores were achieved for reading and mathematics than in those classes using mainly exploratory approaches (DES, 1978).

However on the same page a more meaningful statement was given little prominence;

7.25 ...Teachers in a minority of classes employed a combination of didactic and exploratory approaches; in these classes the work children were given to do was better matched to their capabilities for the less able, average and more able than in those classes using mainly didactic or mainly exploratory methods (DES, 1978).

The narrow focus and selective analysis of test results of the basic skills was much easier to interpret for those wishing to revert to an earlier era identified with formal teaching methods, rather than the more complicated findings mentioned in paragraph 7.25 above.

Despite attempts to adapt policy, the effects were pervasive. Primary schools, from being relatively independent bodies, supported and controlled at a distance by local councils, were soon to come under ever increasing central government scrutiny, with all aspects being judged and evaluated through standardised measures and imposed criteria. The new performative vocabulary of success and failure, mentioned earlier, was being introduced and changing

the perceived landscape. By re-defining expectations the whole culture of the primary school experience was being transformed into something which had little resemblance to the world in which most of the staff, including myself, had developed knowledge and expertise. The vocabulary of business management and the production line was soon to dominate; targets were to be met; results delivered; output increased; efficiencies achieved.

To support this there was an overriding implication by policy makers and politicians that primary school children were ‘missing out’ and that what they were missing out on could be categorised and measured. This was the theme started by Prime Minister Callaghan in the Great Debate and promoted through polemics such as the Black Papers on the perils of education reforms such as progressive education and comprehensive schools, published by a group of right wing Conservatives (Jones, 2003 p102). It had taken 12 years for the values associated with performativity to become embedded within the system. Legislation was now brought in to make sure that it stayed there.

2.2 The Education Reform Act (ERA) 1988

The Education Reform Act (ERA) introduced the National Curriculum to ensure that children didn’t ‘miss out’. Further legislation brought in the statutory testing of seven and eleven year old children, including the publication of results at Key Stage 2, and the creation of Ofsted, which monitored primary schools from 1994, with inspection summaries published in local newspapers. A ‘panoptic system of surveillance’ through testing and inspection was put into place to ensure that schools would conform to the new expectations being imposed upon them (Ball, 1994; Foucault, 1977; Galton, 2007). This was reinforced by other elements of ERA, with the marketization

of schooling through parental choice and the introduction of the Local Management of Schools (LMS) where responsibility for the majority of the school budget (driven by pupil numbers) was shifted from local authority to school control. The political agenda for the centralized control of education was now firmly established.

Before considering these developments in more detail it is worth considering the chronology of significant policies which have affected primary schools in the last two decades. These are listed on Table 1 below.

From Table 1 the ongoing development of principles established in 1988 can be clearly seen. The focus on standards and targets has intensified, particularly since 1997. The National Curriculum has been regularly revised, gradually being moulded towards the ‘basics’. The role of Ofsted has become ever more data driven, seemingly sophisticated but lacking flexibility. Parental choice, supported by the publication of performance tables and inspection reports, remains high on the agenda. Building on Conservative foundations, the New Labour Standards and Effectiveness Unit, has increased central government involvement in all aspects of primary education, from training headteachers to introducing synthetic phonics and workforce reform.

1988	Education Reform Act
1988	Grant maintained schools created directly funded by government

1988	Parental choice of schools brought in
1989 -90	Introduction of National Curriculum
1990 -93	Local Management of Schools LMS gradually developed across the country
1991	KS1 SATs trialled
1992	Conservatives re-elected
1993	KS2 SATs started
1993	Ofsted created
1993	Dearing Review of National Curriculum
1994	Primary School Inspections started
1995	National primary league tables published
1996	'Desirable Outcomes' for pre school learning and voucher system introduced
1997	New Labour elected. Voucher system and grant maintained schools abolished
1997	Standards and Effectiveness Unit set up by DfES
1997	NPQH (National Professional Qualification for Headship) introduced
1997	School KS2 statutory targets introduced
1998	KS 1 maximum of 30 children per class
1998	Literacy Strategy introduced
1999	Numeracy Strategy introduced
1999	'All Our Futures' government report into creativity and culture published
1999	First Sure Start programmes started
2000	Revised National Curriculum
2000	Foundation Stage curriculum (3-5 yrs)
2000	NCSL National College for School Leadership established by government
2003	'Excellence and Enjoyment' The Primary National Strategy introduced
2003	Workforce remodelling process started
2004	KS1 SATs based on teacher assessment
2004	'Every Child Matters' introduced
2004	NPQH becomes compulsory
2004	DfES Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners published
2004	Sure Start become Children's Centres
2005	School Self Evaluation Form (SEF) for Ofsted statutory
2005	Revised Ofsted format with 2 day notice of inspection
2005	10% PPA (Planning , Preparation and Assessment) time introduced for all teachers
2006	Teaching of synthetic phonics compulsory
2007	DfES identifies 'Hard to Shift' schools
2007	Early Years Foundation Stage targets introduced

Table 1 A Chronology of Reforms arriving in Primary Schools 1988 - 2007

I will now consider how, post 1988, these foundations developed.

2.3 The impact of ERA

Never before had government reforms to the education system been so clearly in the public domain, particularly with media and the press being used as a tool to facilitate change. Based in New Public Management (NPM) (Shore & Wright, 2000 p65) which espoused accountability in terms of results, with high trust in markets and borrowed business models and low trust in public servants and professionals (Hood, 1995 p94; Power, 1997 p43), central government was taking control of the system, investing huge sums of money into various initiatives directly impacting upon schools, whilst reducing the control and influence of Local Education Authorities (LEAs) and creating a 'quasi market' (Whitty, 1997) through promoting parental choice. School effectiveness research was used to justify the new system (Barber, 1996; Mortimore, Sammons, Stoll, Lewis, & Ecob, 1988; Reynolds & Farrell, 1996). Work by Caldwell and Spinks, using an exemplar model developed in an all age school in Australia, supported the development of LMS. Their book on this subject, *The Self-Managing School*, (1988) was published within months of ERA and was frequently used and quoted in LMS training for headteachers and governors. It was followed by *Leading the Self-Managing School* (1992), *Re-imagining the Self-Managing School* (1994) and *Beyond the Self-Managing School* (1998). This is just one example of the developing influence of this movement in the period. However school effectiveness was criticised for de-skilling teachers by many in the research community as well as by those being subjected to it (Apple, 1996 p 37-38; Ball, 1994 p60).

At the same time government placed much faith in research it had commissioned from the newly formed Ofsted, led by the antagonistic Chris

Woodhead (Beckett, 1999). Woodhead's support of traditional teaching methods and his political stance (Tomlinson, 2000 p53) reflected right wing views espoused in the earlier Black Papers. These papers although lacking in research accuracy had been important because of 'their political and ideological acuteness' (Jones, 1983 p77). This was also the strength of Woodhead. Ofsted's annual reports and research the organisation produced were frequently used by him to fuel the debate about progressive methods in a way designed to appeal to both the media and politicians. In my experience the approach of Woodhead did not sit easily with primary headteachers in the East Midlands. At a meeting with Nottinghamshire headteachers, in 1995, he appeared conciliatory, saying that of course he would take to our concerns about regional problems into consideration. Once back in Whitehall many of his subsequent actions appeared less sympathetic. On one occasion in 1996 he 'amended' an Ofsted report into reading in three inner London boroughs 'deleting sections noting that factors outside school control – poverty, bilingualism, high staff turnover – affected pupil progress, but left in criticisms of teachers and their methods' (Tomlinson, 2000 p78). Such selective use of research data by Ofsted was symptomatic of a more general complaint that school effectiveness research was

....an essentially technicist literature which lacks a critical perspective on the relationship between schools and their social and political context (Thrupp, 1999 p17).

For primary schools in challenging circumstances the combination of elements of school effectiveness quantitative research data and an inspectorate driven by a leader promoting 'traditional values and beliefs' was problematic. The legacy

of this period still remains in the rhetoric of politicians anxious to gain political advantage.⁶ Such challenges are not new.

Research considering the impact of ERA

The ERA had a profound effect on the primary school system, introducing structures and expectations that were alien to the values of those teachers and schools committed to developing a more caring and supportive approach to children's learning. Schools struggled to adapt and conform. Many were almost overwhelmed by the bureaucratic structures imposed upon them (Jeffrey & Woods, 1996). Some schools were able to adjust without compromising their beliefs (Jeffrey & Woods, 2003) but the influence and change to planning and organisation in the majority of schools was considerable (Nias, Southworth, & Campbell, 1992; Pollard, Broadfoot, Croll, Osborn, & Abbott, 1994; Webb & Vulliamy, 1996).

As already mentioned this was a very fruitful period for research; the introduction of so much legislation providing a rich and varied range of data, ranging from small scale studies of individual children and schools to very large scale projects covering all aspects of policy and practice during this period. Possibly the most comprehensive ethnographic study relevant to my research during this period was the PACE Project.

⁶In the TES, in November 2008, the Conservative shadow schools secretary, Michael Gove, still challenged progressive ideas, calling the educational establishment a "*small, self-replicating group of academics and bureaucrats who have been in thrall to a particular ideology for 40 years*" (Mansell, 2008).

In the next section I describe this in some detail to illustrate the wide ranging nature of the data involved in this research.

The PACE (Primary Assessment, Curriculum and Experience) Project 1989 – 1997 (University of Bristol - Profs. A. Pollard & P. Broadfoot, M. Osborn and P. Triggs)

The PACE (Primary Assessment, Curriculum and Experience) project was a large scale project which researched the impact of the ERA on primary education in the 1990s (1989-1997). This work was independently funded by the ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council) and so was able to consider broader aspects of the impact of ERA, rather than being commissioned research focussing on specific elements. The PACE project, set across 8 LEAs, with a main sample of 48 schools involving 150 teachers and heads, used a variety of research procedures, notably structured and semi, structure interviews with headteachers and teachers, questionnaires, systematic classroom observations and pupil interviews, analysis of assessment data and documentary evidence. The longitudinal nature of the project involved re-visiting schools, with a series of interviews and questionnaires over time. Of particular significance were the perspectives and practices of nine teachers in case study schools being considered annually, along with tracking the progress of six children in these schools throughout the research period.

The PACE project highlighted the tensions associated with competition and consumerism which the ERA had introduced. My first hand experience and associated emotional journey of implementation of ERA, along with the subsequent legislation in the 90s, has been captured, across schools, by this

research. In helping position my transition from practitioner to researcher the PACE project identified the underlying difficulties of those deeply committed to the professional development of primary practice under this new regime; ‘The contrast in value positions could hardly have been more stark’ (Extract from Pollard et al (1994) in Pollard, 2002b p373).

Maintaining positions as changes impact

Webb and Vulliamy visited 50 primary schools (for whole days) in their ATL (Association of Teachers and Lecturers) commissioned study during 1992-94 interviewing heads, deputies, teachers and observing lessons and found evidence of schools and teachers attempting to adapt to the new National Curriculum in a variety of ways (Webb & Vulliamy, 1996), including some attempting to retain previously held values and beliefs. More significantly they repeated this research 10 years later, finding, by this time, teachers ‘more secure in their new teaching approaches’ (Webb & Vulliamy, 2006 p132). Other ethnographic researchers, aware of the impact of ERA in prescribing what teachers should teach, also considered the developmental tradition described by Pollard et al (1994). These included Peter Woods who was drawn to capturing this earlier pedagogy, concerned that it might disappear altogether.

2.4 The art of primary school teaching

In a series of books in the early 90s, Woods described research investigating the skills and attributes associated with creative teaching, aware that the circumstances created by ERA were making such teaching increasingly difficult. In the first book *Teacher Skills and Strategies* Woods notes that, ‘particularly in primary schools’ the best teacher work was identified with ‘a

spirit of invention and innovation that seems to be a distinctive hallmark of teaching in British primary schools' (Woods, 1990 p23). In the 1970s I had been very fortunate to have worked in two schools in Buckinghamshire which were considered to be both innovative and creative by the County Council and by nationally acknowledged 'promoters of progressivism', including Christian Schiller (Cunningham, 1988 p57). Certainly in these schools teaching was considered an art, very much in the developmental tradition as considered by Woods. Interestingly Alexander, following Gage (1978), regards teaching as an art with a scientific basis (Alexander, 2000 p274).

Having worked in schools with frequent visitors and international reputations, I could identify with the type of primary school and the teachers Woods describes. However in my experience such schools were few and far between, linked by informal networks (Jones, 2003 p55), and considered by some to be little more than members of the 'Plowden Club', lacking clarity in objectives and curriculum direction (Cunningham, 1988 p160). Nevertheless there were specific qualities and conditions identified by Woods which have resonance today

Inventiveness, adaptability, flexibility, a willingness to experiment, and, at times, to take risks are among the personal qualities ... these flourish in some conditions but languish in others (Woods, 1990 p23).

As a practitioner at the time I can identify with these qualities and conditions. What remains problematic is how widespread this approach was. Innovative and creative teachers were struggling with the National Curriculum (Ball, 1994; Pollard et al., 1994; Richards, 1999; Troman, 1999) and it was difficult

for many schools to develop strategies to support creativity when performativity dominated.

By this time, as illustrated by my experience of having SATs results published without governors permission, the National Curriculum was having a considerable impact on schools, making it more difficult for schools to maintain the good practice associated with developing a supportive and caring learning environment for both staff and children. This was also investigated by Woods. In the second book in the series *Critical Events in Teaching and Learning* (1993) Woods was drawn to what, from his own experience many years earlier, he called the ‘mysteries of primary school’ and how some teachers acquired ‘special knowledge, skills and experience’ (vii). As a counter to the standardisation of the National Curriculum, transformational positive experiences, ‘critical events’ were analysed by Woods to consider how reflective teachers had developed their practice and how these strengths had been retained within the new system. Of particular note was the way in which Woods was able to identify how these events were developed into meaningful learning experiences for all concerned through a series of stages (p8). This analysis provided a much clearer picture of how teaching and learning could be developed with a ‘critical’ event as the initial stimulus. My own experience of a boy finding parts of a human skull fits in very well with the scenario described by Woods; from the initial *impact* of finding the bones, through the *planning* and *preparation* to support the investigation, including setting up a classroom display, allowing *divergence* by exploring opportunities such as writing to the vicar and subsequently *convergence* in bringing ideas together to share with the class, *consolidation* through work produced in making a book

about bones and finally *celebration* at a field trip evening for parents of what had been achieved (p8).

The analysis by Woods revealed a much more sophisticated approach to teaching and learning than that developed by many schools in the post-Plowden era and which had been promoted in such books as *Teaching by Topics* (Rance, 1968). Unfortunately the unique primary school strengths and qualities identified and celebrated by Woods had little impact on ministers taking control of the system or schools trying to work within it. The timing of publication of *Critical Events* could not have been worse, as primary schools struggled to manage the introduction of SATs and Ofsted inspections, alongside the National Curriculum and LMS.

Earlier research suggests that the type of teachers and schools which were the focus of Woods work had not flourished in the post Plowden era (Galton, Simon, & Croll, 1980; Simon, 1981). Even when change was demanded by local authorities, (see the Leeds case, Alexander, 1992), many teachers were reluctant to take up the challenge, despite having the opportunity. By the mid 90s conditions for innovation and creativity were not good. This was reflected in Woods' next book *Creative Teachers in Primary Schools* (1995) where he considered how teachers had adjusted to the changes caused by the National Curriculum, identifying modes of adaption ranging from 'resistance, appropriation and resourcing to enrichment and re-routing' (p8-9). The ethnographic case studies for this research were carried out in the early 90s, in the period before the full effects of ERA and subsequent legislation were felt. My own experience reflected similar optimistic modes of adaption at this time, but this fragile confidence was soon to be dashed. Primary school Ofsted

inspections were introduced in September 1994 which were to challenge attempts at non-conformity and appropriation, would ignore enrichment and resourcing activities and would result in further stress on teachers, magnifying more negative modes of adaption and responses identified by Woods.

As the situation in primary schools was becoming ever more challenging, the next book in the series *Teachable Moments – the art of teaching in primary schools* (Woods & Jeffrey, 1996b) was in many ways a distillation and refinement of the earlier publications, once more emphasising the identified qualities under threat from external impositions. Qualitative research data was obtained through interviews and classroom observations, as well as using documents and photographic evidence, over a three year period from 1992 -95, working with a total of 18 teachers in 8 schools. Five of these schools were subjected to a more focussed study. A significant comment in this book was the wish of Woods and Jeffrey to ‘do research with teachers, rather than on them’ (p12).

Teachable Moments researchers worked with selected teachers, who were ‘mid-career, experienced, well respected, generally highly regarded as successful and with management experience’ (p10). They identified relationships generated by all of them which featured ‘... interest, enthusiasm, inquiry, excitement, discovery, risk taking and fun’ (p71). The findings were not claimed to be representative but were more indicative of what could, or should, be achieved in supportive circumstances, even within the context of an imposed curriculum.

With regard to framing my research, if primary schools are expected to be innovative and creative, as set out in *Excellence and Enjoyment* (DfES, 2003a

p4), the skills and attitudes identified by Woods and Jeffrey are essential. I was able to use this work to help in structuring my investigation (see Chapter 3).

It was to be another seven years before Jeffrey and Woods revisited creativity in a longitudinal study *The Creative School*, writing about an infant school which they had observed maintaining its philosophy and beliefs throughout the 90s. It was seen as an inspiration to all that visited it (Jeffrey & Woods, 2003). Such an holistic approach, at primary school level was, and remains, unusual. Three day visits to the school were made each half term between 1999 & 2001 in an attempt to further understand the achievements. There are two concerns with the setting for this work. Firstly it is situated in an infant school – free from the pressures of SATs and the subject intensification of KS 2, and secondly, although close to an army garrison, it is not in an area of social deprivation. However this should not detract from the dynamic work observed by Jeffrey and Woods, which illustrates what can be achieved, given the right circumstances and staff. For my research this was to prove invaluable in understanding the contexts of the case study schools (see Chapter 3).

Most primary school research in the later 90s dealt with policy reform, specific aspects of ERA and the subsequent changes, such as Ofsted inspections, as they were introduced. I now consider these developments in more detail.

2.5 The National Curriculum

The National Curriculum, in its various guises, was and remains contested ground (Alexander, 2000; Ball, 1994; Croll, 1996; Hall & Ozerk, 2008; Maguire et al., 2006; Pollard et al., 1994; Wyse, McCreery, & Torrance, 2008). Introducing all of the National Curriculum to schools was not logistically easy.

Government planning had been fragmented. 'Experts' were appointed to consider nine separate curriculum subjects, each with its own committee to decide on individual subject content and, as part of this, to introduce programmes of study and attainment targets for Key Stages 1 & 2 replacing infant and junior nomenclature – a whole new vocabulary for primary schools. Trying to accommodate the demands of each subject was almost overwhelming. During the introductory period Nias et al. identified positive experiences of whole school curriculum development which united staff and broke down classroom barriers (Nias et al., 1992). What is not clear is how far this benefited those schools less confident in their own beliefs that were still expected to 'deliver the curriculum'. The gradual publication (over 2 years) of the subject based curriculum documents, and the expectations contained within them, caused many difficulties, particularly 'the problem of reconciling the depth and breadth of coverage' along with concerns about 'manageability' and 'coherence' (Richards, 1999 p47-48) mirroring my own experience and becoming a major preoccupation for most primary schools.

In addition religious education was already a statutory requirement. A new role, for teachers to become subject co-ordinators, was also developed. Although not compulsory there was an expectation that each individual subject should have appropriate policy documentation, including a whole school scheme of work, and that this should be monitored by a responsible individual. This resulted in an unpopular, bureaucratic and unwieldy curriculum (Alexander, 1992 p57; Osborn, McNess, Broadfoot, Pollard, & Triggs, 2000 p7; Tomlinson, 2000; Woods & Jeffrey, 1996a p48-49). Ball scathingly describes how 'traditional values' embedded within the National Curriculum

restricted opportunities for more positive developments calling it – ‘a curriculum of the dead’ (Ball, 1994 p46).

Such concerns highlighted the difficulties of National Curriculum implementation. In smaller primary schools several subjects could be the responsibility of one person. At the same time there was a further expectation that the co-ordinator should be a subject specialist with considerable knowledge, particularly for the teaching of older Key Stage 2 children. The DfES commissioned a team to investigate the problems of managing the National Curriculum, initially led by Alexander, author of the Leeds investigation and Rose, chief primary HMI. Woodhead, Chief Executive of the National Curriculum Council was subsequently added to the team causing some consternation about impartiality (Alexander quoted in Galton, Hargreaves, Comber, Wall, & Pell, 1999 p 17-18).

The ‘Three Wise Men’ Report

The difficulties of subject specialism were compounded in the paper *Curriculum Organisation and Classroom Practice in Primary Schools* (Alexander, Rose, & Woodhead, 1992), the ‘Three Wise Men’s Report’⁷ which had been given the brief to review evidence to ‘... make recommendations about curriculum organisation, teaching methods and classroom practice for the successful implementation of the National Curriculum, particularly at Key Stage 2’ (Richards, 1999 p105). The emphasis on Key Stage 2 implies that there was a specific body of knowledge to be conveyed to children, treating

⁷ The ‘Three Wise Men’ – Professor Robin Alexander, Chief HMI Jim Rose and Chris Woodhead, Chief Executive of the National Curriculum Council. Almost 20 years later Alexander is leading the Primary Review (a large scale independent review of primary education involving 70 academics), Rose is undertaking a government commissioned review of primary education and Woodhead, having risen to chief HMI, is now a professor at an independent (private) university as well as being chair of a company running an independent schools group.

them as empty vessels once they had completed 'the basics' at Key Stage 1. The paper recommended more specialist teaching to enable the National Curriculum to be delivered and that LEAs' LMS formulae should be urgently revised in favour of primary schools to achieve this. But, as Richards points out, this also assumed that the National Curriculum would continue in the same structured form (p106).

However it was the polarised debate between progressive and traditional teaching methods that dominated the report. Much of this has been attributed to the involvement of Woodhead wanting to support his 'political masters' (Alexander, 1997; Galton et al., 1999 p20) . Certainly the playing field was not level. There were concerns about the involvement of Kenneth Clark, the minister who commissioned the paper after welcoming an HMI report on primary education in France, where whole class and didactic teaching was used extensively and which appeared to 'work' (Clarke, 1991b quoted in Ball, 1994 p45). Although it was stated that the paper was introduced to help focus debate and inform policy Ball states that;

In effect, the debate was opened, judged and closed in the same document. Progressive child-centred methods and the Plowden Report were subjected to a public deconstruction, progressive teachers were disciplined and the groundwork was laid for a thoroughgoing reintroduction of traditional teaching methods (Ball, 1994 p44).

Such policy moves had a negative impact on the practice of many primary school teachers who still held their own beliefs and values. Creativity and innovation were now being challenged. The 'how' of teaching, as well as the 'what,' was in the spotlight. This could be seen as a rehearsal of the arguments

for the subsequent introduction of the National Strategies. Although Alexander later suggested that, along with Rose, he had argued for ‘fitness for purpose’ within the report (Alexander, 2000 p274) such subtlety was lost at the time, suggesting the more politically aware Woodhead manoeuvred the findings to suit the wishes of Kenneth Clark.

In the same period other research evidence highlighted the frustration of some older and more experienced teachers, along with others who found it difficult to reconcile their beliefs with the new technocracy (Nias et al., 1992; Osborn et al., 2000). There were further frustrations identified with teachers being unable to adequately deliver the National Curriculum (Pollard et al., 1994; Woods & Jeffrey, 1996b). Concerns about overload were also recognised in official reports from Ofsted and the National Curriculum Council (Osborn et al., 2000 p115) leading to the setting up of a review the National Curriculum by Sir Ron Dearing.

The Dearing Review

The 1993 Curriculum Review (Dearing, 1993) recommended a reduction in wider curriculum content, with 20% of time to be freed for individual school curriculum initiatives, but the author also personally argued that the time created should be spent on additional work in ‘the basics’⁸ (Dearing quoted in Gillborn & Youdell, 2000 p20). Following the implementation of the revised curriculum in 1995, this argument was used as the basis for justifying the daily amount of time allocated to dedicated literacy teaching which, after a pilot

⁸ ‘ Assuming a 36 week teaching year, to allow a margin for the induction of new pupils, assessment work, school events and educational visits (Dearing, 1994, p. 30), the Dearing Report recommended that 180 hours of English be taught directly in Key Stage 1, an hour a day in the 36 weeks referred to above. A related recommendation was that another 36 hours were to be taught through other subjects. In Key Stage 2 the figures were 162 and 18 respectively.’
<http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primary/publications/literacy/63541/651145/919633>

project in 15 authorities in 1996, led to the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy in 1998 (DCSF, 2008b). Research from the PACE project casts an interesting perspective on the impact of Dearing; ‘...teachers continued to be concerned about the superficial coverage of much of what they did’ (Osborn et al., 2000 p127).

One positive impact of the introduction of the National Curriculum and the Dearing Review, although not a specific intention, was that it encouraged staff in primary schools to work more closely together (Nias et al., 1992; Osborn et al., 2000). In many schools, until this time, curriculum autonomy for the individual teacher had dominated (Nias, 1989). Now attitudes were changing, although not necessarily classroom practice, which other research suggests had never been as ‘radical’ as politicians and policy makers had suggested (Galton et al., 1999; Webb & Vulliamy, 1996). Teamwork and cooperation became essential to deal with the externally imposed expectations of the National Curriculum. This was particularly fortuitous as further elements of government control, associated with new forms of audit and accountability, were gradually being introduced. Before considering these elements of government strategy I will examine the second significant element of ERA, the introduction of Local Management of Schools (LMS).

2.6 LMS (Local Management of Schools)

To me, as a headteacher actively seeking funds to transform a very run down school, LMS had seemed like a good idea. Very few colleagues at the introductory meetings questioned what was happening. No longer would we have to deal with the bureaucracy associated with bidding for funding from the local authority. More subtle ramifications, particularly for primary schools

were not considered. Richards, in his book *Primary Education – At a Hinge of History* sums up the feelings of many in describing the introduction of LMS in the early 90s;

Probably the most successful and widely appreciated of the ERA initiatives was local management of schools which gave schools much more control over their own finances and helped them develop a less dependent relationship with their LEAs (Richards, 1999 p46).

However this statement needs to be examined very carefully to identify what is meant by success and the implications of that success on schools (particularly primary schools), LEAs and central government. Richards himself identified managerial concerns; ‘...this success was bought at a cost in some schools where managerialism rather than educational leadership was the order of the day’ (p46). The success of this new system caused concerns about the wider implications of LMS where a discourse of management was the key feature across on-going education reforms;

The devolution of school budgets; the greatly reduced power of LEAs ; the break up of national pay agreements for teachers; and the encouragement given to entrepreneurial innovation and income generation; all contribute to an illusion of autonomy and flexibility for the manager (Ball, 1994 p66).

The term ‘illusion of autonomy’ is very telling. LMS helped drive the government choice agenda through pupil numbers dictating school budget size. Schools had to compete for resources by attracting pupils. Headteachers and governors were now responsible for managing fluctuations in funding which had previously been absorbed by local authorities. Formula funding, which

allocated the amount of funding per pupil respectively for infant, junior and secondary pupils, was based on historic levels of funding, perpetuating primary/secondary differentials, thus ignoring the main recommendation of the Three Wise Men Report to urgently review primary funding (Alexander et al., 1992). Partly because of this financial imbalance, the responsibilities associated with LMS affected those in primary schools much more than their secondary colleagues, where there was already the support infrastructure to cope.

The allure of the opportunity for more direct control of available resources soon diminished. The PACE project (Osborn et al., 2000), surveying a representative national cross section of 48 primary schools in 8 LEAs found that, although initially 25% of schools welcomed the devolved budget, by 1995 this had declined to only 15%. Under-funding left primary headteachers little room for manoeuvre. Costs had to be reduced to the minimum and cheaper inexperienced staff employed. Fund raising and entrepreneurial activities now became essential for many schools (Osborn et al., 2000 p205).

Budget deficiencies were apparent throughout the 90s and still dominate the concerns of primary school headteachers. The NFER annual survey of trends in primary education in 2004 (413 schools) reported that ‘for the 11th consecutive year (*in other words in every year since the introduction of LMS to primary schools*) budgets were cited as the most common cause of concern’ (Easton, Knight, & Kendall, 2005 p3 comments in italics inserted). In 2003/4 this was the main concern for over 80% of headteachers. By 2006 budgets remained the main concern for 70% of heads. Over half of schools also considered staffing a concern (Chamberlain, Lewis, Teeman, & Kendall, 2006). It is not easy for a

headteacher to build a team whilst making staff redundant or with insufficient support staff to meet the needs of children and staff. These findings fit in well with the comments of Ball (1994) where he pointed out that whilst LMS introduced a managerial discourse of competition and choice there were wider implications;

... self-management is also seen as a way of delivering other changes.

It is a mechanism for ensuring the delivery of a National Curriculum, and it ties classroom practice, student performance, teacher appraisal, school recruitment and resource allocation into a single tight bundle of planning and surveillance (Ball, 1994 p71).

There were concerns that the management of this overall performative discourse was driving a wedge between practitioners and this new role for primary school leaders (Ball, 1994 p71). Such concerns are also evident in the way assessment of the National Curriculum developed.

2.7 Testing and assessment

With the introduction of the National Curriculum came an expectation that the performance of pupils and schools should be assessed nationally. Initially the process was designed and constructed by another government commissioned committee, the Task Group on Assessment and Testing (TGAT), which produced a report (DES, 1988) which attempted to address the concerns of many primary school teachers, opposed in principle to simplistic testing. The TGAT approach was 'in favour of diagnostic, problem solving, open ended, process oriented, teacher assessments' (Ball, 1994 p40). Such an approach was familiar to most primary schools, usually where an assessment was undertaken by an educational psychologist, or where concerns were raised about individual

learning difficulties. There were similarities to earlier forms of assessment developed by the Assessment and Performance Unit (APU), established in 1974, for taking annual national samples of maths, language or science achievement for 11 year olds (Galton et al., 1999 p142). Unfortunately this model of assessment proved very labour intensive and time consuming when transferred from one or two pupils to whole classes in English, mathematics and science in every school. This led to outcries from teachers about unmanageability and workload (Dadds, 2002; Galton et al., 1999; Osborn et al., 2000; Pollard et al., 1994). Even today mention of ‘floating and sinking’, a 1991 KS1 science assessment activity, provokes an almost Pavlovian response from those that experienced it. The overload was acknowledged by the NFER, commissioned to produce the SATs, several years later (Sainsbury, 1996). But interestingly, ‘in many classrooms the *early* assessment procedures seemed to have broadened the curriculum, ... and to have been well received by children’ (Pollard, 2002a p328). Not everything about these changes was negative, enriching learning experiences for some children.

To begin with there had been some resistance to the new forms of assessment with Key Stages 1 & 3 SATs being boycotted nationally in 1993 and the TES reporting three LEAs refusing to implement SATs in 1995, because of a lack of funding for supply cover (Blackburne, 1995). However the pressure to conform to statutory requirements was relentless.

Keeping SATs simple

Unfortunately the government solution to this labour intensive approach, that TGAT research had shown seemed to benefit children, was not to increase funding accordingly, but instead to take the opportunity to simplify assessment

and testing, reducing the requirements ‘in favour of publishable, measurement-based, competitive, pencil and paper, externally set tests and examinations’ (Ball, 1994 p40). Kenneth Clarke, Secretary of State in 1991, was instrumental in simplifying the assessment process. From analysis of a Westminster Lecture by Clarke (1991a) Ball suggests how this ‘no nonsense’ approach was interpreted;

... *complex* assessment is seen as designed to obscure. *Simple* tests are revealing. Complexity is ‘soft’, misleading, producer-based. Simplicity is ‘hard’, clear, unequivocal and commonsensical (1994 p41).

This is the foundation of the simplistic system of judgement which remains in place today. The vocabulary of failing schools, target setting, unsatisfactory teachers and children not up to standard could be said to have become entrenched through the pragmatism of Kenneth Clarke, supported by unprecedented legislative powers.

As in the United States, statutory reforms ‘tended to persist if they were ‘required by law and easily monitored’ (Tyack & Cuban, 1995 p57). The worst fears of those opposed to such simplistic testing were being realized. Alexander describes what many teachers called the ‘fourfold burden of assessment’; the unprecedented demands on teacher time; the focus on the ‘basics’ creating an unbalanced curriculum; the stresses created for children and families and the public pillorying of naming and shaming schools⁹ (Alexander, 2000 p372). So the foundations of the current testing regime became well established.

⁹ Alexander also notes a later development ‘the culture of naming and shaming – which Labour deplored while in opposition ... then pursued even more zealously than their Conservative predecessors once they gained power in 1997’ (Alexander, 2000 p372).

My own experience of trialling SATs was a very clear example of the system being used to exert control over a school, even though governors and staff were not willing, or children ready to be judged in such a manner. Central government accessed and published pilot test data, without permission from the school, thus embedding performativity through both power and the associated process of 'self-legitimation' (Lyotard, 1984 p47). This involved the DfES using detailed information (however flawed) to legitimate its position in a judgemental and seemingly authoritative way, claiming the test results were essential information for parents. Here was an external mechanism which provided 'scientific proof' of what was happening. Now the school was expected to conform through performativity. Subsequently there was teaching to the test; the consequences otherwise would have been dire, as, because of the LMS funding structure, the school had to compete with others in the locality for pupils and funding.

To further ensure compliance and control of the education system, with LMS, the National Curriculum and testing and assessment already in place, an additional measure was introduced – an agency to establish the regular inspection of every school in the country – The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted).

2.8 Ofsted

The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) was established through the Education (Schools) Act, 1992 and the Education (School Inspection) Regulations 1993. Although it was independent of the DfES, the chief inspector of schools was appointed by the secretary of state (Tomlinson, 2000 p53) and 'the remit was tied closely to the implementation and validation of

government policy' (Alexander, 2000 p142). It replaced the independent HMI system of selective inspection, support and training which was also able 'from time to time to deliver explicit or coded messages that were more critical, especially on resource issues' (Alexander, 2000 p142). This system of inspection had been in place since the Victorian era. An independent agency, capable of being critical of government policy, was not appropriate as a tool for policy compliance in the perceived battle against the 'old' education establishment (Ball, 1994 p40). Inglis sums up the mood of many at the time;

... there was not only to be a compulsory National Curriculum, but also a new government office of standards in education which would conduct its own audits of schools, of their teaching, their maintenance of standards and their handling of the fatuously inequitable budgets recently devolved (as the jargon goes) to their care. Half of the inspectorate would be pensioned off; it was elderly and acquiescent anyway. The other half would, in its way, audit the auditors as they did their auditing (Inglis, 2000 p425).

The intended task of inspecting 24,687 schools (DCSF, 2007d) every 4 years, starting from 1993 in secondary schools and 1994 in primaries, was fraught with logistical difficulties. Ofsted developed a strategy of contracting out each inspection to individuals, to local authority teams keeping employees in post as their budgets were being reduced, or private companies, many of which were created to meet the rapidly growing demand for inspection services.

The unpleasant experience that was Ofsted

My experience of an early Ofsted inspection in 1994 was a further example of central government using its position to exert power and influence over what

the school was doing. By placing the findings in the public domain, through statutory press reporting, the recently introduced quasi market (Whitty, 1997) was supported and the school forced to perform in the manner prescribed. Being one of the first primary schools to be subjected to this type of inspection we were not prepared for the lead inspector, a former HMI, being blind to anything not on his check list, or for the debilitating effect this had on staff morale. This has been well reported in other subsequent research (Ball, 2003; Jeffrey & Woods, 1996; Troman, 1997, 2000; Woods & Jeffrey, 1998). Inglis is scathing about this new breed of inspector;

They were hired by inspectorial consortia (this is language filthy with dishonest use) started by superannuated HMI and advisers from the local education authorities who had been paid off as a hostile government declared civil war on locally elected councillors and their recalcitrant education committees (Inglis, 2000 p425).

Our unsympathetic Ofsted experience led to a determination to try and avoid a repeat of inspection fatigue and criticism, even though it did not fit in with our beliefs. At the same time, we still attempted to challenge the conformity of what was being expected. Such interpretation of policy has been studied in considerable depth during this period (Ball, 1994; Bowe, Ball, & Gold, 1992; Osborn et al., 2000; Pollard et al., 1994; Troman, 1999). Two years later, because of our attempts to continue being creative, we were told to put the National Curriculum first in our planning documents.

A figurehead for Ofsted

A year after it was formed to supersede Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Schools the government appointed a new full time head for Ofsted. Retaining the

previous nomenclature of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools (HMCI) Chris Woodhead was one of the 'Three Wise Men' (see previous section). From this earlier report he was already an unpopular figure for many in primary schools; because of his narrow subject vision and criticism of teachers; also from comments during his time at the National Curriculum Council (NCC) and the Schools Examination and Assessment Council (SEAC), both bodies established from the ERA in 1988. With a penchant for publicity and self aggrandisement, as described in the *New Statesman* (Beckett, 1999), Woodhead developed a very different organisation to the earlier inspectorate. The first Ofsted inspections, starting in 1993, focussed on the secondary sector, with demands for enormous amounts of documentary evidence being matched to practice in every aspect of school life. Developed from this model Ofsted inspections of primary schools started in September 1994, introducing an era dominated by what Ball has described as the 'terrors of performativity' (Ball, 2003). Once more the size of primary schools caused real problems. Qualitative research evidence at the time highlighted primary headteachers and staff overwhelmed by intense questioning and scrutiny, whilst still attempting to continue running schools and classes (Fielding, 2001; Jeffrey & Woods, 1996; Osborn et al., 2000; Troman, 1997, 2000; Woods & Jeffrey, 1998). For many the negativity and lack of support, alien to their practice, was very damaging (Troman, 2000).

Using his ability to manipulate the media, Woodhead was able to give a very high profile to Ofsted from the start. This, combined with the statutory publication of all Ofsted school inspection reports in the local press, created a very powerful, seemingly authoritative, base for further attacks on the teaching

profession (Galton et al., 1999 p24). An article in the New Statesman describes how, famously, at a press conference, Woodhead talked of 15,000 failing teachers, extrapolating data from Ofsted reports of unsatisfactory lessons to imply that these teachers, from one or two observed lessons, were no good, regardless of the pressurised circumstances that the evidence had come from (Beckett, 1999). Such data was seized upon by the media, thus giving Ofsted further credibility.

Some school effectiveness researchers were attracted to data that Ofsted provided, rather than questioning the veracity of the blame culture associated with it (Thrupp, 1999 p151-2). With government using Ofsted to justify its policies as well, it is not surprising that it rapidly became so well established, and that it remains as a formidable instrument of centralised government control today, despite many modifications.

All of these changes were introduced by a Conservative government that was to lose power in 1997. By this time a lack of investment in public services had become problematic. Barber describes the Tory introduction of the various initiatives in this period as ‘increasing the challenges: new standards, new tests, new school inspection and new publication of school test scores’ but with low support (Barber, 2001 p19). Annual budget reductions had become the norm since the introduction of LMS (Easton et al., 2005) making the government unpopular. To address this deficiency the mantra adopted by Barber and New Labour was to be ‘High challenge, high support’.

2.9 New Labour, new money, new 'rigour'

At the Labour Party Conference in October 1996, party leader and future prime minister, Tony Blair made his memorable and emotional sound bite statement;

*Ask me my three main priorities for government, and I tell you:
education, education, education* (TES report Rafferty, 1996).

This and many other such positive statements proved popular with the electorate, even teachers. Within a year New Labour came to power and, for a brief moment in time, those working in the field of education were relieved that 18 years of Tory budget reductions, interventions and mistrust of the teaching profession had come to an end (Ball, 2001). This euphoria was not to last. The first warning bells were sounded when Chris Woodhead, Chief HMI and head of Ofsted, kept his job. He was subsequently given a 34% pay rise in September the next year (BBC, 1998). Woodhead was felt by headteachers to be responsible for much of the conflict and demoralisation associated with the Tory era (Barber, 2001 p19). However it became clear his self promotion and 'no nonsense' approach appealed to the policy drivers of New Labour. It seemed that they expected Woodhead to deliver the 'high challenge', whilst they concentrated on the 'high support'. Barber, Chief Adviser to the Secretary of State for Education on school standards from 1997 -2001, and colleagues in the new Standards and Effectiveness Unit, were determined to implement the mantra of 'high challenge, high support' in order to build their vision of a 'world class education service' (Barber, 2001 p19 & 17).

A plethora of initiatives was introduced and huge investment in education made in an attempt to redress years of declining budgets under the Tories;

‘forty-seven education-related policies, initiatives and funding decisions were listed in a briefing paper at the Labour Party Annual Conference in 1998’ and this involved ‘a cash injection of £19 billion over 3 years according to government figures’ (Ball, 2001 p45). Much of this spending was intended to address concerns associated with urban decline and poverty. There was a belief that raising standards of achievement in literacy and numeracy could break the cycle of socio-economic deprivation, thus positively transforming the life chances of many so called ‘under-achievers’ (Jones, 2003 p171). In an attempt to raise standards across the board, New Labour continued with performative policies already in place and being developed by the previous Conservative government. In 1998 the National Literacy Strategy was introduced. A year later the National Numeracy Strategy followed, both with prescriptive methodology expected to be the norm. For the first time the ‘how’ of primary school teaching as well as the ‘what’ was being dictated by central government. The government also ensured that these policies received unprecedented ‘high support’ for implementation in the belief that this would solve the perceived problem.

It is interesting to read the interpretation of this period, given by Barber in 2001, where he describes educators waiting for the new regime to bring more support and less challenge;

...the Blair government did not believe the old approach would deliver either the long-term vision or the short-term results. Instead it built on the Conservative government’s reforms, sharpened the challenge and, crucially, added the support. Hence the high challenge, high support (Barber, 2001 p21).

The way in which the ‘support’ was implemented raises questions about whether this vocabulary was appropriate.

2.10 New strategies?

Much of the structure of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies had been piloted through the Conservative National Literacy Project in 25 LEAs (Tomlinson, 2000 p78) but New Labour seemed to claim it as their own. Barber and the Standards Unit used research compiled for OFSTED, *‘Worlds Apart? A review of international surveys of educational achievement involving England’* (Reynolds & Farrell, 1996), which highlighted poor performance of English pupils in international comparisons in mathematics and science, to justify the introduction of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. These strategies promoted whole class teaching as the all-encompassing panacea to raise standards. By introducing the ‘how’ into primary education government policy was much more than ‘support’. But the justification for this ‘what works’ approach, dictating what was happening in every classroom, was not as sound as it first appeared. Writing in 2000, Alexander highlighted the catalogue of technical flaws that Reynolds and Farrell themselves identified in two of the studies they used;

– poor sampling, missing data, excessively variable response rates, and lack of between-country comparability in test items and administrative procedures – which are so serious as to make one wonder whether the test results were worth reporting at all. Surprisingly they do not see their judgement on the state of mathematics education in England as in any way compromised by these flaws (Alexander, 2000 p36).

Despite this, the achievement of English schools was defined as poor in Mathematics and Science. These were the only two areas studied because, it was claimed, earlier in the report, they were more easily and consistently measurable across countries and between cultures! The poor results for England fitted in well with the beliefs of David Blunkett, (Secretary of State for Education 1997-2001) highlighted in his speech to the ESRC in early 2000;

One of our prime needs is to be able to measure the size of the effect of A on B. This is genuine social science and reliable answers can only be reached if the best social scientists are willing to engage in this endeavour. We are not interested in worthless correlations based on small samples from which it is impossible to draw generalisable conclusions (Blunkett quoted in Hammersley, 2002 p83-84).

So statistics (however questionable) justified, for the politicians, the way forward. A world-wide quantitative study (Reynolds & Farrell, 1996) had given the government the opportunity to centralise power in an attempt to maintain what it saw as competitiveness within the global economy. This was the ‘manufactured’ foundation for the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. There are further links here to performativity, with Blunkett setting ambitious national KS 2 SATs targets to be achieved by 2002 to validate this approach. Of course the government did not ‘dictate’ what happened in every classroom. Schools were free to ignore the strategies, but if they did so would be subjected to rigorous inspections (above and beyond their regular Ofsted visits) to ensure that they were achieving sufficiently high standards. The choice was theirs. It is not clear how such an approach can be regarded as ‘support’.

New Pedagogy?

Some (e.g. Alexander, 2004; Allen & Ainley, 2007; Boyle & Bragg, 2006; English, Hargreaves, & Hislam, 2002; Woods, Jeffrey, & Troman, 2001; Wrigley, 2005) have found the ‘what works’ pedagogy of the strategies questionable. The description of others at the time was quite graphic;

...the literacy and numeracy hours and the exemplar schemes of work could be seen as the pedagogical equivalent of painting by numbers (Davies & Edwards, 2001 p100)

This comment is not surprising when the strategies consisted of whole class lessons of an hour for literacy and 45 minutes for numeracy, precisely structured, with an introduction setting out the objectives, a teaching input of dictated content for all the pupils, followed by ability group activities with the teacher working with one group whilst others were given tasks which could be completed without support, and finally a plenary session where work completed was discussed and objectives re-visited. Detailed lesson plans for all year groups in Key Stage 1 (5-7 year olds) and Key Stage 2 (7-11 year olds) were provided with progression strands expected to be followed.

At the same time, to support literacy, there had been a government commitment to increase by 20,000 the number of full time (or equivalent) teaching assistants in all schools (DfEE, 1998) . According to Ofsted the number of teaching assistants in English schools grew from 61,000 in 1997 to 96,000 in 2001 (BBC, 2002). The consequences of these extra adults in primary schools would have a much wider impact in years to come with the introduction of workforce reform. This is considered further in Chapter 9.

Assessing the Strategies

Only when the strategies were in place, did the government commission an evaluation of their potential for success. The final report from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto (OISEUT) (Earl et al., 2003) and annual reports by OFSTED seemed positive, as long as the right passages were selected. This was, for the DfES, sufficient justification for the formats to continue. A lot of independent research, questioning the effectiveness of the strategies, and the values inherent within them, was ignored (English et al., 2002; Fisher, 2004; Mroz, Smith, & Hardman, 2000; Smith, Hardman, Wall, & Mroz, 2004; Twistleton, 2000; Tymms, 2004; Wyse, 2003).

Even the OISEUT Report, in reviewing the early years of the strategies had concerns about the abilities of teachers;

The data indicates that for many teachers, gaps or weaknesses in subject knowledge or pedagogical understanding limit the extent to which they can make full use of the frameworks and resources of the Strategies (Earl et al., 2003 p6).

This was despite schools having received exemplary frameworks and a large range of resources. Research by English et al. suggests that bringing about real change is far more expensive and time consuming than the approach adopted to implement the strategies. The resources needed for modifying the practice of even enthusiastic teachers is highlighted in their study. Teachers were videoed teaching the Literacy hour; an extract was selected for self analysis and then discussed with a colleague or researcher. The lengthy process of monitoring, self-evaluation and discussion led to a noticeable improvement in classroom

interactions with children when further lessons were observed. The abstract from the paper highlights how important this point is in suggesting that;

....opportunities for critical reflection on practice are needed to help teachers articulate and resolve the dilemmas created by the imposition of prescribed programmes on personal educational principles (English et al., 2002).

The final report of OISEUT on the implementation of the strategies also highlights the need for such support:

Even with the Strategies strong focus on building capacity, the magnitude of the task has meant that many teachers have had relatively little opportunity for the sustained professional development and consolidation that is needed (Earl et al., 2003 p6).

Ignoring such concerns, the focus on testing and targets continued, but KS2 SATs results showed little improvement (Tymms, 2004). Despite this the government hailed the strategies a great success. Ofsted reported (DfES, 2003c) that, although not compulsory, almost every school had implemented the strategies, implying that they were welcome and popular. However, this was hardly surprising when any alternative was accompanied by DfES threats of more rigorous inspection and pressure in order to ensure that their standards targets were being achieved. Nevertheless, this selective positive evidence was used as the backbone of the next stage of government policy to raise standards above the plateau – the Primary Strategy, continuing the standardisation of the earlier strategies, but now also promoting creativity and innovation, within a wide-ranging set of ideas, initiatives and legislation, aimed at further raising standards. (The Primary Strategy is discussed in detail in Chapter 5).

Policy makers and politicians have concentrated on outcomes which are quantifiable and used to judge both the quality of the product – in this case, children, and also the efficiency of the producers – the schools (e.g. Barber, 2001; Reynolds & Farrell, 1996; Slavin, 2002). This ‘simple’ approach has become the driving force of school reform over the last twenty years (Alexander, 2000 p41). Little account has been taken of the raw materials used or of the resources needed, or available, to create this product. Thrupp raises concerns that most improvement literature ‘appears to perceive few limitations in school effectiveness work’ (Thrupp, 1999 p177). There continues to be an almost overwhelming optimism that this ‘what works’ approach will eventually succeed (Barber, 2001; Fullan, 2005; Hopkins, 2007). Little account seems to have been taken of the history of education reform (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). This is considered in more depth in Chapter 4.

In the next chapter, in order to bring a deeper understanding to my research into the Primary Strategy, I position myself within the research community as being both a reflective teacher and a reflexive researcher. I then consider the methodological approaches and methods used in this study.

Chapter 3 The researcher, the methodology and methods

No one can think about everything, to be sure; no one can think about *anything* without experience and information about it. Nevertheless there is such a thing as *readiness* to consider in a thoughtful way the subjects that do come within the range of experience – a readiness that contrasts strongly with the disposition to pass judgement on the basis of mere custom, tradition, prejudice, etc., and thus shun the task of thinking (Dewey, 1933 p34).

In this chapter I position myself as both teacher and researcher before considering how this has helped shape the methodology of my research. The combination of many years experience of a rapidly changing system allied to more recent critical policy research knowledge provides a powerful framework for understanding the impact of the Primary Strategy.

3.1 A reflective teacher

Perhaps the most significant development in my journey has been moving from becoming a more reflective teacher, my original intention, to also becoming a reflexive researcher. These two elements are closely connected. The term reflective teacher can be interpreted in a number of ways and is used by both policy makers and practitioners. A comprehensive and systematic definition, for primary school teachers, has been developed by Pollard and colleagues, over at least 15 years. This builds from earlier use by Dewey, contrasting ‘routine action’ with ‘reflective action’ and stating that ‘reflective thinking must be an educational aim’ (Dewey, 1933 p17). The key characteristics of reflective practice are; going beyond mere delivery of a prescribed curriculum by considering aims and consequences; the on-going revisiting, questioning and revising of practice; using classroom enquiry to improve the quality of

teaching; being open minded, responsible and fully committed, with judgement and insight informed by enquiry and other research; having an ability to work constructively with others to enhance learning experiences and with the skill to mediate externally imposed initiatives (Pollard, 2002a p12-13). These are also the specific qualities observed by Woods in primary schools (1990 p23) as mentioned in the previous chapter. The historical development of such practice is considered in the next chapter.

My own experience empowered me in developing as a reflective practitioner. From working in two very exciting and innovative schools, through setting up and running an urban studies centre as an advisory teacher, to deputy headship and leading a school I was able to refine my practice and to share these experiences with others. This included jointly running residential environmental studies courses at Missenden Abbey in Buckinghamshire where teachers were encouraged to develop first hand learning experiences, at an adult level, which could then be used with children at school and shared with other teachers. This type of in-service training, prominent in the 1970s, has been linked to the promotion of the progressive ideal with claims that such enrichment was too often contrived and far removed from the realities of many schools (Cunningham, 1988 p85) . However as well as considering the organisational and practical skills necessary, these courses promoted a greater understanding of the underlying pedagogy and expectations that teachers have of children when attempting to develop both innovative and creative work. Having experienced courses at Missenden Abbey as both provider and attendee it is clear that many of the elements essential for being a reflective teacher were firmly re-enforced by the process. In many ways the intentions, in developing

leaders for the future, were similar to current NCSL courses, but the approach was very different, the practical focus and time for reflection being far removed from the more pressured leadership, managerial and analytical content of many on-going programmes. A considerable number of teachers attending these courses did go on to become primary school leaders. These deeply embedded experiences also helped me in becoming a headteacher, as mentioned in my interview story.

Only after leaving headship and starting on the long road to recovery did I develop what Dewey calls the 'readiness' to think once more and to consider what had happened to me. This was to prove invaluable as I moved into the research arena, questioning why some schools appeared able to succeed in the current climate and others did not.

3.2 Becoming a reflexive researcher

Becoming a more reflective teacher in recent years had a very positive effect on my role as a reflexive researcher. The two roles are closely linked. Dewey develops this point, describing the habit of thinking as personal attitude and comparing it with logical, technical skills;

...with respect to the aims of education, no separation can be made between impersonal, abstract principles of logic and moral qualities of character. What is needed is to weave them into unity (Dewey, 1933 p34).

This has significance for me in becoming a reflexive researcher, within a system of primary schooling dominated by the standards agenda. A reflexive researcher should be able to weave together the various strands of the system into his or her subjective experience, in order to bring a depth of understanding

and interpretation to their research that could not be achieved using objective evidence alone. Gordon explains how this should work;

Researcher reflexivity is meant to advance the understanding of both the researcher and eventual readers about how past experiences and beliefs shape the ways in which stories get told. Through interrogation and disclosure of preconceptions and attitudes, researchers reveal their positionalities and this openness becomes a strength of qualitative work tying it to an interpretivist paradigm (Gordon, 2005 p280).

For this to be achieved it is important that the reflective elements have been retained and utilized in my methodology. It is the combination of first hand experience of what was happening in primary schools, what is currently happening, and an understanding of what could be happening that brings to my research a potency it would otherwise lack. However Behar, in her book, *The Vulnerable Observer*, warns of the dangers of self indulgence;

The exposure of the self who is also a spectator has to take us somewhere we couldn't otherwise get to. It has to be essential to the argument, not a decorative flourish, not exposure for its own sake (Behar, 1996 p14).

I do not regard my story of life as a headteacher in the 90's as an embellishment to my research. It is essential for my positioning and interpretative understanding of on-going developments. In answering criticism of those not prepared to consider the validity of such an approach Behar goes on to state that;

.... a personal voice, if creatively used, can lead the reader, not into miniature bubbles of navel-gazing, but into the enormous sea of serious social issues (Behar, 1996 p14).

Hopefully I have moved beyond the stage of navel gazing, enabling me to consider, in depth, the contexts and circumstances impacting upon the case study schools in a way which brings new knowledge to my research. This is not a straightforward task. All research is filtered through the researcher. Subjectivity is inherently challenging in these circumstances yet when acknowledged and used appropriately can produce significant results. This is considered further later in the chapter

Geertz, describing his anthropological approach, gives an insight into the complexity of becoming a reflexive researcher where, 'the road lies, like any genuine Quest, through a terrifying complexity' (Geertz, 1973 p53-54). Although not directly related to school experiences this reflects many of the elements needed for interpreting the culture of primary schooling.

This is where combining being a reflective teacher and reflexive researcher helps to create a path along the tortuous route of understanding the impact of policy implementation in a variety of settings and circumstances. It gives a framework to my research which both strengthens and helps in interpreting the data obtained.

3.3 Combined - practice and research

Being a reflective practitioner, as described earlier (Pollard, 2002a), positions me within the policy moves associated with the Primary Strategy. An understanding of expectations and perceived experience is very important in order to be able to interpret data obtained. However being a reflexive

researcher positions me outside policy, able to critically consider policy intentions, as well as implementation and impact (Ball, 1994). Having first hand experience of primary education from the heady days of the Plowden era, through to the present day, enables me to appreciate and understand many of the subtle nuances and repercussions of events otherwise treated as of little importance or relevance.

To help understand this relationship further, table 2 below, based on the seven characteristics of being a reflective teacher (Pollard, 2002a P13), is used to compare these with the characteristics of being a reflexive researcher (developed from Ozga, 2000 p5). From this it can be seen how one is very much a pre-requisite for the other. This is particularly important for research into primary education, taking it beyond the objective analysis of ‘the basics’.

Reflective Practitioner	Reflexive Researcher
Has an active concern with aims and consequences as well as means and technical efficiency	Reveals positionality of subjective experience as essential to research
Applies teaching in a cyclical or spiralling process, monitoring, evaluating and revising own practice continually	Interrogates preconceptions and attitudes analytically to relate to research process
Is competent in methods of evidence based classroom enquiry supporting development of higher standards of teaching	Brings to research a depth of understanding and interpretation from personal experience
Has an attitude of open mindedness, responsibility and wholeheartedness	Works with the subjects of the research rather than imposing upon them
Develops teaching based on teacher judgement informed by evidence-based enquiry and insights from other research	Is able to weave together evidence from both quantitative and qualitative sources.
Enhances work through collaboration and dialogue with colleagues	Has knowledge and understanding of the work of others in the field and shares findings with them
Creatively mediates externally developed frameworks for teaching and learning	Is able to sympathetically balance research requirements with the needs of those being studied

Table 2 Reflective practitioner and reflexive researcher
(developed from Ozga, 2000; Pollard, 2002a)

Of particular concern to me, as both practitioner and researcher, are the divergent positions associated with primary school policy and practice. On the one hand there are those that wish to polish and refine the current system to produce improvement, working from inside policy and claiming success, whilst there are others that question the very nature and appropriateness of policy within the broader sociological context. Having experienced the effects of the 'what works' approach, as well as the success of working in an innovative and creative way, has helped in my positioning as both an insider and outsider in considering the process of policy implementation.

To help understand this standpoint, I now consider the epistemology involved.

3.4 Epistemology

3.4.1 Subjectivity

Subjectivity is culturally constructed. A dictionary definition positions it as the antithesis of objectivity ... 'interpretation based on personal opinions or feelings rather than on external facts or evidence' (Encarta on-line dictionary). Such a simple comparison masks the more complicated and hidden subjectivities affecting ethnographic research in primary schools, where the objectivity of many facts and much evidence is questionable. Amongst many policy makers and politicians there is a desire to appear objective using the technology of performativity with 'the translation of complex social processes and events into simple figures or categories of judgement' (Ball, 2003 p216). Although not acknowledged, subjectivity is clearly present, as Young explains;

... the ideal of impartiality serves ideological functions. It masks the ways in which the particular perspectives of dominant groups claim

universality, and helps justify hierarchical decision making structures (Young, 1990 p97).

My personal experience brings a different subjectivity to the process, one associated with strongly held beliefs and principles, seemingly threatened by the imposition of performativity. In considering current policy reforms these different subjectivities are apparent and have to be taken into account; ‘... the subjectivities of change and changing subjectivities which are threatened or required or brought about by performativity’ (Ball, 2003 p17). Interpreting these different perspectives helps in developing a critical understanding of the process of policy implementation.

3.4.2 A critical approach

Critical theory originated in the community of philosophers and social scientists known as the Frankfurt School that moved to the USA during the Second World War (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). From within this group concerns were expressed that human beings were regarded as the products of a rigid, reified, capitalist structure where

... the commodification of all goods, services, and objects, and the new modes of thought promoted by the mass media and positivist science appear to be "natural" and to form a system impervious to human control or intervention (Kellner, 1990 section 3 para 2).

This is why critical theory is so important to this research. It goes beyond ‘what works’ towards developing ‘a normative reflection that is historically and socially contextualized ... Critical theory rejects as illusory the effort to construct a universal normative system insulated from a particular society’ (Young, 1990 p5). I am able to bring to this research experience and

understanding of both the social and historical contexts of primary schooling (Alexander, 2004; Thrupp, 1999).

3.5 Bringing critical theory into primary school research

My personal narrative tells the story of an on-going battle against neo-liberal policies of successive governments, intent on establishing centralised control of primary schooling. Scott positions such experiences, explaining how in using critical theory;

... research should be about identifying and unmasking those human beliefs and practices which limit freedom, justice and democracy (Scott, 2000 p54).

My concerns, as a reflective practitioner, are that the independence of teachers has been seriously eroded and that the learning experiences of children have been severely undermined. As a reflexive researcher I bring an understanding and interpretation of these concerns to my work. What is needed is a framework to challenge the official view of the system. Morrison talks of the theoretical and practical possibilities of applying such a 'critical theory' of education to British primary schools;

The challenge of critical theory to hitherto accepted tenets of education has offered educational discourse new maxims and issues which are at once refreshing and provocative. For critics of traditionalism and of the political right it articulates both anxieties about the *status quo* and avenues for altering or overturning the system and the structural complacency which they see inhering in it (Morrison, 1989 p3).

The timing of the publication of this 'challenging' article is ironic, being in the same year the National Curriculum was introduced and other elements of the

1988 ERA were being developed. In almost twenty years since then statutory legislation has entrenched the 'status quo', but Morrison, at the time, was optimistic;

Critical theory offers a rich field of study to protagonists and antagonists alike of existing and proposed curricula, drawing together philosophy, politics and sociology to indicate the direction of advances in curriculum theory (p3).

Later, having used critical theory to evaluate how progressive education 'failed to address or challenge society and social movements at large because of its conceptual confusion and because of the neglect of its emancipatory potential - potential for changing society and children in that society' (p11) he considers the impact of re-establishing it for the socially critical primary school;

It breaks the links of schools being simply receivers of state policies to being generators of policies. It moves from the view of the State determining and dominating schools, curricula and people to a dialectic view that transformation is a possibility which must be faced and encouraged (Morrison, 1989 p13).

Such a theoretical framework offers the possibility of challenging the veracity of many elements of current policy implementation. Today primary education has become even more highly politicised, with the national strategies used as a driver for societal change and Third Way policies of New Labour attempting to address deep seated inequalities and entrenchment within the system. Critical theory is important in helping to understand and question the positioning of the various actors within this highly complex situation.

3.6 Who benefits from this analysis?

The application of critical theory to education gives voice to teachers, children, and school leaders affected by policy but not involved in creating it. For teachers, Carr and Kemis state that such analysis;

...must be related intrinsically to the professional development of teachers. More extensive professional autonomy and responsibility require that teachers themselves build educational theory through critical reflection on their own practical knowledge (Carr & Kemmis, 1986 p41) .

For children, Apple, somewhat poignantly, talks of the serious consequences which develop from the abstract categories that grow out of, and define, the institutional life of schools which; ‘protects both the existing institution and the educator from self doubt and from the innocence and reality of the child’ (Apple, 1980 p134). Critical theory helps to address these concerns by focussing on children through questioning the validity of these presuppositions. It also helps schools subjected to the current regime challenge the popular discourse of primary schooling.

3.7 Methodology

3.7.1 Policy sociology

Using sociological tools it is possible to develop research giving a deep understanding of the impact of policies on individuals, institutions and the contexts within which they are set. Placing this evidence alongside critical analysis of policy intentions, which may be hidden to the passive observer, helps in building up an overall picture of what is happening in primary schools

in a very turbulent time. Such an approach is important in order to appreciate what has been changed and what has remained the same; what Ball calls ‘dissolution and conservation’ within education policy (Ball, 2008a p193). Such moves are not always apparent or acknowledged and some may need to be challenged. This is very complicated territory where the voices of the socially disadvantaged, and of those working with them, are frequently not heard, or ignored. It is my intention to address this concern.

Policy as process

Before examining the unique positioning of primary schools in more detail it is necessary to consider what is meant by policy. This is not straightforward. Ball talks of policy as text and discourse, with policy text open to interpretation, sometimes ignored, and discourse not just ‘about what can be said, and thought, but also about who can speak, when, where and with what authority’ (Ball, 2006 p48). In a similar vein Ozga describes ‘policy as a **process** rather than a product, involving negotiation, contestation or struggle between different groups who may lie outside the formal machinery of official policy making’ (Ozga, 2000 p2). Another perspective is clearly identified with the school effectiveness and improvement movement, so influential in establishing centralised control of the education system; ‘There are those who understand policy in quite straightforward terms as the actions of government aimed at securing particular outcomes’ (Ozga, 2000 p2).

These divergent positions make the interpretation and understanding of policy so challenging. Further to this the inter-relatedness of various policy elements of the Primary Strategy adds to the difficulties. Although such complexity has resulted in policy definition remaining open to interpretation ‘depending to a

considerable degree on the perspective of the researcher' (Ozga, 2000 p2) the impact of policies on schools is clearly evident . This is where policy sociology is important for this research in helping bring to it an understanding of how policy affects those experiencing it. It is also important in helping to interpret the moves of policy makers and politicians at a time when centralised government control of schools has never been greater.

The change agenda of New Labour, beyond education, brings with it the very best of intentions towards those in the most socially deprived communities across the country. Education policy is seen as a significant driver in improving the lot of those struggling within the system and also in improving the global economic positioning of the country (Barber, 2001). Policy sociology provides the tools for getting below the surface of the good intentions in order to examine the 'everyday realities' (Thomson, 2002) of the case study schools.

Surface epistemology

My own experience of policy implementation raises questions about the knowledge upon which government initiatives are built, their capacity to achieve what is intended and the validity of their claims. What Ball calls 'surface epistemology' helps locate this research within the broader context of social policy;

This is not an exercise in 'deep epistemology' - realism, essentialism, forms of explanation and all that – rather it is concerned with 'surface epistemology' – the relationships between conceptualisation, research conduct and design and interpretation (Ball, 1997 p257).

Clearly research into policy implementation creates its own theories of knowledge. There is also a warning here. Ball identifies within policy research a tension between the concerns of efficiency and those of social justice;

Critical researchers, apparently safely ensconced in the moral high ground, nonetheless make a livelihood trading in the artefacts of misery and broken dreams of practitioners (Ball, 1997 p257).

Care needs to be taken in considering policy moves which may be underwritten by the best of intentions and that could, in the right circumstances, have a positive effect. It is the interpretation of the combination of policies and initiatives, set in different contexts, which is likely to give meaning to this 'surface epistemology'.

Further to this within the context of critical policy analysis, the power associated with the language game of performativity is considerable. Describing performativity as an indirect steering mechanism Ball states that;

...performativity provides sign systems which 'represent' education in a self referential and reified form of consumption (Ball, 2006 p71).

For this research, in order to understand how such mechanisms develop, a 'policy trajectory' approach (Ball, 1994) is particularly useful.

3.7.2 Considering policy trajectory studies

The term policy trajectory is described by Ball (1994) as 'a cross sectional analysis tracing policy formulation, struggle and response from within the state itself through to the various recipients of policy' (p26). It was developed in the early 1990s, as research into the impact of the 1988 ERA was attempting to understand the ramifications of wide ranging and complex legislation. Rather than focussing on specific elements of policy implementation, a broader

conceptual structure was initially attempted by Bowe, Ball and Gold (1992) to consider the various contexts of policy making. This involved;

- the context of influence
- the context of policy text production
- the context(s) of practice

There were two subsequent additions

- the context of outcomes
- the context of political strategy

(Ball, 1994 p26)

This structure is not a rigid classification. Many elements across these contexts are interrelated. The flexibility and fluidity needed in considering these different influences brings to studying the trajectory of policy great potential for understanding impact and intention. Developed at a time of enormous education reforms in the 1990s this is a particularly useful tool in considering something as multi-faceted as the Primary Strategy, itself infused with change (see Chapter 5).

For this research a policy trajectory approach is important in that it helps identify the different influences on school development and classroom practice which may not be initially obvious. The various policy initiatives associated with the Primary Strategy, although described independently in policy documents, are closely connected in school settings. When such contexts are considered the impact may be different to stated intentions. This research gives voice to those subjected to policy implementation (in difficult circumstances) and considers the interconnectedness of school experiences and policy imperatives. It attempts to address the perception promoted by policy makers

and politicians that 'policies are always solutions and never part of the problem' (Ball, 2006 p17).

It is also important that the historical context of primary schools is considered in examining policy trajectory. Much of what is being expected today has origins in earlier policies and perceptions of primary schooling which are not always acknowledged within contemporary discourses. To some the New Labour policy makers perspective of the past is 'as distorted and partisan an account of recent educational history as one is likely to find yet *realpolitik* dictates that it's the one that counts' (Alexander, 2004 p16). However there is evidence of continuities from early in the 20th Century having a considerable influence on current perceptions, policy and practice. Only when these are taken into account is it possible to understand how policy formulation, described as new and innovative, is entrenched in earlier discourses directly influencing classroom practice. Again it is vital to give voice to those in schools having to cope with diverse policy expectations whose origins may not be apparent or acknowledged and which appear problematic.

A final consideration for policy trajectory should be time. The schedule and pace associated with policy production through to policy implementation, along with the expectation of improvement or change being achieved within a set period, has a considerable influence on the different contexts identified above. Much of this is associated with what Ball calls 'the time compression of globalisation' (Ball, 2008a p197) where government expects results to be rapidly achieved to help position the country positively within the developing global economic market place. The way such time pressure shapes policy imperatives needs to be considered. This has to be compared with the time

scale of implementing policy at the micro level through individual teachers and schools. Also the sustainability of policy initiatives over time has to be considered, as impact, expectations and circumstances change. This is why an ethnographic case study approach is important in helping raise awareness of the time available for practitioners and children across the policy implementation spectrum.

3.8 Taking the research into schools

In order to understand the ‘effects’ on trajectory of these on-going developments it was important that this element of the research was empirical in design and very much school based. The scope of such a study is highlighted by Denzin and Lincoln (1994) as they expand on the breadth of qualitative research;

Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials ...that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives. Accordingly, qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of inter connected methods, hoping always to get a better fix on the subject matter at hand (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994 p2).

Using a case study approach gives an opportunity to observe these ‘routine and problematic moments and meanings’.

3.9 A Case study approach

Policy implementation in primary schools is a very complex matter. In order to develop a depth of understanding of this, going beyond performative data and judgements, a case study approach is particularly helpful. Case study research has been described by Yin as ‘empirical enquiry that investigates a

contemporary phenomenon within its real life context when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident' (Yin, 2003 p13). The phenomenon which is the Primary Strategy has within in many interdependent policies and initiatives (see Chapter 5). Only when research is situated in the contexts where all these different elements are expected to be implemented simultaneously is it possible to identify connections influencing how they develop. These may be not be acknowledged, or could be hidden, but seem likely to have considerable impact on policy implementation. For this research it is important to recognize and highlight such issues.

Case study research involves collecting data from a variety of sources set within a particular context. The case studies developed in this research tell a story. It is a story of excitement, optimism, good intentions and special places; but it is also a story of lost opportunities and frustration. It is not an easy story. I have been fortunate, for research purposes, that much of it is situated in 'twilight zones' far removed from the corridors of power, in schools often reluctant to open their doors to outside observers (see Nias et al., 1992 p5). Following Ozga (2000), the terrain, as well as being contested, is difficult. To illustrate such complexity, Egan, in his book *Teaching as Story Telling*, considers phases of what he calls educational fashion in elementary schools, making a very important point that these do not provide a neat, sequential story where one phase replaces another;

Rather we find that the later phase enjoys a fashionable dominance in the literature of education, but in practice does not replace but rather compromises with the earlier phases (Egan, 1986 p110).

Case study research is able to reveal the layering of current policy experience, (which could be interpreted as being fashionably dominant, although much is statutory), with earlier phases of school development, still embedded in the hearts and minds of many practitioners. This is not to say that these earlier experiences are necessarily better, but their influence must be taken into consideration when evaluating the impact of current initiatives.

Critics of the case study approach raise concerns that it may be too narrowly focussed on one specific organisation, ignoring the broader impact of policy implementation with findings not being generalisable. Although not directly intended to address these concerns, for this research I developed four individual case studies of primary schools in order to compare and contrast experiences between the schools, identifying commonalities and differences in their implementation of the Primary Strategy. To give further depth to the knowledge obtained I decided to develop an ethnographic approach to the case studies.

3.10 Ethnography

Social ethnography is a term used to describe what anthropologists do (Geertz, 1973 p5). Data is collected through immersion in the society being studied, in many cases by being involved as a participant observer in order to gain the confidence of those involved. The textbook approach is described by Geertz as; ‘establishing rapport, selecting informants, transcribing texts, taking genealogies, mapping fields, keeping a diary, and so on’ (p6). However it is not the data itself which is of significance, rather the interpretation of it for the ethnographer in considering;

... a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which he must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render (Geertz, 1973 p10).

This accumulation of information is termed by Geertz as 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973 p6) a term he borrows from Ryle (1971). It is the way in which this portrayal of interwoven complexity is interpreted which is important for the research process.

Applying ethnography to primary school research using 'thick description' enables the researcher to develop insights beyond the formal process of policy implementation. In this research the four primary school case studies were broadly ethnographic, set within a 'natural context' to produce richly descriptive findings to inform the decisions of practitioners, policymakers or theorists (Yin, 1994). 'Fuzzy generalisations' are produced from such studies (Bassey, 1999). These provide a clearer understanding of how policy is being re-shaped into practice, viz. how '... simple transmission processes become complex, as teachers and pupils modify policy intentions, taking advantage of the spaces between planning and outcomes, as well as the contradictions or competition between purposes' (Ozga, 2000 p10).

Using ethnography helps tell this complicated story. Policy may appear relatively straightforward but what happens in schools is not (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000; Thomson, 2002). Gewirtz et. al. highlight how important it is to consider the overall effect of the implementation of something as complex as the Primary Strategy on schools;

Policies are inevitably crude and simple. Practice is typically sophisticated, contingent and unstable. The assertion of, and resistance to, policy is always hedged around with some degree of chaos/freedom (Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowe, 1995 p110).

This research has attempted to go beyond the crude and simplistic ‘what works’ policies of central government by moving it into the highly developed, complex and unpredictable world of primary schooling.

My work draws on previous studies viz. using a sustained ethnographic approach in a primary school (Jeffrey & Woods, 2003; Nias, 1989; Nias et al., 1992); collecting data about the system, the school and the classroom (Alexander, 2000; Alexander et al., 1992; Galton et al., 1999; Jackson, 1990; Maguire et al., 2006; Woods & Jeffrey, 1996b); linking classroom practice and research with current educational, political and social debates (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000; Osborn et al., 2000; Pollard, 2002a; Thomson, 2002; Webb & Vulliamy, 1996, 2006); considering issues of creativity and creative teaching (Beetlestone, 1998; Craft, 2005; Craft, Jeffrey, & Leibling, 2001; Jones & Wyse, 2004) and setting the context for the current political deliberation ((Lupton, 2005; Thrupp, 1999; Tomlinson, 2000).

3.11 Why I used case studies

In answering the research questions I felt that I needed to get more deeply involved in the ‘everyday reality’ (Jackson, 1990; Thomson, 2002) of schools similar to those where headteachers had initially questioned the Strategy structure. There is a complicated story (Egan, 1986) frequently influenced by both history and context (Gordon, 2005; Young, 1990). I wanted to be able to spend time celebrating their successes and identifying problems and difficulties

associated with various elements of the Strategy. There is a considerable body of research over time that has looked at the everyday reality of primary schools (see above), and even research that has looked at the initial impact of the Primary Strategy (Ofsted, 2005e; Webb & Vulliamy, 2006, 2007). However, with many elements associated the Strategy introduced subsequent to these investigations, I felt it essential to collect evidence of the longer term impact of the combination of policies and initiatives, rather than drawing conclusions within two years, when certain changes may well have been influenced by a type of Hawthorne Effect.¹⁰ It was also of note that in the six pilot study schools only 3 had adopted non-statutory elements of the Strategy in their whole school curriculum planning, more than two years after it was available. Policy implementation is a slow process.

From the pilot study it was clear that it was schools in isolated pockets of deprivation, struggling to reach government targets, that were faced with the most difficulties in implementing the increasing expectations of the Primary Strategy. Having been a primary headteacher positioned me as having experienced the control of policy makers (structure), and the freedom to interpret policy and develop ideas with a closely-knit team of teachers (agency). I used this experience to help me gain access to schools struggling within the present performative regime. In the next section I explain how I developed this approach.

¹⁰ Hawthorne Effect: improvement in performance, as by workers or students, resulting from mere awareness that experimental attempts are being made to bring about improvement <http://www.yourdictionary.com/hawthorne-effect>

3.12 Finding the schools and working in them

For the case studies I deliberately looked for 3 schools that were in areas affected by industrial or economic decline, notably ex-mining communities or large council/housing association estates in urban conurbations. Former colleagues and inspectors were able to suggest schools and areas to consider. To confirm that these schools were suitable I looked at league tables of SATs results, not to judge the performance of the schools, but as an indicator of socio-economic difficulties (Maguire et al., 2006; Thrupp, 1999). I also used IDACI (Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index) (ONS, 2007) to assess levels of unemployment in the area. To provide a contrast I also developed a case study of a fourth school in 'the leafy suburbs' with little evidence of social disadvantage.

The pilot study made me acutely aware of the pressure on the headteachers as they prepared for the implementation of the on-line SEF (Self Evaluation Form) for Ofsted in September 2005. Because of such concerns I wanted to be able to offer something in return to the case study schools, when I approached them, rather than just appearing to be a passive observer and interviewer. In negotiations to gain access to the schools I offered to work creatively with a class for a morning each week over half a term. Much of this work was based on themes associated with the Royal Horticultural Society courses that I had been running in 2003/04.

Initially I contacted the headteachers by phone and arranged visits to discuss my proposals. Once the headteachers understood what I wanted to do, I asked them to put this to staff to gain initial approval. After further contact I then arranged to attend staff meetings to discuss my proposals. Staff appreciated the

fact that I was aware of their challenging circumstances and was looking for evidence of their successes and difficulties, at the same time welcoming the offer of classroom support. I explained the interview procedures and data collection which were subsequently conducted using BERA guidelines with regard to confidentiality and anonymity. The Nottingham University Code of Practice was followed. Informed consent was obtained from adults interviewed. All interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed and copies given to interviewees for approval before being used by me. Observation notes were discussed with staff.

3.13 Positionality

As a former headteacher I had to be very careful about how I was perceived in the schools. Having previously been in a position of authority, my power as a researcher and ensuing issues of power relationships with participants could have become problematic if I had been seen or felt to be imposing my views upon staff rather than working with them, or simply reproducing an analysis from my earlier experience. It was important not to be seen as going into the schools with a pre-set agenda but rather to identify the successes and difficulties experienced in them during the research period. At the same time, although attempting to give voice to schools and those in them, it has to be acknowledged that this is my story and my interpretation. Through being a reflexive researcher, I brought rich experience to the research combined with an awareness of being associated with my previous position.

To this end I will now list issues concerning positionality and associated power issues and relationships, building on elements of critical theory as espoused by

Morrison (1989 p3), that needed to be addressed for the research itself to become a dynamic process, before considering them in more detail:

1. Ensuring that I working with staff rather than imposing on them
2. Avoiding coercion – not being a spy in the classroom
3. Respecting children through involving them in the research process
4. Confidentiality – not using my position as a catalyst for disagreements
5. Appropriate researcher behaviour in a primary school
6. Explaining to staff exceptional circumstances beyond the research process

Mistreatment of children

Illegalities

Disclosures

3.14 Working with staff

With the initial access to the schools being through headteachers, great care had to be taken to ensure that it was not just the enthusiasm of the head for the project that was driving it. I was acutely aware that my position as a former headteacher with its associated power relationships, as well as my age and gender, had a number of implications for how I was perceived by staff, notably those that were younger or less experienced. Several strategies were used to address these issues, including being based in the staffroom, working with a class each week in order to be seen as part of the team (rather than as an outsider making judgements), and not undertaking formal interviews until I had been in the school for at least three weeks in order to gain the trust of the staff. It was my experience that working alongside younger staff in the classroom

helped break down the age and gender barriers before more formal parts of the research began.

3.15 Avoiding coercion

The preliminary staff meeting proved essential in setting out my position and contribution thus ensuring a mutual understanding of the expected behaviour of all concerned. Great care was taken to emphasise that I was not a spy in the classroom reporting back findings to the headteacher about the quality of teaching and behaviour. Further to this there was a danger that, as a former headteacher, I could inadvertently have been used as, or perceived to be, an agent of the headteacher or governors monitoring or investigating an unsatisfactory or failing teacher or member of the support staff. This could have led to antagonism towards me within the school and resentment on the part of the member of staff concerned. This is why it was so important to ensure that consent was openly given before participation and that the opportunity to withdraw at any time was made very clear. At the same time both anonymity and confidentiality were emphasised in both observations and interviews.

I was concerned to ensure that all those involved in the case studies were willing participants and not being coerced into taking part. As well as teachers, support staff and children had to be willing to take part in each case study and have the opportunity of withdrawal at any time.

3.16 Children matter in research too

There is a danger that ethical issues are developed for the benefit of adults through the use of consent forms etc. whilst at the same time there is an

expectation that children will automatically be involved. Of particular relevance to avoid this situation is work done by Kaye Johnson, in South Australia, to develop a policy with children in her school of principles for researchers to adhere to (Johnson, 2000 p6-7). These principles are particularly important if personal details and background are being investigated and highlight the sensitivity of children to the presence of a researcher. Because my research concentrated on policy implementation I did not focus on personally sensitive areas, but nevertheless introduced and used these principles with children in each class that I worked with from the start, including treating them with respect, explaining my research, seeking their consent and being open about my intentions.

3.17 Confidentiality

There could be a real disparity between what different teachers, other staff, governors and the head perceived to be happening in the schools. I had to use my discretion where such problems became evident in order to avoid becoming a catalyst for a breakdown in relations within the school which could have directly affected the educational opportunities of the children, as well as the research process. I explained to staff (both during the preliminary meeting and also in interviews and conversations) that raising such issues is not the role of a researcher and great care was taken to ensure that this aspect of confidentiality was respected at all times.

As well as the expected matters of individual confidentiality it was important part of the research process to make clear, before getting permission to attend staff meetings etc., that as an observer any further issues of confidentiality and

anonymity were also respected and that any external providers were also informed of my role.

3.18 Appropriate researcher behaviour

Amidst on-going concerns about the vulnerability of children and government legislation in 2002 bringing in Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks to prevent unsuitable adults gaining access to schools, researchers have to carefully consider their role. As part of statutory safeguarding children procedures (DfES, 2004c) primary schools would not expect a researcher in my position to work in isolation with children. Informal interviews and conversations took place in open, visible spaces, within close distance to or in the presence of another adult.

Further to this, and a legal requirement, my first task in each school, before going into any classroom, was to present the appropriate administrator with my CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) clearance from the University.

3.19 Exceptional circumstances

There are a number of exceptional circumstances which override the research process. My experience as a headteacher was helpful in positioning me sympathetically at the initial meeting with staff in explaining the process if such situations arose and in understanding the necessary procedures.

Mistreatment of children

The participants were made aware of my responsibility to report to the appropriate authority, identified before the research started, any observed

mistreatment of children by adults or other children (as opposed to poor or unsatisfactory teaching) and in exceptional circumstances, where life or limb was being put at risk, of the responsibility to intervene immediately.

Illegalities

Participants were also made aware of my responsibility to report illegal activity observed or identified. The range of this is immense and there is a danger of the researcher exhibiting a betrayal of trust, for instance with a child giving the researcher a gift that may have been stolen. I explained that the timing and the manner of dealing with such a problem would be carefully considered as not just the teacher or support staff, but the head and parents may well become involved. Such a problem would initially be discussed quietly with the teacher who should be aware of the background of the child and may be aware of any previous similar behaviour and how it has been dealt with, and the strategies the school employs in managing these situations. Fortunately these circumstances did not arise.

At the other extreme any illegal activity observed would have to be reported to a higher authority. Again this would have been done discretely as the behaviour observed may already be being dealt with and it is not the role of the researcher to publicly initiate such an inquiry. It was important that I identified the appropriate person at each level of authority, for instance if there had been a concern about the behaviour of the headteacher, to report this to the chair of the governing body or to the local authority inspector. As is also expected of school staff, the time and date of any observed illegal activity would have been

recorded and also the time and date of my reporting it to the appropriate authority. Once more any such actions were not necessary.

Disclosures

All schools have a procedure and a named person for dealing with incidents of disclosure of abuse. I made sure that I identified this person before working with children. If a disclosure had been experienced the information would have been recorded as soon as possible, including time, date and person reported to, because it could end up being used as evidence in a court of law.

3.20 Establishing good relationships

A concern that only became apparent once I had started the research was that in one school I had not spoken to the whole staff, only the teachers and some TAs. This resulted in me having to explain to the Senior TA and others what I was doing, which provided an interesting insight into the structure and management of this school. Fortunately, because of my approach in working with the children, offering some exciting experiences, I was readily accepted into the school and within the first week all the staff understood my role. In the other three schools I also built up good relationships with staff and children and was able to obtain some interviews and to develop conversations which would have been difficult in a shorter time scale. Only after having worked in each school for three weeks did I approach staff for interviews. I attempted to get a cross section of staff, both in age and experience (see Appendix 2). To my surprise no one refused to be interviewed. There was only one teacher that I did not approach, who had a very busy sports schedule at lunchtimes and after school. This teacher did not even take PPA (Planning, Preparation and Assessment) time. The available cover teacher was used to do lesson planning

and other paperwork during that time. It was interesting that PPA time made teachers more readily available to be interviewed. Even if the interviews did not take place during cover time, teachers on PPA release were happier to use lunchtimes and after school time. They seemed more relaxed. It was more difficult to pin down Teaching Assistants (TAs). Their schedules were very intensive with little non-contact time. Much of the evidence from TAs came through staffroom and classroom conversations.

Having gained the confidence of both adults and children, I was able to work in each school as a participant observer for 3 or 4 days per week over half a term. With preliminary visits, later interviews and further visits to check transcripts I remained in close contact with each school for approximately a term.

3.21 Data collection

Classroom observations focussed on atmosphere, identified in *Teachable Moments* (Woods & Jeffrey, 1996b) as essential to create what the Primary Strategy describes as a 'rich and exciting experience' (DfES, 2003a p27) for primary school children. The characteristics of this being 'anticipation and expectation, relevance, achievement and success and satisfaction' (Woods & Jeffrey, 1996b p74). These categories informed the observation schedule. Further to this, staffroom interactions, conversations and meetings, playground experiences, creative events, assemblies and educational visits were also observed using the same characteristics. This diversity of experience enabled me to obtain rich data during each case study. In Appendix 1 an indicative week in one school highlights the range of observations undertaken.

Other data was collected through semi structured interviews, conversations with staff, students, governors and parents, documentary analysis, photographic

evidence and observation notes. In semi structured interviews staff considered the impact of the Primary Strategy over time as well as during the research period. An interview schedule is included in Appendix 3.

Altogether I obtained 30 semi-structured interviews with heads, deputies, teachers, TAs and an office manager. A full list of interviewees is included in Appendix 2. As I progressed through the four case studies I undertook less formal interviews with TAs and other support staff, instead having conversations about salient points identified from the earlier structured interviews. Further conversations with other teachers, TAs, parents, children and governors were recorded in field notes.

3.22 Data analysis

Textual analysis

This part of the research was initially developed within the context of the tradition of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2000). In challenging assumptions inherent in much government policy discourse related to primary schools (Ball, 1994 p21-24) this is a process described as ‘denaturalisation’ which ‘involves showing how social structures determine properties of discourse and how in turn discourse determines social structures’ (Fairclough, 1995 p27). Drawing on this the intention was to examine the discourse of policy texts and statements by politicians and policy makers, beyond a simplistic ‘common sense’ interpretation (Fairclough 1995) of ‘what works’ (Alexander, 2004) towards a more critical approach, with evidence suggesting that more hidden ‘ideological underpinnings’ (Fairclough, 1995, 2000) continue to influence government policy discourse and remain dominant throughout the primary school system.

I used a Word based version of *Excellence and Enjoyment* (available on-line from the DfES) to develop the critical text analysis using NVivo qualitative data analysis software. NVivo coding (e.g. simply classifying the content into excellence and enjoyment and analyzing the language used in each classification) enabled me to critically analyze the document relatively quickly in a variety of ways (see Appendices 5 & 6 for word counts and vocabulary analysis). The program helped maintain flexibility in the on-going analysis. Using this approach I identified and developed more subtle and nuance themes, such as control, which provided a deeper insight into the policy process, drawing more meaningful and less obvious conclusions about the content than a straightforward reading would suggest (see Chapter 5). This followed on from a similar analysis during the pilot study (Curtis 2005). NVivo was a useful tool for managing a document of just over 21000 words. However this approach did not accommodate such issues as the full colour glossiness of images and layout designed to appeal to teachers (Alexander 2004), the juxtaposition of the various elements of the document with other policies, omissions, the selective use of data and references, the way in which it had become accessible to teachers and how it was used by various actors. For my analysis a more 'critical, informed and independent response to policy' (Ozga, 2000 p107) was needed in order to historically situate the Primary Strategy within wider discourses related to the development of primary education found in Chapter 4.

To bring together the two parts of the research, within each case study the initial framework for interview, field notes, documentary and data analysis also

used NVivo based on elements identified in *Excellence and Enjoyment* (see Appendix 4). Data was coded and thematised and the resulting information brought together to allow comparison of how these particular schools were responding to policy initiatives. The areas coded included standards, staffing, budget, context, children and curriculum. However school context was not identified as significant in the analysis of *Excellence and Enjoyment* but was clearly of importance to the case studies, hence its inclusion in the analysis. Other identified elements which were added as the analysis developed included the language of conformity, reflectiveness, tipping points, justifications and positives and negatives, all more relevant areas for critical policy research than those simply ensuring ‘smooth policy delivery’ (Ozga, 2000 p 112).

NVivo Limitations

As already mentioned NVivo was a useful tool for sorting and classifying the large amount of data and was also helpful in identifying passages with particular themes. However to gain a more nuanced understanding of the data it was necessary to return to the original interviews to listen to emphasis and intonation. Part of the research process had been for me to transcribe, as well as conduct, all the interviews. This helped in gaining familiarity with the data in a way which was not achievable through NVivo alone. On several occasions NVivo provided me with a general direction but a number of subtle inferences would have been missed and the wider context of statements could have been overlooked by relying too much on it. I did not have the technology to consider full electronic copies of several transcriptions alongside each other. Paper copies and highlighter pens achieved this. They also showed my thought

processes and the trail of alterations as I interrogated the data and developed my analysis, something NVivo on its own was unable to do.

Using this broader approach the case studies produced evidence through methodological triangulation (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000 p112) i.e. case evidence was combined with data from the literature review and policy analysis to provide reliable interpretations. This enabled worthwhile and convincing arguments to be built (Coleman & Briggs, 2002 p109). There was also internal triangulation in and between the schools using the various data collected.

3.23 The two research stages

This research has involved two distinct stages.

A) Policy texts and discourses

Initially it focussed on policy texts and discourses associated with the introduction of the Primary Strategy and the overall development of primary schooling since the Victorian era. By considering earlier texts and discourses it is possible to bring understanding to the overall structure and intentions of current policy moves.

B) Policy effects in schools (case studies)

The second stage of the research was to develop case studies of the four primary schools to consider policy effects in specific contexts. The complexity of the various policies and initiatives associated with the Primary Strategy meant that using a case study approach was invaluable in determining the interrelatedness and effectiveness of their impact.

Before situating the schools and considering the case study evidence, it is important to understand the circumstances which created the current system of primary schooling in England and that still have considerable influence on policy implementation today. In the next chapter I look critically at how the structure of primary education was introduced, and remains deeply entrenched in values of a by-gone era, by considering the development of the discourse of primary schooling from Victorian times to the present day. Although the Strategy claims to be transforming primary education, contained within this history there is evidence of deeply entrenched positioning and systemic difficulties which have yet to be addressed and which are still impacting on primary schools today.

Chapter 4 A critical history of primary education policy

... every reformist power is tempted to acquire political advantages, to transform itself into an ecclesiastical administration in order to support its project, to thus lose its primitive “purity” or change it into a mere decoration of the apparatus, and to transform its militants into officials or conquerors (de Certeau, 1984 p184).

In this chapter I consider the trajectory of policy texts and discourses which have influenced the development of primary education from its inception through to the 1988 Education Reform Act, and continue to be evident in both policy and practice today. This is a more detailed account of this earlier period than in Chapter 2 which set the context of developments during the last 20 years. The importance of what happened before 1988 is crucial for this research in bringing critical theory to the fore.

I consider how certain discourses of primary education developed in the Victorian era, and remained intact throughout the 20th Century, even though, in the post Second World War period of frugality and optimism, other, more creative discourses briefly flourished before being overwhelmed. This will help explain the origin of many of the underlying influences which, when translated into policy, have become so influential and problematic within the structure of the Primary Strategy.

Earlier discourses of primary education should not be ignored

Although contemporary politicians, policymakers and school effectiveness researchers tend not to look back (Alexander, 2004), many of the current issues and concerns directly affecting the Primary Strategy originate from the development of compulsory primary schooling in Victorian England. The

result of ignoring the influence of these earlier traditions, produces ‘an over simplified and distorted picture’ (Galton et al., 1980 p6). Charles Clarke, in the foreword to the *Five Year Strategy for children and learners* (DfES, 2004e), which affirmed many of the initiatives set out in *Excellence and Enjoyment* (DfES, 2003a), went as far back as the 1942 Beveridge Report considering social security and the 1944 Butler Education Act. It is of note that he then discussed the structure and failings of subsequent secondary education but neglected to mention anything about the structure of primary schools, except scathing comments about low aspiration and poor performance before the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. His only other mention of primary education was his wish that ‘every primary school offers high standards in the basics, but in the context of a broad, rich and enjoyable curriculum’, the same approach he promoted in *Excellence and Enjoyment* (DfES, 2003a) with the emphasis on ‘the basics’.

Before looking at the text and case study evidence, it is necessary to go back much further to understand the significance of such comments. Alexander describes much of the rhetoric of New Labour as concerned with ‘the rewriting of educational history’ (Alexander, 2004 p15). But evidence tracing the development of primary schooling in England suggests that government policy is perpetuating an earlier discourse of deeply entrenched influences, values, assumptions and beliefs. Primary schooling has long been portrayed as relatively straightforward, both to deliver and to understand, and is considered merely preparatory for secondary schooling. Alexander himself in an earlier work identifies such concerns (Alexander, 2000 p131).

4.1 Establishing key themes in primary school development

Theme 1 Control and conformity

The very first central government involvement, ‘a foot in the door of state provision’(Alexander, 2000 p135), came in 1833 with a grant of £20,000 to support voluntary agencies in their task of building ‘School Houses for the Education of the Children of the Poorer Classes in Great Britain’ (Simon 1974 p151-2 quoted in Alexander, 2000 p134). The alternative for many very young children of the poor was factory work. Many philanthropists, charitable and church organizations saw schooling as a way of breaking this very early cycle of deprivation, but wanted to maintain control of the schools which they established. This was, after all, the future manual workforce expected to conform to the work ethic in order to bring wealth to the country (Bauman, 1998 p15).

Government funding gradually increased. Eventually a system of payment by results was set up in 1862, when central government first took control of the curriculum, to justify grant allocations for schools established by voluntary organisations, predominantly churches (Richards, 1999 p55). It continued when the 1870 Elementary Education Act in England introduced compulsory schooling which was gradually extended up to age 10 in 1876, 11 in 1893 and 12 in 1899 (Alexander, 2000 p137). This was to provide ‘sound and cheap’ elementary schools for children aged 5 -13 which were limited and inferior (Blyth, 1965 p21 quoted in; Gillard, 2009 p143) The effects of the system are clearly summarised by former HMI Colin Richards;

There is no doubt that the ‘payment by results’ curriculum had a marked influence on practice. Its rigid reinforcement through the

system of annual examination of pupils (and indirectly their teachers) ensured compliance with its demands. The system was successful, in discouraging initiative and in developing habits of obedience, docility and passivity – in teachers as well as in pupils (Richards, 1999 p55-56).

All those attending were expected to submit to a regime of conformity and compliance. The system did little to address the needs of those who struggled to achieve, other than training them to perform basic tasks. Strict discipline and punitive measures often did little more than contain, or hide, those who did not succeed. Elsewhere kindness and coercion were also used in masking the inadequacies of the system.

Theme 2 Performance/Performativity

My grandfather fondly recounted the story of being trained by his headmaster, Mr Bint, in the 1880s, to be prepared for the arrival of the School Inspector. This involved putting his right hand up if he knew the answer to a question and putting his left hand up if he did not. The really important thing was to know the difference between the left and right hands. This served a vital purpose. At the time most funding for the school, and for the salary of Mr Bint, was decided according to the system of payment by results, a practice which continued until 1897. If the inspector believed that the children were performing well more funding would be allocated both to Mr Bint and to the school.

On the next page is a photograph of the school.



Photographs 1 Bucknall Primary School, Lincolnshire 1880s
Mr Bint is on the right. My grandfather is bottom left.

This photograph gives a visual insight into the era. The school was well staffed with two teachers and, behind the hedge, the school caretaker. The respectably dressed children appear very serious and attentive, with all eyes on the camera. That Mr Bint, who taught the older children, still had to resort to training this small group to perform, highlights the rigidity of the expectations being imposed upon him. The story told by my grandfather would seem appropriate for a large class in an urban school but the photograph shows how the pervasive influence of ‘payment by results’ was apparent even in this rural idyll.

The narrow and much criticised system of payment by results was abolished in 1897. Local Education Authorities were introduced, with the discretion to adapt the system to local requirements, and much broader curriculum guidelines were promoted through elementary education codes issued by the Board of Education (Richards, 1999). But by this time the idea and structure of the ‘real school’ was already established (Tyack & Cuban, 1995) and continued to be the foundation upon which other improvements were expected to

develop. Tyack and Cuban explain this in their study of school reform in the USA;

Reforms that were *structured add-ons* generally did not disturb the standard operating procedures of schools, and this non-interference enhanced their chances of lasting. As accretions to the central core of instruction, they did not demand fundamental change in the behaviour of teachers (Tyack & Cuban, 1995 p57).

Thus ‘productive thought, invention and adaptation’ (Ball, 1994 p19) could be used by teachers either to change practice or to adapt it and maintain the status quo, as described by Tyack and Cuban. It is clear that, even at this early stage in the development of primary education, maintaining the status quo dominated. In many schools the adaptive process perpetuated practice which conformed to the payment by results approach.

Two further themes accumulated within the system throughout the 20th Century one further underpinning the regime of panoptic performativity (Perryman, 2006) current in primary schools today, the other seemingly diametrically opposed to it..

Theme 3 Selection and sorting by ‘ability’

The performance of schools matched to funding masks a more insidious element of the system, carried over from the first decade of the 20th Century. Elementary schools were used to select and prepare a substantial number of pupils to gain entry to secondary school (Richards, 1999 p57). This system identified those children who were adept at performing basic tasks and showed the potential for further academic development. The reward for this was entry to a new and specialized world of grammar schools where knowledge was

implanted to feed the burgeoning bureaucracy and to continue the tradition of the colonial superiority of Queen and country. Such knowledge was specialized, intense and expensive. Many specialist teachers were needed to sustain this extravagant position (Alexander, 2000 p147).

The process of selection and preparation of the elite did not finish there. Grammar schools were used to select and prepare a minority of their pupils to go on to university. Even at this stage discrimination was apparent. The elite of the elite went on to the Oxbridge universities, still regarded even today as opening the door to endless career opportunities. Other pupils managed to gain places at less prestigious 'red brick' universities. The less academic or financially challenged were able to gain places at teacher training, police or armed forces colleges whilst many of the original elite went into menial roles in hospitals, local government, banks, building societies and industry, gradually using their talents to work their way up through the system. The weak fell by the wayside, becoming employed in factories or farms doing unskilled manual work.

The demand for ever higher academic standards came from the selection process for universities. Only by meeting this demand were pupils and schools able to claim success. This approach was used to model the funding differential between elementary/primary schools and secondary schools. Younger children only needed 'the basics' and would be selected for further education if their potential was apparent. Knowledge and superiority were the mantras to access the prestigious realms of higher academia. A tradition of meritocracy was established.

Theme 4 Progressive challenges

However the work of influential thinkers such as Rousseau, Dewey and Froebel, challenged the authoritative structure inherited through ‘payment by results’, (Alexander, 2000; Dewey, 1933; Galton et al., 1980; Rousseau. J, 1993). Also prominent at this time was the pioneering work of innovators such as Montessori, Macmillan and Isaacs (Galton et al., 1980 p13). Of particular note was the publication in 1911, by former elementary school inspector Edmond Holmes, of *What Is and What Might be* (1911), described as ‘the first striking manifesto of the progressives’ (Galton et al., 1980 p13) it was a scathing condemnation of the system of ‘mechanical obedience’ of which he had been part (Shute, 1998) . The work of Robert Owen in developing the infant school a century earlier also remained highly influential at this time (Jones,D. in Lowe, 1987). The culmination of this on-going debate led eventually to the government commissioned Hadow Report into primary education published in 1931.¹¹

I now consider how these identified key themes continued developing through critical text analysis of the Hadow Report, before considering further discourses associated with the 1944 Education Act, the more recent ‘progressive’ Plowden Report (DES, 1967) and subsequent discourses impacting directly on the case study schools today.

4.2 The Hadow Report 1931: a report with built in tensions

Tensions between ‘activity and experience’ and ability grouping

¹¹ One of six reports produced by Hadow between 1923 & 33. As well as the primary school report of particular note are *The Education of the Adolescent* (1926) and *Infants and Nursery schools* (1933) (Gillard, 2006)

The Hadow Report of 1931 focussed on junior, or what are now called Key Stage 2, children. In considering the primary school it is reminiscent of the *Every Child Matters* agenda (DfES, 2004d) but appears more measured;

Its primary aim must be to aid children, while they are children, to be healthy and, so far as is possible, happy children, vigorous in body and lively in mind, in order that later, as with widening experience they grow toward maturity, the knowledge which life demands may more easily be mastered and the necessary accomplishments more readily acquired (Hadow, 1931 p xv).

The way in which Hadow appears concerned with growth and development in the primary years is very much in line with what Dewey describes as the business of education which ‘might be defined as an emancipation and enlargement of experience’ (Dewey, 1933 p202) rather than the more scientific knowledge associated with performativity.

The introduction to the report also appears to encourage schools to move well away from the rigidity of structure inherited from Victorian times;

The essential point is that any curriculum, if it is not to be purely arbitrary and artificial, must make use of certain elements of experience, because they are part of the common life of mankind. The aim of the school is to introduce its pupils to such experiences in an orderly and intelligent manner, so as to develop their innate powers and to awaken them to the basic interests of civilised existence (1931 p xv).

This is a powerful discourse. Rather than promulgating elementary schooling a more reflective approach is taken. In talking of introducing learning

experiences to children in an orderly and intelligent manner it is clear that there are high expectations of primary school teachers which go way beyond 'the basics'. Hadow clearly wanted something better than the rigidity of subject based impositions of an earlier age (Holmes, 1911) and believed that with this approach

.....the curriculum of a school acquires a higher degree of unity than is possible so long as it is regarded as a series of separate, if related, subjects (1931 p xv).

It seemed to be moving towards ideas promoted by Dewey for the development of experiential education (Dewey, 1933 p202) and away from the basics of the elementary school. It could also be seen as preparing the foundations for the 'socially critical school' as proposed by Morrison many years later (1989).

Progressivism versus performativity

However within the report there were other influences which do not fit in so well to this agenda, and led to the report being described as Janus-faced by Alexander (2000 p137). Of particular concern was the impact of eminent psychologist Cyril Burt who wrote Appendix 3 - *Memorandum on the mental characteristics of children between the ages of seven and eleven*. This influenced the report to recommend a structure to ease selection for secondary education at the age of 11. The document acknowledges this;

In general we agree with our psychological witnesses in thinking that in very large primary schools there might, wherever possible, be a triple track system of organisation, viz. a series of 'A' classes or groups for the bright children, and a series of smaller 'C' classes or groups to include retarded children, both series being parallel to the ordinary series of 'B'

classes or groups for the average children (Hadow, 1931 Chapter 5 para 56).

Clearly the theme of selection and sorting, established earlier in the 20th Century, was further entrenched by this section of the report, despite other sections appearing to contradict this approach in espousing more progressive ideals, as mentioned earlier.

The repercussions of this ‘scientific’ approach of measurement, categorisation, and management, particularly in assessing potential for secondary schooling, have had a significant long term impact on both policy and practice, described as performativity by Lyotard (1984 p47). Such simplistic classification is still evident in the Primary Strategy, although couched in more conciliatory terms. It is not surprising then that the change agenda never really got going. Although challenging the curriculum practice of many junior schools, at the same time it recommended a very rigid, restrictive structure. Once more there were expectations of control and conformity. The discourse of the ‘real school’ was being perpetuated (Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

As can be seen from this analysis the key themes identified earlier were being continued. The discourse of the so called ‘progressive ideal’ was clearly acknowledged and given prominence within the report. However the contradictory elements found later in it were highly influential in limiting enthusiasm for the suggested changes and improvements to the learning experience for children.

4.3 The unexpected legacy of Hadow

The lack of enthusiasm for implementing change meant that the earlier part of the report was generally ignored, as is clear from a speech by Christian Schiller

(HMI from 1925 to 1955) to the University of Birmingham Institute of Education in 1955:

This remarkable report was published in 1931. It was ... a complete flop. Its impact on the schools at that time was negligible; few people read it, and fewer still realised its significance. It came when we were not ready for such guidance; and only now, after more than twenty years, is its influence beginning to be seen in action in the classroom (Griffin-Beale, 1979 p61).

Schiller appears selective in his description of Hadow. Only those elements of the report which were concerned with developing a creative primary curriculum seemed significant to him. Equally significant were the conclusions and recommendations for the performative structure of primary schooling;

It seems certain, however, that some qualifying examination or test will always be required for the purpose of classifying pupils (Hadow, 1931 Ch 10 para 103).

As *Excellence and Enjoyment* stated over 70 years later 'testing, targets and tables are here to stay' (DfES, 2003a p20). Little has changed, except that the purpose of testing now is to make schools accountable, despite government claims that it is to inform parents about individual pupils. What Hadow did was to firmly entrench the principle of performativity in the minds of those able to succeed in the meritocracy that classifying pupils had created.

I will now consider how the contradictory elements of Hadow influenced the development of primary schooling in England after the Second World War.

4.4 1944 and beyond - an era of secondary school selection

With the introduction of secondary education for all in the 1944 Education Act, an eleven plus examination, in the final year of primary school, was to be used to select children for three types of secondary school: grammar (an academic 10 -20%), technical (a similar percentage for the development of scientists and engineers) and, for the rest, more practical experiences in secondary modern schools. They were all to have equal status and would provide a more expensive service than the primary schools which were to classify the children for them, using the intelligence tests promoted by Hadow (p123). However few technical schools were built because of financial constraints and so a bipartite system was established by default. This had significant consequences.

Primary schools were funded and structured to provide little more than an elementary education (Alexander, 2000 p147). Their main task was to identify a limited number of children for academic success, perpetuating the pre-war elitism that politicians had hoped the 1944 Act would address (Jones, 2003 p15). Meritocracy was still the order of the day. Primary schools did not have the resources to provide support in specific areas, or in the range of subjects made available for older children. Their job was to sort children, in preparation for the appropriate secondary school which would have more resources and staffing and where 'real teaching' could begin. An elitist, high cost tradition of secondary schooling became established which, despite claims to the contrary, is still in place today. It can be found in the 164 remaining grammar schools in England and, more subtly, in grouping by ability found in the majority of other secondary schools, as well as in primary /secondary funding differentials.

4.5 The 1950s: an era of optimism, growth, and some change

In the 50s there was post-war optimism for many that all was going well in education. This was exemplified by recently retired HMI, Christian Schiller in 1955, again in his speech to the University of Birmingham Institute of Education;

There was a time when most people were content to consider the purpose of early school as ‘laying the foundations’, ‘teaching the tools’, or ‘providing the basic requirements’. The number of such people is getting less and less every day. The question therefore arises, ‘By what new purpose can this old and simple purpose be replaced ?’ (Griffin-Beale, 1979 p63).

The over optimistic change assumptions and smooth oratory of Schiller (Cunningham, 1988 p212) belie the expectations of a deeply embedded system. Failure to address this rhetorical question would soon become the Achilles heel of progressivism (Alexander, 1992, 2000; Cunningham, 1988; Jones, 2003; Morrison, 1989). However in this period optimism remained. School funding was increased considerably in the belief that better education would support economic growth and as Jones describes:

... despite the scepticism of some on the right, education became from the mid-1950s onwards a policy of relative consensus, where those concerned with economic growth and those committed to increasing levels of educational opportunity could find themselves in agreement (Jones, 2003 p39).

It seemed that the move away from elementary schools providing a basic education for the working classes was well under way. In primary schools class

sizes were reduced, funding for resources was increased and many new buildings were commissioned. A number of LEAs encouraged schools to innovate. Although structure and much practice did not change there was an overriding confidence, at this time, in the way the system was developing.

By the early 60s the orthodoxy of secondary selection was being challenged through the introduction of comprehensive schools in many Local Authorities. This was given further momentum in 1964 by the newly elected Labour government requesting all local authorities to submit plans for the reorganisation of secondary schooling along comprehensive lines (Tomlinson, 2000). It was at this time that a report was commissioned by the government to ‘consider primary education in all its aspects, and the transition to secondary school’ (DES, 1967 p1). The Plowden Report was published in early 1967. Within months I was introduced to it by my father with the comment that I would be amazed by the changes in primary schools in the six years since I had been there. I did not appreciate the impact this would have on me at the time.

4.6 The Plowden Report: a progressive high point

The main focus of the Plowden Report lay in attempting to promote the positive experiences identified in many schools across the country. Building on elements of the earlier Hadow Report it challenged the orthodoxy of more traditional schooling, starting with the often quoted statement that ‘at the heart of the education process lies the child’ (Ch2 para 9). Analysing comments in the report about the role of the school, Alexander sums up many elements of ‘Plowdenism’;

... child centredness, school as a micro-community, individualization, learning by discovery and experience, the preference for a seamless

integrated curriculum over traditional subjects, creativity, the learning potential of play; but also the dogmatic tone – ‘this is how things are and how they should be’ (Alexander, 2000 p140) .

The report was written at a time of apparent consensus and optimism, with the authors believing that the momentum for such change was quickening (para 505). Resistance to change, and for some a lack of ability to change, would later become more problematic.

However the report considered much more than just the ‘progressive methods’ listed by Alexander and subsequently condemned by right wing traditionalists. It was a large document of over 500 pages which emphasised ‘a growing awareness ...of the importance to the individual of his family and social background’ (para 3) and combined this with a description of what was described as ‘best practice’ in primary schools (para 6). The social aspects of the report came out in favour of positive discrimination for children from deprived areas (Tomlinson, 2000). This influence is still present today. It is worth listing the headings of the various parts of the report;

- The Growth of the Child
- The Home, School and Neighbourhood
- The Structure of Primary Education
- The Children in the Schools: Curriculum and Internal Organisation
- The Adults in Schools
- Independent Schools
- Primary School Buildings and Equipment; Status; and Research
- Conclusions and Recommendations

Here was further evidence of the momentum of the move away from elementary schooling. The wide ranging remit found in these headings addressed many issues far removed from the classroom experiences, yet directly related to them.

Selection challenged?

One purpose of the report had been to consider transition between primary and secondary education and one recommendation was to delay the age of transfer to 12. There were assumptions about how far the comprehensive school system would develop. It optimistically stated;

418. Selection at 11 is coming to an end, a trend we welcome in view of the difficulty of making right decisions and the effect of selection on the curriculum in primary schools.

However, there was an earlier concern that ‘it is not yet clear how soon and how completely authorities will abandon selection’ (para 409)¹². The report also noted the ‘fundamentally egalitarian’ aims associated with the introduction of selection to ‘open the doors of grammar schools to children of high ability irrespective of their social background’ (para 410). However it was highly critical of the results;

410. ... For the last 20 year however the 11 plus has shut off from grammar schools many who wanted to go there and whose subsequent careers have shown that they would have profited from the opportunity.

The report also stated that the selection process led to a narrowing of the primary school curriculum alongside ‘an excessive emphasis on the acquisition

¹² In 2009 there were still 164 grammar schools remaining in England and 69 in Northern Ireland <http://www.ngsa.org.uk/>

of measureable skills' (para 412). It also noted, from an HMI survey, that in areas where comprehensive schools had been introduced

412 ...Not surprisingly some teachers continue their established routines when the reason for them has disappeared. The books of English exercises and of mechanical computation remain in many schools.

Here is clear evidence of the conformity of teachers resistant or reluctant to change in the 1960s, retaining routines which had supported the selection process. These less obvious influences of selection remained problematic and could be linked to what Tyack and Cuban described as the perception of a 'real school' (1995).

It is important to note that the report did come out very strongly in favour of better links between the primary and secondary phases with the use of diagnostic assessments and internal and standardised testing to better inform the process. There was however a warning

422 ...Although tests are useful, there is some danger of spending too much time on testing, at the expense of teaching.

The argument about the purposes of testing was to surface again in the early 1990s (see later in this chapter). Subsequently concerns about the amount of time involved in SATs testing have been raised nationally and identified in the case study schools more than 40 years after the Plowden Report.

The authors of the report were concerned that children from disadvantaged backgrounds were not likely to do well in formal selection procedures, stating that no test is 'culture free' and that there was 'a risk that their potential may be under estimated because their actual achievement is not seen in relation to their

starting point' (para 419). This concern led to recommendations for addressing identified inequalities experienced by such children within the primary school system.

Attempting to address cumulative generational deprivation

A whole chapter of the Plowden Report was devoted to the establishment of what it called Education Priority Areas (EPAs). The intention was to increase resources for primary schools caught in a 'vicious circle' of deprivation (para 132) through an unequal distribution of resources in favour of such schools. An analogy was drawn between the nutritional provision of free milk and meals before World War 1, enabling the right physical conditions for learning, and extra staffing and resources providing 'enriched intellectual nourishment' (para 152). The way in which such resources were to be focussed was seen as controversial because of limited funding (para 153). Difficult decisions would have to be taken. However the EPA idea was accepted by all political parties and 500+ schools were designated as EPAs (Smith, Smith, & Smith, 2007). Unfortunately the Plowden report was produced at a time of economic growth and prosperity. By the time the policy was being implemented, in the early 70s, the country was heading towards recession. The Plowden aims for a major programme for addressing inequalities across the country were never met (Smith et al., 2007 p142). An inequitable system remained. However, the principle of such support had been established.

A forgotten legacy and investment not sustained

Many of the issues raised and recommendations for improvement in the report have, over time, become integrated into mainstream thinking about primary education e.g. providing extra support for schools in areas of social

disadvantage, developing nursery education, actively involving parents and communities, creating smaller classes, bringing in extra adult support to classes, promoting individualised learning, better school building. This legacy of Plowden is often overlooked. Both Conservative and New Labour governments have attempted to channel funding into areas of social deprivation in order to address the identified problems, but there is little acknowledgement of the influence of this element of the report in official documents.

Plowden recommendations of much greater funding for all aspects of primary schools and altering the structure, with secondary transition at a later age, initially made a considerable impact, but were not always a priority or sustained. A number of LEAs introduced middle schools (for 8-12 or 9-13 yr olds), but this was possibly due to expediency, with the raising of the school leaving age to 16 in 1972 putting pressure on secondary school accommodation.

From 1965 teacher-pupil ratios were much smaller in the new comprehensive schools, encouraged by the Labour government (Jones, 2003 p70 quoting; Simon, 1991 p581). This highly political initiative further increased funding differentials between primary and secondary phases. Today historical funding is still used by local authorities and central government to maintain discrepancies in funding between primary and secondary schools (Sibieta, Chowdry, & Muriel, 2008 p30) with per pupil funding allocations for each Key Stage favouring secondary schools. Increases in local authority DSG (Direct School Grant) which makes up the majority of funding for schools are limited by central government to a percentage of the previous year's allocation.

Inherent difficulties

In identifying good 'child centred' practice the Plowden Report highlighted a number of very successful progressive schools, chosen by Local Education Authorities, whose approach challenged the structured orthodoxy of primary schools across the country. However in many schools 'the hold of the standard grammar of schooling was tenacious' (Tyack & Cuban, 1995 p96). Children were subjected to traditional lessons, were rigidly controlled and expected to conform. Routine testing supported performativity and, in these circumstances, reflected earlier selection procedures. The themes identified earlier in the chapter remained clearly evident

There were also curriculum concerns. Schiller's unease was noted in a speech, reported in the TES, soon after publication:

... he found it was not cohesive, much of it seemed the work of sociologists rather than those concerned with the teaching of children, and perhaps its greatest mistake lay in dealing with 'subjects' (TES 28.04.67 in Cunningham, 1988 p159).

The use of 'subjects' within the context of the experiential learning that Plowden was promoting was certainly unfortunate. This gave a traditional structure to the description of the curriculum ensuring elements of conformity were maintained. Using subjects to discuss areas of learning laid the foundation for the subject-based National Curriculum in primary schools 20 years later. This seems to contradict the stated intentions found elsewhere in the report of developing a more flexible curriculum which echoed elements of the much earlier Hadow Report into primary education;

Any practice which predetermines the pattern (of the curriculum) and imposes it upon all is to be condemned (para 538).

....we stress that children's learning does not fit into subject categories (para 555).

(DES, 1967)

The size and scope of the document meant that such varying interpretations of curriculum expectations left it open to further criticism (Cunningham, 1988 p15).

I will now consider how, from a relatively stable base of consensus in the 60s, the balance between progressive and performative influences began to change, even though secondary school selection was declining and the value of primary schooling at last seemed to have been recognised.

4.7 The post Plowden era – a lost opportunity for progressive ideas

The Plowden Report has frequently been misquoted by those wishing to discredit progressive education (Maguire et al., 2006 p74) in a manner which suggests that poor practice was endemic within the system. A more considered account of primary schooling at the time is given by Tomlinson;

For many teachers and parents, the 1960s were a time of some innovation, with modest but positive changes in the primary school curriculumand changes in secondary school organisation which pointed the way towards a more equitable education for all (Tomlinson, 2000 p18).

Nevertheless the years post Plowden have been identified as a 'golden era' (Richards, 1999 p11) when central government appeared to acknowledge the

importance of primary education. Funding and resources seemed to be more readily available than at any time since the establishment of primary schools. Richards even identifies the good intentions of the Conservative Secretary of State, Margaret Thatcher, in the 1972 White Paper *Framework for Expansion* where she;

...*'promised* 'to bring about a shift of resources within the education budget in favour of primary schools' *at the expense of secondary and higher education*' (DES 1972 in Richards, 1999 p11).

However time was not on the side of primary schools. An election in February 1974 resulted in a hung parliament. Another election in October the same year saw Labour take power with a majority of only 3 seats, in the midst of an economic crisis (Jones, 2003 p72). In such a climate the good intentions of the 1972 White Paper were not at the top of the agenda. It seemed that the argument for better funding had not been won, as the country moved into economic recession.

The battle for hearts and minds

This period saw many attempts to spread and develop the messages about teaching and learning found within the Plowden Report. However there were intrinsic problems in attempting to bring about substantive change to primary schooling. Tyack and Cuban identify such difficulties for those promoting innovation very clearly in their work on school reform in the USA when they state that:

Concentrating on convincing their professional peers, they did not cultivate the kind of broader social movement that might nourish educational and social change. Failure to enlist the support and ideas of

the community was especially harmful to fundamental reforms that violated the public's notions of a 'real school' (Tyack & Cuban, 1995 p108).

The enormity of a further problem facing the supporters of Plowden is described very clearly by Jones:

England was the home of a right wing intelligentsia fiercely attached to a national heritage, to elite education and to the myths of excellence and leadership that clustered around it (Jones, 2003 p102).

Such right wing traditionalists were often to be found in positions of power in Whitehall and in the media. Jones identifies a confidential 'Yellow Book' produced by civil servants in the DES (Department of Education and Science) in 1976 which 'brought to the surface the DES's longstanding unhappiness with the direction of state education, and with the positions of the main social actors who were driving change' (p95). An insidious attack was contained within the document, and highlighted by Jones, whereby it was claimed that a creative approach could produce admirable results 'in the right hands' but that for 'less able and experienced teachers it represented a trap'. This left the door wide open for the DES to justify more control of schools by central government or, as the phrase noted by Jones from the document states: 'The time was therefore almost certainly ripe for a corrective shift of emphasis' (p95). The use of the word 'corrective' suggests that the DES needed conformity and compliance to control teachers.

The implication that, for less competent or inexperienced teachers, a more formal structure was easier to 'deliver' was significant. Delivery would become quantifiable. Performance could be measured. However for these

teachers, whatever approach was being used, there would be difficulties if support and understanding was lacking. An imposed structure based on elementary school principles could mask such deficiencies by concentrating on very narrow basic targets. This problem does not seem to have been considered by those wishing to influence policy.

4.8 The Great Debate

The 'Yellow Book' was leaked to the press just before the Great Education Debate was implemented in October 1976 (Chitty, 1989 p81). This debate was initiated by Prime Minister James Callaghan in his speech at Ruskin College Oxford, at a time when the economy of the country was challenged and resources for schools were rapidly disappearing. The media fuelled the debate by highlighting such incidents as the debacle of the William Tyndale School in London that seemed to take progressivism to new extremes (Alexander, 2000 p141). Research by Bennett published in, *Teaching Styles and Pupil Progress* (Bennett, 1976) further appeared to support traditional styles of teaching (Richards, 1999 p17).

Although wide ranging, there were certain elements of the Callaghan speech which were to have a profound impact on the direction of ensuing developments. These were reiterated towards the end of the speech;

Let me repeat some of the fields that need study because they cause concern. There are the methods and aims of informal instruction, the strong case for the so-called 'core curriculum' of basic knowledge; next, what is the proper way of monitoring the use of resources in order to maintain a proper national standard of performance; then there is

the role of the inspectorate in relation to national standards; and there is the need to improve relations between industry and education (Callaghan, 1976).

Interestingly, in this summary of areas of concern, Callaghan omitted the one earlier line in his speech which considered the impact of deprivation on educational opportunity “... *It means mitigating as far as possible the disadvantages that may be suffered through poor home conditions or physical or mental handicap*” (Callaghan, 1976). The Plowden Report had raised the problems of social disadvantage. It was ‘the first attempt by an official committee to come to terms with the problems set for schools by poverty and deprivation’ (Glennerster, 1995 p136 quoted in; Jones, 2003 p83). Callaghan, with this one omission, virtually removed social deprivation from the agenda, leaving the door open for a very polarised debate to develop between so called ‘progressive’ and ‘traditional’ educational protagonists over the next twenty years.

A number of authors identify the Ruskin College speech as the starting point for the move towards the current centralised control of schools. Others go back further to the publication of Plowden and its attempts to unsettle the status quo. The uncertain economic climate and industrial unrest are also identified as causes for concern. There is no doubt that these are all contributory factors in what was to become known as the ‘blame culture’ and the ‘discourse of derision’ (Ball, 1994) developing at the time. There is one further lever which had a significant influence on policy makers, in those days usually civil servants, and their masters, politicians, in achieving ‘a corrective shift of emphasis’. In 1974 the Houghton Report had given primary school teachers

the largest pay rise they have ever experienced. This one act unsettled the equilibrium of relatively poorly paid teachers being given the freedom to develop their own ideas. Instead more highly paid professionals were expected to deliver 'value for money'.

By the time of the Great Debate the attention of politicians and the media had been further focussed by a series of Black Papers; right wing publications challenging the progressive methods espoused by Plowden and portraying a lowering of achievement associated with comprehensive schooling (Simon, 1991).

All the themes identified earlier in this chapter were prominent in the Black Papers. There were claims that across the country progressive schools were out of control. They didn't conform or measure the performance of their children. On top of this a lack of secondary selection disadvantaged those that would have previously gone to grammar schools. This challenging rhetoric began to inhibit those teachers and schools less confident in developing progressive ideas and ensured that in many schools traditional values associated with an earlier era remained in place. The system didn't change.

Rather than being based on sound research, the Black Papers were more 'a series of interventions in popular debate' identifying with an earlier era of standards and privileges (Jones, 1983 p77). By highlighting what they regarded as unsuccessful experiments their 'value for money' agenda was very difficult for politicians to address. Much of the rhetoric appealed to middle class parents eager for their children to succeed. Press and television were also keen to portray policy difficulties (Cunningham, 1988 p216). Education had become not only polarised but highly political. These concerns were used to justify the

move towards centralised control, to ensure that teachers delivered more¹³ in what was to become a newly created quasi-market (Whitty, 1997). This was at a time when many other areas of civil service influence were diminishing, as nationalised industries declined and the international influence of the UK was dwindling.

4.9 The battle for control of the system

Since the ‘Great Debate’ the education of primary school children has come under ever increasing public scrutiny. The focus has been on classroom practice, curriculum and pedagogy. This meant that the structure itself was not challenged in the way considered by Plowden or the White Paper of 1972. Those in power were distracted, by the developing economic crisis, their civil servants at the DES through The Yellow Book (Chitty, 1989 p81) and media concerns, from considering funding a more radical approach to the structure of primary school provision.

The influence and aims of the DES at this time are once more clearly articulated by Jones:

The DES aimed at not just reshaping practice through judicious advice, but at bringing to a halt what seemed to be the spontaneous and deep-seated tendencies of the school system towards localized, piecemeal, unsupervised, professionally led and progressive-influenced reform – in primary schools and throughout the state system (Jones, 2003 p95).

¹³ There are interesting parallels with the recent large pay awards to GPs (General Practitioner doctors) where there are now increasing expectations for them to deliver more.

However two years later the HMI Primary survey of 1978 provided clear evidence that the Plowden revolution never happened. The findings are summarised by Richards:

... most proposals for curriculum change made in the 1960s and 1970s have been based on assumptions about teaching, learning, knowledge and children which do not appear to inform the practice of the majority of teachers. The current curriculum is revealed as scarcely more than a revamped elementary school curriculum with the same major utilitarian emphases (Richards, 1999).

It seems that the DES was more than happy to perpetuate perceived inadequacies of the system to gain control, rather than promoting those areas that were achieving success. Research on teaching styles and achievement, which appeared to promote a more structured approach, had helped fuel the debate (Bennett, 1976).

Why the revolution never happened

At the same time there was evidence that much of the enthusiasm for Plowden style innovation was misguided, with reforms being imposed rather than being developed collaboratively, leaving the proponents open to severe criticism (Alexander, 1992). Such impatience on the part of the innovators highlights a further reason for innovation not happening:

A second common problem was burnout among educational reformers. Changing basic organisational patterns created overload for teachers, for it did not simply add new tasks to familiar routines but required teachers to replace old behavior with new and to persuade pupils,

colleagues and parents and school boards to accept the new patterns as normal and desirable (Tyack & Cuban, 1995 p108).

Many of the curriculum changes promoted by Plowden never really became widely established (Galton et al., 1999 p9; Simon, 1981). The report itself identified only 10% of schools that were either 'outstanding or of good quality with some outstanding features.' Another 23% were 'good in most respects without any special distinction' (DES, 1967 para 270). There were just not enough schools to maintain the momentum of change once the withering attacks of the right questioned whether these were 'real schools' (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Instead of developing a consensus of opinion which place 'the child at the heart of the system', progressive educators were fighting a rear guard action against the 'grammar' of control and conformity, selection and performativity.

It is not surprising that Alexander, one of the authors of the 'Three Wise Men' paper into primary school organisation and practice (Alexander et al., 1992), highlighted that by 1978 the HMI primary survey reported that 'only 5% of classrooms exhibited wholeheartedly exploratory characteristics' (quoted in Alexander, 2000 p141). The 'golden age' had lasted less than ten years. The innovators were burnt out. The battle for central control of the system and for the removal of the influence of LEAs (Lowe, 1987 p14) was under way. 'Real schools' were back at the top of the agenda (Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

Theme 5. The struggle for money

A further theme that can be identified, which has impacted on all the others, is the ongoing struggle for money in primary schools. Concerns about insufficient

funding recur throughout the development of primary education in the 20th Century. Funding fluctuations, linked to the economic state of the country, have provided occasional opportunities for improving both the system and structure (as almost happened in the early 1970s), but, as Alexander suggests, the perception that primary schools are still seen as little more than ‘elementary’ has not positioned them well in more stringent times (Alexander, 2000 p147). At such times the ‘value for money’ performance of schools seems to be easily transposed into the process of performativity. This is explored further in Chapter 9.

The arrival of New Labour in 1997 brought considerable extra funding across the education system. In primary schools one particular financial focus was on improving standards in literacy and numeracy. However by 2002 school performance was not matching government expectations. To policy makers and politicians the Primary Strategy appeared to offer a solution.

The next chapter considers the positioning of those responsible for introducing the Primary Strategy through a critical analysis of *Excellence and Enjoyment*, and subsequent initiatives. This evidence suggests that, despite claims to the contrary, policy makers and politicians remain focussed on performative data as the main driver to bring about wider societal change with inherent consequences for schools and curriculum development.

Chapter 5 Understanding Excellence and Enjoyment

... every reformist power is tempted to acquire political advantages, to transform itself into an ecclesiastical administration in order to support its project, to thus lose its primitive “purity” or change it into a mere decoration of the apparatus, and to transform its militants into officials or conquerors (de Certeau, 1984 p184).

Having considered the political climate in the late 20th Century, which eventually led to the Primary Strategy being ‘manufactured’ (Geertz, 1973), in this chapter, I set the context, analyze the content and describe the characteristics of *Excellence and Enjoyment* (DfES 2003a), before positioning the policy makers who developed it. Critically considering the Strategy and on-going policy developments, helps frame the subsequent case study chapters. I examine in detail policy influence and control likely to be impacting in various ways on the case study schools and investigate the intentions and motivations of the policy makers – both obvious and hidden (Scott 2000), before considering subsequent policy moves.

5.1 Government targets not achieved

Half way through their second electoral term New Labour politicians had still not achieved the educational transformation they predicted when taking office in 1997. Key Stage 2 targets for 2002, set by their first Secretary of State for Education, David Blunkett, with a promise of resignation made if they were not achieved, were missed. By this time Blunkett had moved on to become Home Secretary. It was left to his successor, Estelle Morris to resign in October 2002, having apparently made a similar pledge as an education minister in 1999, claiming that she did not feel up to the job, according to the press (Jones, 2002). However such disappointment was not going to distract New Labour

policy makers from their on-going change agenda directed towards primary education. This was an integral part of their Third Way approach. A complex and expansive political rhetoric was being brought to bear on schools at this time as part of the re-positioning of the country within the global economy;

...the ideas of transformation, modernisation, innovation, enterprise, dynamism, creativity and competitiveness are key signifiers in education and public sector reform (Ball, 2008a p14).

And so, with the first wave of changes having had less impact than expected, a second wave of ambitious reforms was brought in, with *Excellence and Enjoyment: a strategy for primary schools* (DfES, 2003a) introducing what was to eventually become the Primary National Strategy.

Before critically analysing *Excellence and Enjoyment* it is worth considering the structure of the document, to appreciate how detailed and far reaching it is.

5.2 Characteristics of the Strategy; commodification & control

Although initially the ‘big picture’ of the strategy is associated with standards and the curriculum, there is a much broader agenda of change related to it. This approach is what Giddens describes as ‘commodification’, in that such dynamic services can be sold to the electorate, to the teaching profession and to the rest of the global education market. Interestingly Giddens goes on to say that ‘...capitalistic enterprise increasingly seeks to shape consumption as well as monopolise the conditions of production’ (Giddens, 1991 p197). The political rhetoric of the change agenda can be identified within the glossy, full colour pages of *Excellence and Enjoyment* (Alexander, 2004 p28), but it is the centralised control, as promoted by Barber (2001), that appears to make the overall impact, mirroring the approach described by Giddens.

To attempt to get an overview of how these two elements, ‘commodification’ and control (as identified in the previous chapter), are combined I have summarized the stated key points of the seven main chapters of *Excellence and Enjoyment* (DfES, 2003a) as follows:

- **School character and innovation** – encouraging schools to develop individual character and be innovative in their approach to teaching and the curriculum in order to raise standards, whilst at the same time maintaining a ‘strong’ focus on tests, tables and targets.
- **Excellent primary teaching** – building on the success of the literacy and numeracy strategies and promoting outstanding teaching, to ensure a rich and exciting experience for children at primary school and also promoting creativity as a powerful way of engaging pupils with their learning.
- **Learning – a focus on individual children** – advocating formative assessment for learning to support the needs and abilities of individual children. At the same time promoting a model of intervention for children with special educational needs to reduce numbers achieving below Level 3 in SATs. Raising concerns about minority ethnic achievement. Creating a new category of child – the gifted and talented, and finally ensuring a smooth transition between stages of education.
- **Partnership beyond the classroom** – considering how parents and the community are involved in successful schools and developments towards creating extended schools. Also, considering ways of building

positive attitudes towards health and behaviour into the ethos of schools.

- **Leadership in primary schools and the power of collaboration** – how headteachers should be empowered to lead excellent learning and teaching across the curriculum. Promoting the development of ‘networks’ of like minded schools and good practice.
- **Workforce reform** – ‘a vital part of a continuously improving primary education system, freeing teachers to teach’ (p65) and emphasising how schools ‘being in a good position’, with promised government support, should make sure additional time and resources are available to be used creatively and effectively to benefit children.
- **Realising the vision** – how all involved - schools, LEAs, consultants and government – should work together to build on the opportunities available.

This was the multi-layered vision set out for primary education which, it was claimed, built on what had already been achieved (DfES, 2003c). However, there was as yet little indication whether this was a new strategy or merely a conglomeration of ideas and initiatives linked by the standards agenda.

5.3 Is *Excellence and Enjoyment* transforming primary education?

Content analysis: How much excellence? How much enjoyment?

Using Nvivo to investigate *Excellence and Enjoyment* produced some interesting results. My first analysis coded the document into excellence and enjoyment (Appendix 5). For excellence I focussed on such things as

standards, testing and achievement; very much terms of control and power. For enjoyment I considered themes such as freedom, excitement and enrichment where independence of thought might flourish. Excellence was coded in twice as many passages as enjoyment. This seemed to suggest a reasonable fit with the title of the document, but did not reflect how big the passages were for each categorisation. To appreciate the size of the passages I counted the characters in each one. This produced a much more significant result. The character count for excellence was seven times that of enjoyment. Excellence was clearly dominant. Further analysis of the content of the passages revealed a pattern that emerged on many occasions, with a brief line about enjoyment appearing in a long passage about excellence. This suggests that enjoyment may have been fitted in to these passages to ensure that the title of the document was not ignored. Although enjoyment is given equal status in the title of the document, in the text it usually appears as an add-on, as exemplified by the referral of the reader to a QCA creativity web-site (DfES, 2003a p31) in the chapter about excellent teaching which is dominated by an emphasis on standards.

Using text analysis to further consider the approach of the policy makers, I found that the most frequently used word was 'support'. The use of this word sends a strong message, subliminally. The government is there to 'support' teachers and to 'support' schools. 'Support' fits in clearly with the mantra developed by the Standards and Effectiveness Unit when New Labour came to power of 'High challenge, high support' (Barber, 2001 p19). Nvivo shows how such language is embedded within the Strategy.

I now consider further evidence suggesting that it is control and power that the government is supporting, rather than schools. By using a critical approach it

was possible to put together a clearer picture of the intentions and meanings of the policy makers which did not match the stated intentions contained within the rhetoric of *Excellence and Enjoyment* and subsequent policy initiatives.

Critical policy analysis

To begin with I position New Labour moves to further embed the literacy and numeracy strategies within the change agenda of the Primary Strategy, before considering further evidence from the critical analysis of *Excellence and Enjoyment* (DfES, 2003a) and the contribution of further policy initiatives being developed as part of the same change agenda. This suggests that, despite many conciliatory remarks by policy makers and politicians, schools are still being focussed on performative data, raising doubts about the overall impact and sustainability of other elements of the Strategy. Scott describes the impact of such critical policy analysis;

... reading educational texts in a critical way allows the reader to reposition themselves in relation to arguments, policy prescriptions and directives in ways which are not intended by the writers of these texts (Scott, 2000 p4).

Fairclough talks of how critical discourse analysis makes it possible;

.... to incorporate elements of 'context' into the analysis of texts, to show the relationship between concrete occasional events and more durable social practices, to show innovation and change in texts, and it has a mediating role in allowing one to connect detailed linguistic and semiotic features of texts with processes of social change on a broader scale (Fairclough, 2005).

Such an approach is important in analysing something as complex as the Primary Strategy, with its socio-political agenda for change, particularly as

within this research the case study schools are situated in the context of isolated pockets of deprivation. This approach helps to get below both the surface impressions of the document and the discourses of the different agendas associated with it.

High Challenge, High Support?

Critical theory helps to situate the Primary Strategy. Having considered earlier developments throughout the 20th Century, to further understand the nature of the Strategy it is worth looking at the words of Michael Barber in 2001, whilst still head of the DfES Standards and Effectiveness Unit. Although, by 2003, he had moved to the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit¹⁴, his influence on the structure of the Primary Strategy was considerable. In contributing a book chapter, as part of an examination of the first four years of New Labour government, Barber briefly summarised the principles of the 'high challenge, high support' approach which was found to be significantly impacting on the case study schools during the research period. Below is an extract;

All students can achieve

- Set high standards and expect every student to meet them.
- Recognise for some students, in some circumstances, reaching those high standards is more difficult: give them the extra assistance and the time they need.

Easton (2000) summarises this approach excellently: if standards of achievement are the constant, then all the other factors in the equation – time, place, teaching approach and resource- must become variables.

Don't compromise on quality: invest in it

¹⁴ 'The Prime Minister's Delivery Unit (PMDU) was established in 2001 with a remit to strengthen the Government's ability to deliver the Prime Minister's key public service priorities. The PMDU works closely in partnership with Number 10, other parts of the Cabinet Office, HM Treasury and other stakeholder Departments in order to assess delivery and provide advice and guidance on ways to achieve step-change improvements in performance' (DfES, 2005b).

- Expect schools and teachers to do an excellent job: hold them to account for their performance.
- Reward success, challenge failure.
- Recognise that if teachers are to perform excellently they need the encouragement, the rewards, the support, the materials, the buildings and, above all, the professional development that makes sustained excellence possible.
- Recognise that, for some schools and some pupils, the challenge of meeting high standards is more demanding and provide the necessary targeted support.

A government that demands quality must provide it too

- Constantly re-state the big picture and strategically manage reform so that the substantial demands of radical change are seen by headteachers and teachers as an investment in a better future rather than a series of unconnected initiatives which are here today and gone tomorrow
- Create a culture in which everyone takes responsibility for student outcomes, including the Secretary of State for Education and in which problems, however intractable, are out in the open being tackled rather than being swept under the carpet.
- Invest steadily and ensure that, to use the Blair soundbite, all money is for modernisation

(Barber, 2001 p21-22).

Set between the first and second sections of this summary Barber eulogises about comments taken from a relatively obscure article by Easton in the American newspaper *Education Week* (Easton, 2000). This gives a further insight into the ‘pseudo-scientific’ approach being developed by the Standards and Effectiveness Unit. In describing standards of achievement as a constant and other factors as variables such an approach could be seen as a ‘denotative language game’ where ‘one is a scientist if one can produce verifiable or falsifiable statements about referents accessible to the experts’ (Lyotard, 1984 p25). It is not clear what is meant by standards of achievement being the constant, but such a formulaic statement appears to have been hi-jacked to accommodate the government standards agenda. What Lyotard would describe

as a discourse of legitimization is evident here where ‘a statement must fulfil a given set of conditions in order to be accepted as scientific’ (Lyotard, 1984 p8). This raises further questions about knowledge and power which could be applied to the Barber extract ‘...who decides what knowledge is and who knows what needs to be decided’ (Lyotard, 1984 p9)? It seems the Standards and Effectiveness Unit staff saw themselves as the ‘experts’ taking responsibility for such scientific knowledge, itself very closely linked to performance and subsequently performativity.

And so it seemed that self proclaimed ‘successful strategies’ in ‘successful schools’ were going to be used as the foundation for imposing radical change, in an attempt to further raise standards and achievement. Such was the ‘joined-up thinking’ which heralded the introduction of the Primary Strategy. It seemed that the standards agenda was the theme which connected the various initiatives within it, following the Barber principle. But if there continued to be problems in literacy and numeracy, when schools received exemplary frameworks, a large range of resources and extra funding (Tymms & Merrell, 2007 p16), what were the implications for positioning other parts of the Strategy espousing creative teaching and learning and creativity that might require even greater skills and support?

5.4 Big picture – fine detail: critically considering the Strategy

In *Excellence and Enjoyment* the DfES continued to promote ‘the big picture’ constantly re-stating its standards agenda, most notably in targeting schools with less than 65% of children reaching level 4 in Key Stage 2 SATs (DfES, 2003a p22). The imposition of such ‘policy imperatives’ within the complexity of the micro-politics of change could be seen as problematic;

Policies are inevitably crude and simple. Practice is typically sophisticated, contingent and unstable. The assertion of, and resistance to, policy is always hedged around with some degree of chaos/freedom (Gewirtz et al., 1995 p110).

It seems that little account has been taken of idiosyncrasy, or the actors involved, in implementing *Excellence and Enjoyment*. It is written as a ‘what works’ policy (Alexander, 2004) to win teachers over. Such a simplistic approach towards developing policy involves everything being taken at face value, with intentions and purpose clear, meaning understood and the authors (although anonymous) being acknowledged as the experts in judging what is appropriate. All of this is very much in line with denotative statements about learning which to ‘the exclusion of all other statements denote or describe objects and may be declared true or false’ (Lyotard, 1984 p18). There are clear suggestions that primary schooling difficulties are relatively easy to diagnose and that solutions lie within the standards agenda and ‘with strong teaching in the basics’ (DfES, 2003a p18). Justification is also offered: ‘So Level 4 really is the door to success in secondary school and beyond’ (p19). The implications of this are far more significant than they initially appear. Narrative knowledge, including creativity and enjoyment, as described by Lyotard (Fazzaro, Walter, & McKerrow, 1994), becomes subservient to SATs results. One of the few mentions of school context is used to justify this performative agenda;

2.12... Since the introduction of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, and of national targets, schools in the most deprived areas have seen the greatest improvement in performance. These schools serve the very children who were previously let down by the school

system and to fail them would be to fail those who could least afford it (DfES, 2003a p18).

This statement itself is open to challenge (Tymms, 2004; Tymms & Merrell, 2007). Extrapolated further it has implications for funding and resources, one of the recurrent themes identified earlier. If all that matters at the end of primary schooling is meeting a target, why invest time and energy in other, less easily measurable activities? The principle of the primary school being preparatory is clearly in place. That of the failing school and of children being let down by the system is subtly promoted. Schooling has become commodified. The strategies are presented as having addressed apparent, earlier schooling inequalities. There is no consideration of why these areas are the most deprived, of the costs involved in achieving such 'performance' or of the reliability of these results, elements of which other research has questioned (Massey, Green, Dexter, & Hamnett, 2003; Tymms, 2004; Tymms & Merrell, 2007).

A what works process?

Such a lack of acknowledgement of difficulties is symptomatic of the *Excellence and Enjoyment* approach. However, the authors do not seem to see it that way. *Excellence and Enjoyment* has been positioned as a 'what works' policy (Alexander, 2004). It 'constantly re-states the big picture' (Barber, 2001) whilst being diverse and covering many areas.

Policy makers seem to believe that by laying down the rules and exerting power and control over the recipients of the policy they will solve the perceived difficulties. Negotiation, contestation and struggle are not seen to be part of the process. Repeated many times are statements implying that the

Literacy and Numeracy Strategies have been ‘strikingly successful.’ Throughout the document there are examples of the language games of Lyotard, authoritarian language being used to show where power and control lies.;

2. Tests, targets and tables play a vital role in helping to raise standards

2.27. We do not accept that the tests and tasks which are set to children at the age of seven, at Key Stage 1, are too difficult or stressful for children to do.

3.12. For schools which are underperforming ...there will still be pressure to address and challenge their weaknesses, using tried and tested approaches.

Only limited, selective evidence is used to justify such statements, but for those reading it quickly, looking for press headlines, it seems impressive. No account is taken of independent research, as mentioned earlier, which questions the validity of these pronouncements. Once more the themes of control and conformity, and performance leading to performativity, identified as shaping primary education earlier in the 20th Century, are apparent. The theme of selection and sorting is also evident, but more subtly with; the emphasis on school performance being reported to parents; the classification of some children as gifted and talented and others being judged as failures if they do not reach Level 4 by the end of KS2. Using ‘tried and tested approaches’ suggests that ‘progressive challenges’ have also been addressed.

More freedom or not?

However, at the same time other statements seem to offer more freedom and independence to schools;

1.14 We want schools to feel freer to take control, and to use that freedom to:

Take a fresh look at their curriculum, their timetable and the organisation of the school day and week, and think actively about how they would like to develop and enrich the experience they offer their children.

Later there is an acknowledgement of research concerns about teachers implementing the Strategies, but underpinning this is the assumption that the Strategies themselves are the solution.

3.2 ... at present evaluations show that too many teachers do not have a deep understanding of the Strategies, which hinders them from adapting and shaping them to their own pupils' needs (DfES, 2003a).

The possibility of the Strategies, the National Curriculum and performative expectations hindering some teachers attempting to take a fresh look at their school curriculum is not considered. At the same time the identified lack of 'deep understanding' of other teachers is not explained. There was a huge investment in the Strategies (Tymms & Merrell, 2007 p16). Teachers were expected to 'deliver', but it seems, for some, to have been a superficial exercise. It is not explained in *Excellence and Enjoyment* why this was the case, or how such teachers could be supported to cope with more freedom. Longer term concerns about the 'conservatism' of many teachers, not willing

or able to think for themselves, identified in other research, are not addressed (Alexander, 2000; Earl et al., 2003; English et al., 2002; Fisher, 2004). Further refinement of the Strategies and more planning time are offered as a solution, but this may not actually be addressing the problem.

More positively, there seemed to be an acknowledgement about the necessity of adapting the Strategies to the needs of individual pupils. But it was not clear from *Excellence and Enjoyment* how, 'building on the *success* of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies' ... might change teaching and learning 'to ensure that children had a rich and exciting experience at primary school' (p27), particularly in those high poverty locations where children have historically been less well served by their educational experiences (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000; Thomson, 2002; Thrupp, 1999; Wexler, Crichlow, Kern, & Martusewicz, 1992). Such research seemed to have been ignored in the continued 're-stating of the big picture' associated with the change agenda being promoted by the DfES Standards and Effectiveness Unit. The Strategies success was treated as fact in *Excellence and Enjoyment* based on SATs raw scores. Other less positive evidence was omitted. There seem to be contradictions, or what might be called a conflict of interests here.

Support or 'Control and Conformity'?

There is evidence of a change in policy language, if not intention in *Excellence and Enjoyment*. The prescriptive and confrontational style, with threats and unrelenting pressure for improvement, as found in the White Paper *Excellence in Schools* (DfES, 1997) which talked of a crusade to focus on standards, intervention and zero tolerance of underperformance, with schools subjected to the 'right amount of pressure and support' (Tomlinson 2001) has been

ameliorated. Power and control is no longer obvious but it remains subtly evident.

Vocabulary analysis considering ‘control’ and ‘freedom’ produced evidence of this pressure. There are more than six times as many words used that exercise control over schools (such as improvement, standards and targets) than there are those that encourage freedom of thought (such as creativity, innovation and excitement). The word ‘quality’ in the ‘freedom’ section is not easily defined and accounts for almost a third of the words. It could also be linked to control (Appendix 6).

Analysing the vocabulary of *Excellence and Enjoyment* using NVivo suggests that, although the Strategy claimed to be giving teachers more freedom to be creative, the standards agenda still dominated. This on-going emphasis on standards raises doubts about the overall impact and sustainability of other elements of the Strategy being introduced, particularly in schools struggling to reach government targets. I now consider critically how these other elements are regarded.

What place creativity? Is this something desirable, or another progressive challenge?

One unusual aspect of the document is the way in which creativity is treated. The first mention of it is not until the third chapter and refers the reader to a QCA web site. Why has all the vocabulary that supports creative freedom and individuality been placed on a web site? Is it without importance? Would it send out the wrong message? There is no mention of the recommendations from *All Our Futures: Creativity Culture and Education* (NACCCE 1999), a report commissioned by New Labour but almost ignored when published at the

same time as the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies were being introduced (Joubert, 2001 p28). It seems that evidence from this document was still not a priority. Joubert highlights what may still be the problem;

Creativity may be too difficult to measure for a government that wants to prove that it is tough on targets (Joubert, 2001 p30).

This is hardly conducive to believing that creativity is at the heart of *Excellence and Enjoyment*, but some of the recommendations of the NACCCE committee, although not acknowledged, seem to have been considered and there is the acknowledgement that ‘it is important that children have a rich and exciting experience at primary school, learning a wide range of things in a wide range of different ways’ (p27). However this remark is preceded by the statement that; ‘Literacy and numeracy are vital building blocks and it is right to focus attention on them’. Once more there is the unquestionable assertion of the supremacy of the Strategies. Other building blocks are not considered.

Keeping control

It would appear that control mechanisms are being increased, despite the claims of more freedom. The statutory elements of testing, inspection and prescription are becoming more deeply entrenched, although the document itself has inconsistencies. The Literacy and Numeracy Strategies are described as being optional early on (p16), but this important point seems to have been forgotten later;

4.6... **we** have developed a model of intervention for children experiencing difficulties in literacy or mathematics, based on three waves:

Wave One: the effective inclusion of **all pupils** in a high quality, daily literacy hour and mathematics lesson ... (my emphases)

Here support seems to have become prescription. It illustrates the expectation that in every school having children with special needs there will be found the specified daily literacy and numeracy lessons. This is clearly control.

Style and content

A number of commentators, including Alexander (2004), have been most derisory about the style and content of *Excellence and Enjoyment*. The following example illustrates the often ill thought out language to be found throughout the document;

5.0 Excellent primary schools know that the work they do outside the classroom with parents and the community and on tackling vital issues like behaviour and school transport is critical to helping children get the best from their learning.

This is an amazing statement – to link in one sentence behaviour, school transport and learning. Good behaviour is a vital issue and, despite the confusion with transport, there is evidence that the government believes it important;

5.0 Primary schools have a critical role in teaching children positive behaviour, and must be supported in building strong approaches to behaviour into the way they teach and into the ethos of the school.

However it is not clear if positive behaviour should be equated with conformity and control. What is a ‘strong approach’? This is a very good media sound bite but independence of thought and self-discipline do not seem high on the

agenda. This does not fit well with the more sophisticated ‘socially critical primary school’ approach described by Morrison (1989 p13).

There is evidence of self-interest to be found in the DfES using reports by Ofsted, itself a government department, to justify actions that it has taken, without considering external evidence that may contradict its statements;

2.11 ...But as Ofsted reports have shown, it is not a question of ‘either’,
‘or’. Raising standards and making learning fun can and do go together.

This is yet another example of a denotative statement judged relevant by government experts, the authenticity of which is questionable when the narrow focus of the standards agenda is considered (Boyle & Bragg, 2006 p574).

Validity

The document seems to be part of a self-perpetuating myth. The confidence of the authors in positioning themselves as those *who know what the situation is* (Lyotard, 1984 p9) seems very clear;

3.2 The Literacy and Numeracy Strategies have, according to all those who have evaluated them, been strikingly successful at improving the quality of teaching and raising standards in primary schools.

This is contested. Many researchers have found considerable fault with the strategies (English et al., 2002; Fisher, 2004; Mroz et al., 2000; Smith et al., 2004; Twistleton, 2000; Tymms, 2004; Wyse, 2003). The fact that they have been ignored is more evidence of power and control, rather than research findings, being promoted. In the document there is a lack of authorship and very selective evidence is used. There are few references to independent research or acknowledgements. The PIRLS reading study (Twist, Sainsbury, Woodthorpe, & Whetton, 2003) quoted to justify and promote the good

position of ten year old readers in an international comparison in *Excellence and Enjoyment* (p11) was selectively reported. The NFER summary of the same report mentions;

‘The PIRLS international survey (2003) reported results from 35 countries and it found that, whilst pupils in England read very well compared to those in other countries, **their enjoyment of reading is poor by comparison**’ (Sainsbury, 2003 p1) *my emphasis*.

This statement was not used to promote enjoyment in *Excellence and Enjoyment* or to question the validity of the Literacy Strategy. Instead the document proclaims that ‘our primary schools ...are world leaders’ (p11). Unfortunately they only seemed to be amongst world leaders in some test results.¹⁵ The implications of this are not considered.

Away from the headlines and ebullient language used to paint a positive picture of primary schooling in *Excellence and Enjoyment* there are mixed messages about the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. After proclaiming their success in raising standards the authors admit that there are concerns about the abilities of some teachers to implement the strategies (p27). However the cost implications of addressing such concerns or the more inherent difficulties highlighted in other research are not considered (English et al., 2002). These problems were not new, but earlier warnings were ignored. *All Our Futures* (NACCCE 1999) raised similar issues 4 years earlier, and recommended teachers having access to materials, ideas and strategies for the imaginative implementation of literacy

¹⁵ NFER subsequently did a further survey comparing reading enjoyment with an earlier 1998 survey which confirmed the PIRLS findings and suggested that the decline in enjoyment could be related to the introduction of the skills based approach of the Literacy Strategy (Sainsbury, 2003). This research was published the month after *Excellence and Enjoyment*.

and numeracy. *Excellence and Enjoyment* talks simply of deep understanding of the strategies, rather than developing a deeper knowledge and understanding of teaching and learning, skills needed to empower teachers in being innovative and creative in meeting the needs of their children. The veracity of the strategies is not questioned. The performative agenda and the scientific-technical approach remain deeply embedded. Lyotard summarises why such data dominates over other discourses;

The scientist questions the validity of narrative statements and concludes that they are never subject to argumentation or proof. He classifies them as belonging to a different mentality: savage, primitive, underdeveloped, backward, alienated, composed of opinions, customs, authority, prejudice, ignorance, ideology. Narratives are fables, myths, legends, fit only for women and children. At best some attempts are made to throw some rays of light into this obscurantism, to civilize, educate, develop (Lyotard, 1984 p27).

Perhaps this is why resources for more innovative developments are mentioned in parallel programmes to the Strategy, such as Creative Partnerships, funded jointly with other government departments (p32-33). It is suggested, in the broadest of terms, that this approach will ‘help schools make the most of arts and cultural opportunities’ (p32). However the implication is that it is the Strategy which will civilise them. What is not mentioned is the limited access to such programmes or the very high costs involved. Children experiencing these initiatives do benefit but this does not sit well with the Strategy goal of ‘**all** schools achieving excellence in teaching with enjoyment in learning.’

Good Practice?

Throughout the document excellence is promoted and exemplified by using the term ‘good practice’. This is not clearly defined except in terms of achievement and performance. It seems that to the authors good test results define good practice. The document does not make clear what the government vision for future practice should be but it does suggest how it will be promoted;

6.16. We intend to develop a new ‘Leading Practice’ programme for primary schools, with common national criteria and branding.

This is unusual, market-oriented language. What is the definition of ‘Leading Practice’? Apparently;

6.16 ...The criteria will be built into a self-assessment model like those that many schools already use, so that schools themselves can judge when they are ready to apply to have their leading practice recognised.

This is another example of bureaucratic control using self-regulation where schools are expected to conform to external expectations. Once more the 20th Century themes of control and conformity can be identified. Leading Practice appears to mean little more than good performance.

Workforce Reform

This section contains another very sweeping statement taken as fact, with very little evidence to back it up;

7.5. Workforce reform goes hand in hand with curriculum enrichment. Higher level teaching assistants (HLTAs), working under a framework of supervision and direction from the teacher and headteacher, can not

only free up teachers' time, but can also bring a wealth of expertise to help bring the curriculum alive.

But then, in the next sentence...

7.5 ...The Department has asked the Teacher Training Agency to develop a training programme for Higher Level Teaching Assistants. This training must be rigorous enough for the responsible role intended and be designed to support the classroom teacher who will remain responsible for the learning programme in raising pupil achievement.

Quite what the last part means is not clear. It may be, as one interviewed head teacher described it, teachers using PPA time to plan for PPA time cover. When do the two plan together? The document states there are now more TAs, so inevitably they will be used in more flexible ways. But there is no evidence in the document to say that this path is the right one for covering 10% of the time for all primary school teachers or any consideration of the resources needed to ensure that workforce reform will indeed 'help bring the curriculum alive' itself an unusual statement implying that it may lack life at present!.

Vision

The document describes how there have been high profile 'consultations' and meetings across the country attended by a large number of people. But it rebuts the identified areas of concern, such as tests and funding inequalities. The primary/secondary funding issue is one example;

8.13 Between 1997-98 and 2002-03 the (funding) assessment per pupil rose by 28% (in cash terms) in the primary sector as against 25% in the secondary sector.

Yet statutory PPA time instantly increases teaching requirements by 10% in one go!

It seems other initiatives in the document, such as extended schools, parental involvement, foreign language teaching, networking and collaboration, school travel and sport may be open to dialogue and a variety of interpretations. However within this vision centralised control of the curriculum through performativity is still maintained. Vision is not needed for implementation of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies and schools are still judged by their SATs performance.

It would appear that this document is written at one level to win over teachers using non-challenging language and offering them freedom and enjoyment (Alexander 2004). For politicians and government officials it is subtly restating their power and control over primary education and is being used as a tool to proclaim their success (real or illusory) to the press and media. It is also signalling to heads and governors an unprecedented upheaval to come in almost every area of school life.

Would there be sufficient funding for the Strategy to work?

Many of the performative business models, ideas and approaches promoted within the change agenda of the Primary Strategy appear to have been initially applied and developed in secondary education, where economies of scale enhance the capacity to absorb change, to delegate responsibilities and to manipulate budgets. A similar secondary school model was used in the introduction of the local management of schools (LMS) in the 1990s. At the time most primary headteachers welcomed the opportunity for more control over their budgets but lacked the resourcing available to secondary colleagues

to delegate responsibilities. *Excellence and Enjoyment* made similar promises to facilitate change, but once more the link to resources appeared somewhat tenuous. Some of the language used was fascinating;

8.7. We know that our strategy cannot succeed if it is not properly resourced. We have raised the level of spending on education – and on primary schools – radically in recent years. Real-terms spending per primary and nursery pupil has risen by over 20% on average since 1997-98.

8.8. One common complaint about this extra funding was that a lot of it came in ring-fenced pots. We have responded to that concern by radically reducing the number of ring-fences. We know that this has caused some turbulence in the system, particularly alongside local authority funding changes (DfES, 2003a).

Certainly huge amounts had been spent since 1997 (Tymms & Merrell, 2007 p16), but much of this was necessary to address 18 years of Conservative underfunding (Ball, 2001 p45). By 2003 it was not clear how big or full the pots were. Removal of ‘ring fencing’ further enhanced the ‘get out clause’ used by LEAs when questioned by headteachers about where promised funds were - “It’s in your budget.” was the usual reply.

One particular statement in *Excellence and Enjoyment* illustrates quite clearly how resources, even then, were being manipulated. Changes in 2003/04 to the school funding system and pressures on costs relating to teachers pensions and National Insurance had caused the Secretary of State to take action;

8.9 To ensure that these special circumstances do not adversely affect schools, he gave LEAs and schools jointly additional flexibility to use their devolved formula capital funding to support revenue expenditure this year, where all other options had been exhausted.

So it seemed that claims about the amount being allocated to devolved formula capital funding that year were undermined by the Secretary of State. This was immediately followed by more claims about future funding;

8.10 For the future, he reassured schools and LEAs that next year's settlement will offer them a clear and stable platform on which to deliver high standards of education.

8.11. The key priority will be to make changes that mean schools can all expect to receive a reasonable per pupil settlement in 2004-05.

8.12. The intention is to ensure that changes are in place in good time to allow schools and LEAs to plan for 2004-05 and so provide increased predictability and stability in school funding.

As already mentioned there were reassurances that funding issues were being addressed, implying that everything was going to be alright and that;

8.17 ... this document begins to offer a blueprint for the future, but the building blocks of future success have been laid by teachers and headteachers, as *they have driven the dramatic improvements that have taken place over the last decade and more*. It is they that will carry on building on that success. We know that they must share in the planning as well as in the execution if the project is to be as successful as our children deserve it to be (my italics DfES, 2003a).

It is fascinating that this last statement was written after only 6 years of New Labour being in power. If this part of *Excellence and Enjoyment* is to be believed there must have been ‘dramatic improvements’ during the Conservative era, possibly since the Education Reform Act of 1988. More recently politicians and policy makers have tended to re-define the Conservative era as one where there were no dramatic improvements. Such are the difficulties of politicians playing what Lyotard calls ‘language games’ with the re-definition of policy described by Davies and Edwards where;

under New Labour ‘standards’ have replaced ‘curriculum’ as the discursive hub of educational policy making. And this discursive reorientation has legitimated the obsessive setting and pursuit of pre-specified targets (Davies & Edwards, 2001 p99).

5.5 A policy epidemic

For any researcher or student of New Labour education reform, life is not dull. There is a continuous stream of new policies and initiatives arriving before previous ones have either become established or evaluated over time. Each new initiative is ‘sold’ to the electorate as a cure-all which will, through raising standards, address social and economic decline and re-position the country at the forefront of the global economy. Ball, (quoting Levin, 1998 p38), describes such a convergence of ideas, associated with what he calls the globalisation of education policy, as a ‘policy epidemic’.

Elements of ‘the colonisation of education policy by economic policy initiatives’ (Ball, 2008a p39) can be identified in *Excellence and Enjoyment* (DfES, 2003a). The way the language develops is interesting. In the foreword Secretary of State Charles Clarke states that ‘Our primary schools are a success

story. The best are the best in the world'. By page 9 in the introduction this has become '1.2 Our leading primary schools are among the best in the world.' Research from an international reading study is used to claim that '1.11... our primary schools are not just improving relative to past performance but are world leaders.' These claims have been challenged elsewhere (Tymms, 2004; Tymms & Merrell, 2007). Later the message is more subtle; '2.13. Achieving Level 4 at the end of primary school improves a child's prospects at secondary school and their future life chances.' It then becomes a self fulfilling prophecy; '2.14. So Level 4 really is the door to success in secondary school and beyond.' Much of the rest of the document then continues to focus on standards, as the earlier NVivo analysis revealed.

Again the themes of control and conformity and performance/performativity are clearly evident in these statements with links to the global economy and the standards agenda.

The on-going rhetoric of radical change

Criteria for success remain focussed on performative data in subsequent strategy documents, initially signposted in *Excellence and Enjoyment*, including *Every Child Matters* (DfES,2004d) and the *Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners* (DfES,2004e). These can be seen as further evidence that government continues to 'emphasise the rhetoric of 'radical change' in promoting modernisation and transformation' (Ball, 2008a p16-17) in schools.

I now consider how these further developments fit into the Primary Strategy.

5.6 Every Child Matters

The Every Child Matters Web site sets the background for the 2004 Children Act which introduced the legislation for the Every Child Matters initiative;

In 2003, the Government published a green paper called Every Child Matters. This was published alongside the formal response to the report into the death of Victoria Climbié, the young girl who was horrifically abused and tortured, and eventually killed by her great aunt and the man with whom they lived. ...

Following the consultation, the Government published Every Child Matters: the Next Steps, and passed the Children Act 2004, providing the legislative spine for developing more effective and accessible services focused around the needs of children, young people and families. (DfES, 2004d)

It is worth noting that in the green paper the main aims set out in the introduction by Paul Boateng, Chief Secretary to the Treasury, were to ensure joined up services providing support, early intervention, accountability and integration of services as well as ensuring that people working with children were valued, rewarded and trained (DfES, 2003b p3). By the time the legislation had been brought in, the emphasis had been subtly altered with outcomes which mattered to children, including achievement and economics, being introduced as the key aims, as this extract from the web site shows;

Every Child Matters: Change for Children is a new approach to the well-being of children and young people from birth to age 19.

The Government's aim is for every child, whatever their background or their circumstances, to have the support they need to:

- Be healthy
- Stay safe
- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Achieve economic well-being

(DfES, 2004d)

Whereas the Hadow Report (1931) had talked of aiding children; with them being lively in mind; widening experience as they grow; mastering life skills more easily and acquiring accomplishments, the more 'neccessarian logic' (Watson and Hay 2003 in Ball, 2008a p14-15) promoted in the *Every Child Matters* bullet points seems more restrictive.

Although laudable in many ways, achievement was related to the standards agenda in primary schools. The economic imperative was also being emphasised, linking Every Child Matters back to the performativity of the Primary Strategy. Clearly the language games of Lyotard were to the fore. Those aspects of *Every Child Matters* which could be easily measured would impact most directly on schools. This was further compounded as Ofsted was also charged with monitoring the contribution schools make to pupil well-being, particularly 'achieving stretching national standards at primary school' (Ofsted, 2005c p3). Once again the standards agenda was linked to the themes of conformity and sorting and selection.

5.7 The Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners

Published in July 2004 (DfES 2004e) this strategy document affirmed many initiatives originally outlined a year earlier in *Excellence and Enjoyment*, but with a much broader remit, including the integration children's services, provision for learners of all ages and the promotion of personalised learning¹⁶ and choice. The foreword by Secretary of State, Charles Clarke contained some familiar rhetoric;

We will never apologise for the directive action we took, for example, on literacy and numeracy in 1997 – it put right a national scandal of low aspiration and poor performance (DfES, 2004e).

To describe the actions of New Labour as putting right a national scandal is very dismissive of all those committed teachers already working extremely hard in primary schools across the country before 1997. Similar attacks were also evident in *Excellence and Enjoyment*. This approach was described as re-writing history, and ignoring the vast body of research evidence in place before 1997 (Alexander, 2004 p16).

The Five Year Strategy summary concerning primary schools illustrated the on-going development of performative Primary Strategy policy initiatives;

Once children reach **primary school**, our **offer** to children and parents is:

- Every child making the best possible progress in reading, writing and maths, with high-quality teachers and support staff in the classroom giving children more tailored learning
- A wider school curriculum and the choice for every child to learn a foreign language, play music and take part in competitive sport

¹⁶ Originally described in *Excellence and Enjoyment* as a focus on the needs of individual children (DfES, 2003a) the term personalised learning was later introduced to ensure a data driven focus on sorting and selecting children e.g. identifying gifted & talented children.

- A closer relationship between parents and schools, with better information through a new 'school profile' and more family learning
- More primary schools working together in networks, supporting each other and challenging failure; and the best heads helping to improve the rest; and poor schools turned around quickly or closed

(DfES, 2004e p7-8).

Interestingly there is no reference to the future funding requirements needed for these 'offers' to develop from rhetoric to reality.

Where is the money?

Despite grandiose claims, highlighting increased expenditure since 1997, there is little evidence within the document of any intension to significantly increase funding to primary schools. Some concessions appeared to have been made;

....we are providing additional resources and support to all primary schools with high levels of disadvantage (more than 35 percent of children receiving free school meals), on the model of the Excellence in Cities programme (p37).

However the amount of funding and support was not clear. In reality any extra resources became subsumed into the standards fund element of school budgets where the same money was to support learning mentors, extra behaviour support and the gifted and talented programme. Of even more concern was funding for schools with slightly less than 35% FSM with many families being borderline cases.

There was a promise of 3 year budgets for schools which became in practice a two year budget. Hidden away towards the end of the document was evidence of the efficiency drive in the DfES, being demanded by the Treasury, which does not seem to sit well with the expansive agenda elsewhere;

Over the Spending Review period the Department, in partnership with key stakeholders, will work to secure efficiency and productivity gains throughout education and children's services amounting to £4.3 billion, by reducing administration costs, reforming procurement and unlocking productivity gains from technology and workforce improvement (p105).

What is on offer?

The *Five Year Strategy* is both confident and ambitious. As in *Excellence and Enjoyment*, international comparisons, using the same questionable data, are made to position it positively and to justify the performative agenda;

Our education system is now among the best in the world. Our ten-year olds are the third best readers in the world (p6).

Our aim is to secure world-class standards for the great majority of our citizens, particularly in our schools (p7).

If we are to aspire to world class standards, we must measure ourselves against the best in the world (p140).

The document sets out an agenda for change with claims in the conclusion;

... to improve every aspect of what we do. It puts a clear focus on children, learners, parents and employers, not just in setting out what we want to offer, but in designing ways of doing it that promote personalisation and choice (DfES, 2004e p110).

The use of the word 'offer' implies a potential for acceptance or rejection. Was this 'offer' an electoral ploy or a further example of the marketisation of schooling?

A rapid success or a long way to go?

Earlier in the document one remark raises questions about DfES policy evaluation;

Through the *successful* national Primary Strategy (the combined successor to the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies) we will develop teachers' skills in tailoring teaching and learning to the needs of all pupils (p37 my italics).

Considering that this document must have been written in early 2004, less than a year after the publication of *Excellence and Enjoyment*, this seems to be a somewhat presumptuous statement. Evidence from my pilot study suggests that staff in many schools, at this time, were not even aware of the Primary Strategy.

The final words of the foreword by Charles Clarke seem perplexing;

And all of this depends, as we have set out, on a radically reshaped system for delivering education and children's services, and in particular a reshaped role for Local Government and for my Department, moving away from direction towards an enabling and empowering role. It depends on freedom for those at the front line to personalise services and to improve them. And it depends on Ministers like me holding our nerve and being able to resist the lure of the next initiative in favour of a system that drives its own improvement more and more.

Within 5 months of publication Charles Clarke was lured into becoming Home Secretary. By the end of 2006 he was no longer a government minister, merely a backbench MP. Further initiatives continued to arrive (see Table 1).

5.8 Initiatives still being imposed

As was already evident in *Excellence and Enjoyment* (DfES, 2003a) the ‘enabling and empowering role’ was only possible if schools were already responding to government expectations. Performativity is clearly evident in this vision of a self-perpetuating system. The radical changes to the system seem far removed from being self-driven and contained. Under the aegis of the Primary Strategy, numerous new initiatives and policies have continued to arrive. They may have been sign-posted years earlier but are only now beginning to impact. Change is endemic. In the last four years there have been four Secretaries of State for Education, each keen to make an impression. The DfES has been split into the DCSF (Department for Children, Schools and Families) and the DIUS (Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills). An internet search revealed 24 further education-related Green Papers, White Papers and Strategy Documents since 2004.¹⁷ This does not include other initiatives such as the review into the teaching of phonics, the revised frameworks for literacy and mathematics (re-named from numeracy), New Ofsted, or the government-commissioned review of primary education, set up even before all of the elements of the Primary Strategy are in place (eg. teaching a modern foreign language). It seems the words of Charles Clark have not been heeded.

The themes identified in considering the history of primary education in Chapter 4, control and conformity, performance/performativity, selection and sorting, progressive challenges and the struggle for money have been clearly evident in the analysis of the *Excellence and Enjoyment* (DfES, 2003a) and subsequent policies in this chapter. This evidence suggests that the wholesale

¹⁷ Green papers are consultation documents outlining policy proposals. White papers detail policy legislation. Strategy documents set out department aims and objectives.
<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/publications/>

reforms and change agenda aimed at creating a world class system of education (Barber, 2001) may be influenced by earlier discourses which could be problematic in achieving the Strategy aims of achieving excellence in teaching and enjoyment in learning. This is why it was important, for the second stage of the research, to take it into primary schools where headteachers had already expressed concerns about the difficulties of policy implementation.

This first stage of the research focussed on policy texts and discourses and was used to help situate and structure the ethnographic case studies. The framework developed in critically considering policy moves helped me to analyse data collected and produced during the case studies from official texts, less formal documents and transcriptions of interviews, conversations and observations. In the next chapter I describe the case study schools and their regional context, before considering evidence of social disadvantage across the cases.

Chapter 6 Contexts & case studies

... modes of interaction in classrooms, the types of control, the generation and labelling of pupil identities, need to be understood as a

dialectic relationship between ideology and material and economic environment (Apple, 1980 p141).

6.1 The East Midlands context



Photographs 2 An area with many ex-mining communities

Pockets of deprivation

In selecting the schools for case studies I drew on my knowledge of the East Midlands to initially identify pockets of deprivation (Lister, 2004 p240) and to then consider schools situated within them. Much of the region has been affected by the closure of coal mines and many semi-urban areas are now frequently described as ex-mining communities. At the same time there are a number of market towns which grew in the second half of the 20th Century to become larger urban communities. A lot of this later prosperity and growth was based around the clothing and textile industry, often providing work for female members of mining families. Thirty years ago the region was prosperous and unemployment was low. However the skills base needed for obtaining employment was also low and there was little opportunity or motivation for self-improvement. This was one of the root causes for the growth of areas of deprivation which have developed, as the staple industries of the region

declined. Similar difficulties have been identified in other such communities (CRC, 2006).

Pit closures

A pivotal moment in this decline was the miners' strike of 1984/85. One interviewed headteacher recalled, as a young class teacher, having to explain to pupils why policemen were chasing parents across the school field. The strike divided many communities, with members of the Union of Democratic Miners (UDM) not striking, and those in the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) not only striking, but actively picketing, in what was often perceived to be in an intimidating way. This led to the deployment of a large number of police from outside the area being brought in to help control the demonstrations. Most notoriously, members of the Metropolitan Police were drafted in and billeted at a local college of education. These 'outsiders' brought to the strike what seemed to be a much less sympathetic and tolerant approach to the protesters (Mimas, 2004). The NUM statistics of the strike give some indication of the human costs involved;

In the course of the dispute, which lasted altogether sixteen months, a total of 11,000 miners were arrested; 7,000 injured; eleven people died, and 1,000 men were sacked, victimised for supporting their Union's policy in the most bitter industrial conflict ever seen in trade union history (NUM, 2008).

Nationally, since 1985, 79 pits have been closed and over 100,000 miners have lost their jobs (NUM, 2008). In the Midlands only 3 pits are still open. The divisions within communities remain. In one school visited during the pilot

study in 2005 several parents refused to talk to the chair of governors because of their conflicting roles during the strike.

School Contexts

Throughout my 14 years of headship in the region, starting shortly after the miners strike, I was made aware of concerns expressed by colleagues working in these struggling communities; their circumstances and difficulties were either being overlooked or not even being acknowledged; their schools were under funded; unfair demands were being made upon them. It was in such schools that I wanted to concentrate my research. Key Stage 2 SATs data analysis from 2007 suggests that in the East Midlands over 100 schools may be in similar circumstances¹⁸. Nationally the figure was over 1300 schools.

I now describe in more detail the specific settings and location of each case study school. Names have been changed to ensure anonymity.

6.2 Lillywhites Junior School

Lillywhites Junior School is on a large council estate on the outskirts of a thriving market town (population 25000). However the unemployment level on the estate remains at around 50%, with few opportunities for employment locally (ONS, 2007). A number of traveller families are housed on the estate. 34% of children are on free school meals (FSM). The school, with approximately 240 on roll, has reduced in size by almost half in the last ten years. Few children now attend from nearby private housing, as the age

¹⁸ Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire and associated city authorities. Schools achieving raw scores of 200 or below out of 300 in maths, English and science tests. Government is targeting schools not achieving 65% Level 4 in Maths and English. With science results included (which are usually higher than English and maths) this would equate to a raw score of 200. Nationally 1321 such schools were identified. No account is taken of support or resources available.

demographic there is maturing. Two infant schools feed Lillywhites, but the budget manager reported that, now, only about half of the infant school children subsequently attended the junior school, parents choosing to send their children to other local schools. The headteacher feels that the situation has been exacerbated by a critical Ofsted report putting the comprehensive school that it feeds into special measures, and less than favourable reports in the local newspaper about the reputation of the estate. Lister clearly highlights such stigmatisation when considering evidence from similar estates (Lister, 2004).

Changing reputation and staff

Twenty years ago, before parental choice, the school was well respected in the community and held up as a model by the LEA, which implemented frequent visits by a variety of education professionals, because of the quality of teaching and learning it provided. Some of the local reputation built on earlier success in the 1970s, getting children to grammar school, but the rich, environmentally based curriculum also made it very popular with parents and children. At this time the intake was more evenly balanced between private housing and the council estate. The positive influence of such a school mix, in raising the achievement levels of the more disadvantaged children, has been identified in other research (Lupton, 2005; Thrupp, 1999).

The school experienced 4 changes of headteacher in the 1990s before the arrival of the current head 8 years ago. Staff turbulence continued as numbers fell, culminating in several redundancies three years ago. Since then a new management team has been appointed and more stability achieved. However two years ago all 8 classes had full time TAs, but now, because of budgetary concerns, each one is shared between two classes and they are no longer full

time. Special needs TAs are used to run two nurture groups. TAs work with sports coaches to manage PPA time.

Today, despite having recently raised standards of achievement, the school struggles to keep pupils, because there are a number of other schools relatively close by with 'nicer' children. The impact of such parental choice, introduced in the Education Reform Act 1988, is identified as a concern by Maguire et al. in their study of urban schools. They make two points. Firstly in considering a government White Paper *Choice and Diversity* in 1992, which stated that parents 'not only had a right to choose an education for their children but were also considered to be in the best position to do so' (DES, 1992), they raise the question;

...what sorts of parent and what sort of school were envisaged in the rhetoric of this White Paper?

And more significantly, for the context of this school, on a large estate without a health centre;

Neither is there any recognition of the complex circumstances that some families, and mothers in particular, have to face; factors such as poor housing, reduced income, lack of wider support and possibly health related problems too (Maguire et al., 2006 p76).

The situation at Lillywhites is also compounded by families wishing to leave the estate because it is not a pleasant place to live. Whenever one of these families leaves the headteacher is worried that they seem to be replaced by families, whose circumstances are less fortunate. Similar concerns have also been identified in other communities (CRC, 2006 p11). The headteacher talks

ruefully of losing children capable of reaching Level 4 in KS2 SATS, to be replaced by children whose life experiences make this much less likely.

The school environment



Quiet playground & older buildings



Vandalised environmental area



Smeared anti vandal paint & reflection of corridor



70s CLASP buildings

Photographs 3 Lillywhites Junior School

The main brick built school was constructed in the 1930s at the same time as the surrounding estate (today approximately 9000 residents). Further CLASP¹⁹ extensions were added in the 70s. The original buildings remain sound but the fabric of the more recent additions is deteriorating rapidly. The school expanded to cater for 16 classes, but currently has reduced to eight. Three classrooms in one wing of the original building are being adapted for community use; a new staff room, an IT room and a nurture group room have been created in other areas. The assembly hall, including a stage, in the main

¹⁹ CLASP (Consortium of Local Authorities Special Provision) 'CLASP was founded in 1957 at the instigation of the Ministry of Education for the purpose of improving the construction and delivery of schools.' (www.clasp.gov.uk) Much use was made of prefabricated materials manufactured off site.

building is very dated, and in need of refurbishment. There is a purpose built dining hall in the more modern extension which also appears neglected. Classrooms are linked by corridors which, in the more modern extension, are difficult to keep attractive, being rather narrow and busy. The corridors in the original building are wider and have been successfully adapted for a number of purposes, including classroom extensions and as focal points for displays outside 4 classes. There are easy chairs for parents and staff to use for informal meetings.

Great efforts have been made in the administrative area to display messages about the school ethos, about Every Child Matters and about the Intensifying Support Programme (ISP). However these displays are very close to the busy office and entrance. Visitors to the office hatch have little time or space to appreciate the messages, as any queue obscures them. This entrance is not used by parents bringing their children to school on a daily basis. The physical layout of the school makes it difficult to display information or to celebrate work and achievements anywhere else, except in and near classrooms. Because children wait to be collected by teachers in the playground before school, few parents enter the school at the start of the day. The corridors become crowded when they are invited in at other times. The headteacher believes that the new community wing has the potential to attract more parents and others from the neighbourhood into the school and intends to use this area to positively promote the school and hopes that it will really benefit them in terms of public relations.

Outside there are two distinct playgrounds on either side of a corridor, one with benches and seats for quieter activities and the other for more physical

activities, such as ball games. There is a large well used field and a recently developed environmental area, struggling to become established because of on-going vandalism.

The site is not secure, despite a great deal of capital funding having been spent on security fencing. This has made it more difficult for children to ‘escape’ from the playgrounds at break times and for bona fide visitors to access the site. However fire exits and other entrances lead to less secure areas for anyone wishing to run away. Most of the site can be accessed by climbing garden fences and walking on roofs, or simply walking through the car park and onto the field next to classrooms, leaving it vulnerable to unwanted visitors and open to regular vandalism.

There is a newly built Family Centre which caters for 0-5 year olds, their parents and carers, on site but not joined to the school, surrounded by effective security fencing and with a separate entrance. In an attempt to encourage integration, Centre administrative staff are being given office space in the new community wing, but this is at the opposite end of the school to the Centre and there is no direct link, meaning staff will have to walk along the street between the two areas.

6.3 Barlingtown Primary School

Barlingtown Primary School is situated on a large council estate in an ex-mining community of approximately 10,000 residents. Unemployment levels in the area have fallen in recent years but the structure of employment has changed from being heavily reliant on high salaried miners to less well paid service industry workers. Almost 50% of the children are on FSM.

A new school and staff

The school, with approximately 340 children on role, was created in September 2005 by the LEA expanding the infant and nursery school to become a primary and forcing the junior school to close, following severe criticism and being put into special measures²⁰ by Ofsted a year earlier. The head of the infant school agreed to take over the new school, as long as sufficient LEA support was provided to address the difficulties. Small classes (approx 20 in each) and full time TA support in every class were agreed to. A new leadership team, with three teachers without class responsibilities, was established to manage the overall development of the new school. These staff also provided PPA cover internally. All staff from the old junior school had to apply for jobs. Only four teaching staff were re-employed. The infant school was already well regarded by the LEA and Ofsted and the model of curriculum development that it used has been adopted in the new school, despite initial scepticism from some staff in Key Stage 2. The extra support was verbally agreed for 5 years by the LEA. Unfortunately this was replaced by a new LA which has cut the extra funding, leading to two teachers and two TAs facing redundancy in September 2007.

An area in decline

The old junior school is another which had a very good reputation within the LEA 20 years ago. An unfortunate illness caused the eventual retirement of a previous headteacher. The uncertainty associated with this began a period of instability which affected the school over several years, the school being run by an acting head until a new headteacher was eventually appointed. By this time pit closures were disrupting the community, beginning a period of economic

²⁰ 'The term applied following an Ofsted inspection when a school is failing to provide an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school' (<http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/sie/glossary/>). Schools in special measures receive extra funding and LEA support and are regularly visited by Ofsted inspectors to monitor improvement. Closure is a possibility if performance does not improve.

decline (CRC, 2006). The arrival of a number of extremely difficult children, re-housed from other areas, further disrupted the school. With large classes and little extra support, the staff struggled simply to maintain order, leading to the interventions of Ofsted and the LEA.



The old junior school wing



Small hall



Ex working men's club seen from school



Expensive to maintain

Photographs 4 Barlingtown Primary School

The buildings date from the late 1920s. Originally the junior school was an all age school. The infant school was built alongside it and extended in the 1970s. Following the creation of the new school the two buildings have been physically joined and a new entrance area created with easy chairs and display areas. There are 12 classes but 20 classroom spaces. Three halls are available. The extra rooms are being developed for a number of purposes including a new staffroom, an IT suite, a community room, a Surestart room, a music room, an art room, a resources room and an after school club. The rooms are linked by

large corridors which are used for display purposes with study and TASC (Thinking Actively in a Social Context) work (Wallace, Maker, Cave, & Chandler, 2004) from each class clearly displayed. The older rooms have been upgraded with interactive white boards and new furniture. There is a large amount of space but all the areas are cared for and used regularly. Following KS 1 practice, great efforts have been made to encourage parents into the KS 2 part of the new school each day, with start up activities planned that parents can join in with. Outside doors are unlocked 20 minutes before registration with teachers and TAs already in class, or in the corridor, to 'meet and greet' the parents and children, to discuss homework and reading diaries and to sort out any minor problems. This is helping to develop a positive learning atmosphere.

6.4 Tillbridge Primary School

Tillbridge Primary School is situated in an ex-mining community, with a population of 20,000, adjoining a larger urban conurbation of approximately 70,000. It is an area of neighbourhood renewal²¹, resulting in the demolition of several streets close to the school several years ago. The replacement houses are only just beginning to be built as part of a European Regeneration Project. Unemployment levels continue to be high and there are significant levels of deprivation within the community. Just over 50% of the children are on FSM. All of the children live within the immediate vicinity of the school in a very deprived area (ONS, 2007).

²¹ A Government scheme set up in 2001 to 'narrow the gap between deprived neighbourhoods and the rest of the country'(www.neighbourhood.gov.uk) through delivering locally based initiatives to address local needs . This particular scheme involved demolishing 150 terraced houses, with plans to build 50 new homes and refurbishing 100 others as well as other community projects.

A turbulent time

The present school was formed by the amalgamation of the infant and junior schools in 2001. At that time it had a roll of 259. Because of regeneration, amalgamation problems and an Ofsted report in 2003 identifying it as under achieving, numbers have fallen to 127 today. The six classes are small (15-20) with a full time shared TA in KS1 who also covers for PPA time. Classes in KS 2 have TA support for literacy and numeracy sessions. These classes are merged twice a week in the afternoons to release teachers for PPA time. A year ago all classes had full time TA support but this is no longer financially viable. Four TAs work with named children with special needs.

The Tillbridge amalgamation was the first in a wider scheme that also removed an earlier system of middle schools. Several staff lost their jobs. A new head from outside the LEA was appointed but only stayed for two years, resulting in the current head, who had been deputy of the infant school being offered the post, almost by default, just before the 2003 Ofsted inspection. A further inspection in 2005 was much more positive.

The school site is typically Victorian, the main school being built at the end of that era. A nursery extension was built in the 1970s. A new community sports hall was built about 10 years ago. A new school hall was built at the time of the amalgamation. The office area has only just moved into a refurbished area. There are 13 classroom areas but only 6 classes. A number of the classrooms have been extended by removing partitions between smaller rooms.



Main entrance



Children's entrance



View of boarded up house next door



Only a hard playground

Photographs 5 Tillbridge Primary School

This has created large class spaces with a great deal of potential that teachers are exploiting well. The only frustration for teachers wanting to work beyond the classroom is that there are no outside doors to the rooms because of very large heating pipes along the outside walls.

The buildings are surrounded by tarmac and set out in a linear way. The sports hall and an all-weather floodlit playing area are at one end. There is a small quiet area and garden next to the nursery (but otherwise no natural surfaces for the children to play on). The Key Stage 1 classes are on one side of the administrative area and the Y5 & 6 classes on the other side of the new hall, in a separate wing of four rooms. The 40 children in Y3 & 4 are housed in a completely separate building, along with the IT suite and their own kitchen facilities, at the opposite end of the school to the sports hall. The physical

layout of the school does not help the staff to work together and it is difficult for children to move easily from one part of the school to another, security concerns meaning that all external doors between the buildings require key access. A lot of work has gone into displays in the areas which join classrooms. The hall is used to display and celebrate the work and achievements of children.

6.5 Waddingworth Junior School

Waddingworth Junior School is situated in a large suburban village (population over 6000) a few miles from a major city. The village is clearly separated from the city by green belt land and has a strong community spirit. Housing is mixed, with low levels of unemployment. Only 8% of children are on FSM.

A school for the community

The school has approximately 240 children on role. Numbers have remained constant for many years and are expected to continue at this level for the foreseeable future. Nearly all the children transfer into school from the village infant school, with just a few coming from a large estate closer to the city. These are the only two schools in the village and both are highly regarded by, and seen as integral parts of, the community. The headteacher feels that this gives the school a good cross section of pupils from a variety of social backgrounds. Research in New Zealand has suggested that such a school mix has a positive 'cumulative' effect on learning, particularly for those from disadvantaged families (Thrupp, 1999 p124 quoting Rutter et al 1979 p179). Children enter the school having performed at above average levels at the end of Key Stage 1, and the high expectations continue and good results are

achieved. There are few of the problems of disruptive behaviour and special needs demands associated with the schools in more deprived areas.

The headteacher, highly regarded by both the LEA and the community, has been in post for more than 20 years, along with three other members of staff. Three staff have 5 -10 years of teaching experience and two others are recently qualified. The average class size is 30. There is an unusual staffing structure, where curriculum and other responsibilities have not been financially rewarded, the headteacher feeling that to create such posts would be divisive and detract from the 'team' approach. The only teacher on a higher pay scale is the deputy head. This has meant that there are sufficient funds for PPA time to be covered by teachers who had all previously worked full time at the school. This has ensured consistency for the children. They are still regarded as being part of the school 'team' and were also able to stand in for illness and course cover. The way they were used was very flexible and teachers were prepared to bank PPA time owed to them. One disadvantage was that the same teacher took both classes in each year group, meaning that the teachers could not plan together in PPA time.

A spacious site

The school is housed in what was a small, two story, 1950s, CLASP style (see earlier in chapter) secondary school building that was closed within 10 years of opening. There are at present 8 classes. Twelve classes can be accommodated comfortably and there are altogether 16 teaching spaces. The extra spaces are currently used for support activities, group work, library and a community room. The extensive grounds have been creatively developed for environmental studies in the last 20 years and sport is actively promoted on the large playing fields.



A CLASP building and large field

Photographs 6 Waddingworth Junior School

When possible amalgamation of the two village schools was proposed by the LEA several years ago the amount of space that would have been lost, both internally and externally, was one of the deciding factors in the plans being rejected by the governors.

These schools appear to be very different and each carried with it a unique set of circumstances which has impacted directly on the teaching and learning experiences of the children. Nevertheless in continuing to set the context there are identified similarities in the difficulties experienced across the three schools in socially disadvantaged areas which I will now describe. These concerns had a considerable impact on the cross case analysis in later chapters.

6.6 Communities with considerable difficulties

Once the research began it was clear that in the three schools in challenging circumstances there was a more pernicious effect from the loss of employment that was having a devastating effect on the lives of many in these communities. The following account was put together from descriptions by the headteachers interviewed of how the current situation in their communities had arisen.

Previously hard working and prosperous, many ex-miners did not find employment and had a considerable amount of redundancy or early retirement money in their pockets, or were registered as being permanently sick. This was described as 'hidden unemployment' in earlier research into the decline of coalfield communities (Fieldhouse & Hollywood, 1999). One headteacher recounted how the tradition of hard drinking after a day 'down the pit' now became a tradition of drowning sorrows, until the redundancy money ran out. Local services, particularly pubs and shops, rapidly declined and were shut, as had happened elsewhere (CRC, 2006). Drug dealing spread rapidly into the communities. The associated problems have come into the schools, as one teacher, a special needs co-ordinator, explained;

We know that there are alcohol problems, we know there have been domestic violence incidents, at home with a number of children, drugs etc. If somebody comes in on say Monday morning having had a hideous weekend - we had a family recently, where there was a police raid, large quantities of amphetamines were found, massive upheaval, then the house was burned down by the three-year-old: when children come in with that level of despair and need, then often there is a need for emotional first aid (Special needs coordinator).

As John Mann, a local MP, explained in a BBC report in 2002;

The perception is that drugs is an inner city problem, and I'm sure it is an inner city problem, but it's also a problem in former mining communities, what we've seen is the pits shut in the 80s and the early '90s shut over night, and peoples' aspirations have been reduced with that (Watson, 2002).

One headteacher described how firework rockets had been used to signal the arrival of new batches of drugs, which avoided the use mobile phones.

Housing policies have also impacted on the schools and children, as another headteacher explained ;

.... many of those who were involved in drug dealing in the city, when they were re-housed to give them new identities, etc, they were moved out to here. So we have got some families who were involved with the really big dealers, the really big men in the city, who were involved in putting them away and they were brought out to here to start again. Well, it is not really far enough from the city, is it? And that causes problems, but many of our parents have been raided. One of our parents at the moment is awaiting trial, because she was raided on three occasions within a month and huge amounts were found. So, they said that it will be a custodial sentence. So those children will be packed up and sent off to ... (Headteacher).

Further disruptions to employment prospects in the region were caused by the decline of the clothing and textile industries throughout the 1990s, as competition from abroad made the local factories financially unviable. Although not as dramatic as the collapse of the mining industry, it did remove a source of employment that required few if any qualifications and was very local, incurring few transport costs. Isolation from larger conurbations is a significant factor in such communities (CRC, 2006).

Low skills & low pay

A spiral of deprivation had begun. Many of those unfortunate to be caught in it were soon to become parents who needed housing. In all three case study

schools concerns were raised about how families with such problems seemed to be focussed within their localities. Although successful efforts have been made to raise employment levels, today the region is still characterised by low skilled and low paid work;

The East Midlands is trapped in a low skill:low pay equilibrium with relatively high employment rates masking a low value added economy (Harper, 2004).

On the surface these communities and this region do not appear to be struggling, but it is the pockets of deprivation which exist within them that appear to have been ignored or overlooked when government initiatives such as Excellence in Cities (DCSF, 2007b) have attempted to address social decline.

6.7 Different schools, the same expectations

There is across the case studies what Geertz would call an identifiable ‘culture’ of primary schooling. This is clearly associated with the themes identified in Chapter 4. It is the subsequent positioning which appears to have been dealt with in very different ways. By studying four schools it has been possible to develop a cross case analysis which gives further insight into these developments, with strengths and weaknesses found both in individual schools and between them.

Using case study evidence the next chapter considers whether these schools have reached a tipping point in policy implementation, or if they are being hindered by identified ‘tripping points’, influenced by the historical themes discussed earlier. Subsequent chapters further investigate the challenges of

creativity or compliance and the difficulties of categorization and costs found in these schools. The findings are then set into the broader policy context.

Chapter 7 Has the Strategy reached a ‘tipping point’ or are ‘tripping points’ hindering its success?

An education system based on a traditional type of pedagogy can fulfil its function of inculcation only so long as it addresses itself to students equipped with the linguistic and cultural capital – and the capacity to

invest it profitably – which the system presupposes and consecrates without ever expressly demanding it and without methodically transmitting it (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977 p99).

The DfES goal was ‘for every primary school to combine excellence in teaching with enjoyment in learning’ when the Primary National Strategy was introduced (DfES, 2003a). In this chapter I consider whether, from within the large amount of data collected, there was evidence that a ‘tipping point’ (Gladwell, 2000) could be reached in achieving this ambiguous goal (Alexander, 2004), or that could be identified and associated with the successful implementation of the Primary Strategy. Gladwell talks of how little things can make a big difference in achieving a ‘tipping point’. I hoped to be able to identify, during the research period, sufficient evidence of such positive ‘tipping points’ in the case study schools to indicate that government objectives were well on their way to being achieved. To begin with I consider the context of the government standards agenda, before taking into account other factors impacting directly on these schools. I describe two ‘tripping point’ incidents in detail before looking at how further potential ‘tripping points’ influence outcomes for children, particularly those in need of support, and the ability of teachers to teach creatively. In conclusion I consider how, as long as the performative pressures and the under-funded structure remain, these schools will never be able to reach the positive ‘tipping point’ so desired by politicians and policy makers.

7.1 Is the Strategy a tipping point for the case study schools?

In a recent book, *Every School a Great School*, David Hopkins, formerly chief adviser on school standards at the DfES (2002-05), stated his belief that a

‘tipping point’ is being reached in education in England, because of reforms in the last 10 years which, he claims, have significantly improved the standard of student achievement and learning (Hopkins, 2007 p4). In an early evaluation of the Primary Strategy, Ofsted reported that it was having a positive impact but cautioned that ‘while the strategy has improved the teaching of English and mathematics overall, teaching in both subjects still remains no better than satisfactory in one in three lessons’ (Ofsted, 2005e). This does not quite reflect the optimism of Hopkins. Many initiatives associated with the Primary Strategy have only been introduced since September 2005, and their subsequent impact is only now becoming clear. Do these developments support the claims of Hopkins? The case study evidence suggests that this may not be so.

It is worth considering what is meant by a ‘tipping point’. One definition is;

a defining moment in a series of events at which time a series of significant, often momentous and irreversible reactions occur.

(Encarta on-line Dictionary UK)

The biggest problem in attempting to identify a ‘tipping point’ for the Primary Strategy lies within the ambiguity of the original goal itself (Alexander, 2004). Earlier critical documentary analysis revealed excellence was very much to do with standards and performance. Enjoyment, however defined, was subsidiary to the standards agenda. I found that this was very much the situation in the case study schools, with externally imposed targets dominating both practice and future planning. The three schools in challenging circumstances were all being pressurized to achieve 65% base level KS2 targets. Even in the leafy

suburbs, at Waddingworth, staff felt inhibited by SATs pressures. As one Y6 teacher explained;

We've always got those SATs in Year 6, but that seems to build up throughout the school, even from Year 3. That's what they're aiming towards, so there's always that target, how many children at Level 4 by the time they leave Year 6. The pressure is put on lower down the school before they reach that. To be quite honest, it's ridiculous (Y6 teacher).

In this school pupils were achieving well above the national average in SATs, but staff were still expected to ensure results were as high as possible, in order to avoid negative comparisons with other nearby schools, also pushing their children to perform. Lyotard explains how central government has achieved this when he states that ‘...political institutions are not content to know – they legislate. That is they formulate prescriptions that have the status of norms’(Lyotard, 1984 p31). SATs tests are norms which, because of their statutory nature, have permeated all primary schools and are perpetuated by the publication of league tables (DCSF, 2007a). These are also regarded as norms by press and the media. As mentioned in Chapter 2 research in the United States has revealed that such easily monitored statutory reforms tend to persist (Tyack & Cuban, 1995 p57).

So near to a 'tipping point', yet so far

In all of the schools there were positive indicators, identified during the research, which could well be interpreted as creating the right conditions for a ‘tipping point’ to develop. As with the pilot study, headteachers felt that the

introduction of the Primary Strategy through *Excellence and Enjoyment* (DfES, 2003a) had enabled them to encourage staff to be more creative in their thinking, given them more freedom to introduce such things as themed weeks and helped develop a more cross curricular approach. However across the schools a number of common difficulties were identified which were inhibiting more positive developments.

These concerns became apparent as a theme once I began to interrogate my data. I raised a number of questions about various incidents to be considered;

- What was the initial cause of the incident?
- How was the incident dealt with?
- Why did the actors react in the way that they did?
- What was the impact - short and long term?
- What was in place or missing within the incident?
- Was this a ‘tripping point’?
- How many different elements were involved?
- What caused some apparently similar incidents to become ‘tripping points’ and others not?
- Are there different patterns layered into the findings?
- Do the findings have significance for policy makers and practitioners in attempting to achieve a true ‘tripping point’?

Before considering the impact of potential ‘tripping points’ across the schools, I describe in detail two observed incidents and the reasons why the third school in challenging circumstances coped more successfully with similar situations.

7.2 Observed ‘tripping point’ incidents

Incident 1 Lillywhites Junior School

Before school each morning children wait on the playground, lining up to be collected by class teachers when a bell rings. They are led into school to hang up coats etc. before going into the classroom to get out reading books, ready for registration. In this Y4 class of 25 (with no TA support at the start of the day) the teacher talks every morning to the parent of a child with autism, Sam, to gauge his mood. He plays loudly with a model helicopter in the quiet area. Another parent waits to talk to the teacher. Her child has an inherited growth disorder. Mum herself struggles with everyday parenting skills and need regular reassurance from the teacher. The atmosphere is not quiet and is punctuated by helicopter noise. A number of children are agitated, going in and out of the cloakroom. According to the children, John and Martha are refusing to come into class because Martha's older brother is in trouble. Between talking to the parents, the teacher tells the children not to worry and that they'll be in soon.

A few minutes later Martha's mum appears at the door and shouts across the room to the teacher that Martha will be in real trouble if she does it again. Martha does not appear. In the corridor the Y4 TA, who works with two classes, is asked by the head to monitor the two children but not to intervene. John taps at the window and the teacher tells the class to ignore him. He also disturbs a group now working in another room, including the autistic boy, Sam, who spends most of the rest of the session at the window trying find out what John wants.

Five minutes later the head and John's mum, sporting a black eye, appear briefly. They are not pursuing John. One of the children tells me

that John's dad has been in prison a lot and that is why John is like he is. The teacher quietly informs me that it took dad an hour to get into school from the local pub last week to collect John. About 15 minutes later John can be seen riding a bike around the playground. The head appears to tell the children to use the smaller playground at break time, away from John. After a quiet break the class resumes and John and Martha appear at the window again, but soon disappear. The assistant head reports that she has removed the bike. At 11.30 the two children leave the premises. The TA returns to the other class by 11.45, having informed the head of their departure.

Repercussions from this included; John being excluded for two days and Martha being put into another class. During the re-admission meeting John hid underneath a pile of coats in the cloakroom. The deputy head spent a long time talking to him there.

Following the re-admission meeting the headteacher came into the staffroom emotionally exhausted. He asked "What more can you do with John?" He asked other staff what they knew about the father's relationships – apparently he has children 'all over town'. The deputy head commented that alcohol is the root of the problem for both parents. A Core Group support meeting had been arranged for 4.00 pm on Friday – after an inset day! The head complained that John can't learn because of the baggage and it stops others learning. He looks at the clock and is concerned that two hours of the morning have already gone.

Incident 2 Tillbridge Primary School

Towards the end of the literacy hour the 14 children in the Y3 class are asked to get into pairs to read and discuss a poem verse for 5 minutes.

The teacher and the TA, who works with the class every morning, are present. The session to this point has been very successful.

Jim, a good reader, refuses to work with anybody. He isolates himself, resting his head on his arms at a table in another part of the room. The TA very calmly asks if he would like to join her. He replies “No” and his head goes down again. The TA does not challenge this and quietly creates a group of three to work together. The teacher, having made sure that everyone else is on task, goes to Jim without fuss, puts her arm around him and talks very gently, asking if he is alright. Jim agrees that although not very happy he will read the verse on his own. By this time the task has been completed and the children successfully report back before being asked to go out to play quietly. Jim makes his way out, with reassurance from the teacher.

After playtime the children walk back into class with the teacher. The TA, who has been on duty, also comes in and starts talking with the teacher. Jim, sitting very near to them, starts shouting at the TA “You’re a liar. You’re a liar.” Apparently, the playground gate onto the street had been left open. Another person who should have been on duty had forgotten, leaving the TA on her own. She closed the gate but a Y6 boy opened it and went out of school. Jim also went out, later claiming that he was telling the other boy to come back in. This was the reason for the liar accusations. Jim was very challenging to the teacher and the TA, refusing to calm down or listen. It was only when the teacher threatened to call the headteacher using the intercom that he sat

down again with his head on his arms. Ten minutes into the numeracy session he joined the rest of the class on the carpet.

Three minutes later the TA was called to help with someone in the next class 'being silly'. A few moments later two TAs carry a Y4 pupil into the classroom, one on each arm. He is totally limp and un-cooperative. He is placed at a table away from where the class is working. It is a large room, made from two smaller classrooms, so the Y4 pupil, Morgan, can only be seen by the teacher. He starts rattling chairs and making silly noises. He only settles down when informed by the teacher that there will be a phone call home if he continues.

When the class have been given tasks to complete the teacher spends 7-8 minutes talking to Morgan, while the TA works with the class. At 11.40 Morgan's one to one afternoon support TA arrives. Morgan is taken out. The last 10 minutes of the session go well, until Jim starts challenging the teacher again when the class talk about lunchtime behaviour. As the class leave, only the threat, once more, of phoning either the head or his mum has any effect. He says that mum would put him in the room with the mice and he would not like that. He goes with the TA to lunch, avoiding the playground, as the teacher rushes out to take netball, a lunchtime club.

Leaving the session I walk back towards the staffroom and meet the headteacher who informs me that the school has just received a letter putting it into the 'Hard to Shift' category. She looks shocked.

Common Problems

In both of these incidents the children concerned came from very difficult backgrounds. John's father and mother had drink problems and were often in

trouble with the police. Martha was a step-sister living in the same house, but not directly related to John. Jim had three ‘dads’ in as many years. He had a younger brother and sister with different fathers. His mother had just started a new relationship. Morgan was ‘out of control at home’, the youngest of three children without a father present. His mother was on medication for depression.

In each incident, observed staff had attempted to be calm and not reactive. This was time-consuming, meaning that academic support for other children was abandoned to cope with behavioural problems. TA support was withdrawn to monitor John and Martha. Hours of senior management team time were spent attempting to resolve the problem. Only the teacher had the skills to negotiate with Jim, which took her away from the class. Having to deal with similar problems was a regular occurrence in all three schools.

Different Expectations

The incident which led to Morgan being carried into the class was slightly different. His teacher had 15 years experience, but interview data showed some anxiety;

I think overall, the behaviour is definitely lacking. There isn't the support, so we rely, very much, on each other and feel sometimes as though, when we take problems elsewhere, we are the ones that are being blamed for it (Morgan's teacher).

Much of the ‘support’ was punitive and children were expected to conform, no matter what emotional difficulties they had. This teacher placed a definite emphasis on ‘getting things done’ (Pollard, Triggs, Broadfoot, McNess, & Osborn, 2000 quoted in; Robinson & Fielding, 2007 p6) irrespective of the emotional needs of the children. Once moved, Morgan was treated very calmly.

The incidents with Jim and Morgan were not followed up because of the arrival of the 'Hard to Shift' letter, which distracted everyone over the next few weeks.

John, Martha and Jim all 'kicked off' at times when they were out of class and had little to do, with few adults close by. In both schools there were staffing pressures. Available support time was targeted on improving literacy and numeracy outcomes, in an attempt to meet government targets. Other times during the school day, where emotional difficulties were likely to surface, received little or no support. In Tillbridge a notable exception to this was the breakfast club, attended by almost a quarter of the children daily, which had a very welcoming atmosphere. This gave those attending a very positive start to the day. However for others, before school, playtimes and lunchtimes were all potential 'tripping points'. In Lillywhites, there was a nurture group which supported children with severe behavioural or learning difficulties. This removed 7 or 8 children from 'the maelstrom' of unsupervised time and teachers felt that it improved the learning atmosphere to some extent in classrooms. Unfortunately, according to the headteacher, there were another 30+ children that would benefit, who now struggle to receive any support.

7.3 The number and quality of staff matter

Barlingtown Primary School was different

The exceptional circumstances of this school meant that it was not only well staffed, with three extra members of the SMT (Senior Management Team) and full time TAs in every class, but most staff were also of high quality. They had both the time and ability to consider incidents and were able to put into place a

variety of diffusing strategies. There were sufficient staff to deal with most difficulties effectively and positively when they arose.

A different start to the day

Children did not have to wait outside before school. The doors were opened at 8.45 am, 15 minutes before registration time. Children made their way in and began daily start up activities, open ended tasks which challenged them to think. In the Y4 class the TA was able to meet and greet the children and sit with them to begin the start up. The class teacher also welcomed children and encouraged them to record their reading homework on a wall chart, as well as talking briefly with parents as they arrived. The special needs TA talked to the parent of a child with autism that she worked with. Two members of the SMT were also in the corridor and able to talk with children and parents as they arrived. The literacy lesson began at 9.05 am. Connor arrived shortly afterwards. The class TA was still able to warmly welcome him and get him settled in and up to date with the lesson. Connor, his brother and two sisters had had special provision, arranged with Social Services, to go to the breakfast club every morning at 8.30 am. They had only managed to get there once in six months.

In the leafy suburbs

In the school in the leafy suburbs no tripping points were observed. One child, who stood on a toilet seat to look into the next cubicle, had been seen by the teacher, and had had to stand outside the heads' door to be 'shamed' by all the staff walking past. These children could wait on the playground, could line up,

could listen (even to uninspiring lessons), and were always expected to do the ‘right thing’. Their standards and achievement were good.

7.4 Identified ‘tripping points’: my contribution to the evidence

Evidence of barriers to learning and achievement were observed in a variety of situations in the three other schools. Sometimes issues seemed to be managed very positively and successfully, and on other occasions incidents became more problematic, with far reaching consequences going right to the heart of the claimed intentions of the Primary Strategy. The identification of these complex incidents, in schools where inherent difficulties have restricted research access, is a significant contribution to the evidence base.

Below are tables of the identified tripping points taken from the case study field notes, conversations and interviews. From the data a number of incidents which had the potential to develop into ‘tripping points’ were identified. Some appeared subtle or short term in their influence (table 1). It is of note that very few such incidents became tripping points at Barlingtown where there were sufficient staff and resources to maintain the learning environment. However the cumulative effect of other tripping points could possibly have a more serious long term impact on learning environments. These are identified in the table 2 .

Of immediate impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extreme behaviour, regularly, of a small minority absorbing time and resources otherwise available for those with learning difficulties <p>Evidence from field notes (the impact of 12 specific incidents observed) & interviews</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dealing with urgent needs of parents (whether challenging, aggressive, personal or with concerns that need time) <p>Each morning during classroom observations at Lillywhites and Tillbridge where there were insufficient staff to meet parental needs (20 morning sessions observed)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Withdrawing TA (Teaching Assistant) support to cover another class with little notice in order to maintain stability <p>Evidence from classroom observations at Lilywhites and Tillbridge (6 incidents) , interviews (8 teachers 4 TAs) & conversations with TAs (6).</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers demanding their statutory entitlement to PPA (Preparation, Planning and Assessment) time regardless of circumstances <p>Evidence from Headteacher interviews in all four schools. 1 or 2 staff in each school</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff illness disrupting daily routines and TA support for children <p>Evidence from interviews and informal conversations with 8 TAs. Cover policy using TAs evident in Headteacher interviews at Lillywhites and Tillbridge. Even Barlingtown struggled with cover on one day when four teachers were ill.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vandalism & police involvement taking staff away from classes <p>Four incidents observed at Lillywhites and Tillbridge</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Urgent Social Services referrals & involvement taking staff away from classes <p>Noted 6 times at Lillywhites andTillbridge. Barlingtown coped without disruption</p>

Table 3 Identified short term tripping points

Medium/Long term impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Larger classes and less TA support, in order to manage PPA cover, impacting on day to day learning support of the most needy. This had already happened at Lillywhites and Tillbridge where Full time TA classroom support was no longer financially sustainable, much to the regret of all interviewees. It was being considered at Barlingtown.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frustration of following ISP (Intensifying Support Programme) routines and SATs targets limiting creativity Four interviewed class teachers at Lillywhites expressed frustration at ISP but two senior management were more positive. All interviewed staff at Tillbridge expressed concerns. In all four schools every interviewee found SATs targets limiting.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theft & vandalism affecting development of outdoor learning environments. Capital funding was being spent on security measures at all three schools in disadvantaged areas rather than in developing more creative outdoor activities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redundancy threats counteracting planning for long term support of needy children and demoralising staff. Concerns expressed by all staff at Barlingtown.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Threat of Ofsted phone call inhibiting spontaneity of teachers. This was evident in all the schools in interviews and conversations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEF (Self Evaluation Form) for Ofsted changing priorities for Senior Management. All senior staff and heads raised concerns in every school.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time spent working with other agencies, fund chasing and accommodating further government initiatives (eg. Assessing Pupil Progress (APP) Problematic at Lillywhites and Tillbridge. Becoming a concern at Barlingtown as budget cuts beginning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heightened security inhibiting independent movement of children around school at all three schools in disadvantaged areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative Ofsted reports, both of the school and of feeder secondary schools causing drift away of pupils in disadvantaged schools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Press criticism of the locality discouraging prospective parents in disadvantaged areas. Despite transformation even Barlingtown was struggling to regain a good reputation

Table 4 Identified medium/long term tripping points

In the next part of this chapter I consider in more detail the effects of these various events.

7.5 ‘Tripping points’ of immediate impact

- ***Disruptive behaviour, regularly, of a small minority absorbing time and resources otherwise available for those with learning difficulties***

As well as the two incidents described in detail, more obvious disruption included; fighting with a new pupil at break time; victimising children of migrant workers²²; refusing to come inside at the end of break; running out of school; not co-operating with midday staff. At the same time, managing children with autism stretched staff resources. Low level disruption in classrooms, particularly when TA support was absent, caused further difficulties. The reaction of teachers and TAs to such difficulties was very different. As in the example of Morgan, some expected children to be compliant and to conform without reaction and would escalate the incident if this did not happen, causing further problems, absorbing the time of more support staff and teachers. Others would deal with incidents very gently, diffusing the situation, allowing the child to calm down and eventually re-integrate into the class or to be quietly withdrawn to get support elsewhere.

Much of this difference was due to the reaction of individual staff. Some did not seem prepared to follow the ethos of the school in following a consistent pattern of addressing behaviour issues. All three schools had very positive behaviour policy statements, but practice did not always reflect this. During an interview one headteacher highlighted the difficulties and frustration when a child passing the office said that he was on his way to the ‘punishment hall’.

The subsequent remarks of headteacher were revealing;

²² During the research period there were 3 Lithuanian and 2 Polish children at Lillywhites, 2 Estonian children at Barlingtown and 3 Polish children at Tillbridge.

Who is it that called it the punishment hall? That's the very first time I've ever heard it called the punishment hall. That makes me almost incandescent with rage. I need to go to the punishment hall, because I want to have a stop. So what was set up as a time out space for children to have a cooling down period had there been any issues, has now become a punishment hall. That needs to go on my agenda for staff meeting tonight, because that really does concern me. I've never called it the punishment hall, SMT have never called it the punishment hall. So where does that label come from? That's worrying, that worries me. That really does worry me and I'm putting it down for the staff meeting and for the staff bulletin. Because punishment hall, it is the same as, I've still got it, I am still battling, there are two members of staff, who still make comments like - this child shouldn't do that, they shouldn't do that, they shouldn't be able to do that, that isn't acceptable. Well yes, it isn't, and they shouldn't, but look at the child's background, look at the problems the child's had and let's see how we can help them, rather than saying that child shouldn't do that therefore he should be sent home (Headteacher).

This school, although well resourced and funded, still had difficulties with some staff not putting into practice what had been mutually agreed as policy. It is clear from this that simply increasing staffing and resources does not necessarily change attitudes. The problem of creating a positive learning environment for children with challenging behaviour is complex and requires very skilful management by all involved, as the headteacher comments showed. The current, narrow, data driven government agenda does not help, as these schools feel vulnerable to criticism of their performance, leading some

staff to feel that they would be better off without certain children. A member of another SMT was concerned about consistency, but also felt that some children caused too many problems;

Some people will let some things go and other people will say that's not acceptable and I think because we are not consistent that has a knock-on effect on the behaviour. That's something that we need to work on, but that's part of our inclusive policy, which I think sometimes is greatly to our detriment, because I think we are too inclusive, and we put up with things that we didn't ought to put up with (Assistant Head).

This teacher was responsible for monitoring assessment throughout the school and felt that the percentage of pupils achieving Level 4 in KS 2 SATs would be much higher without these children. Again, government policy on floor level targets is clearly influential here (Ainscow, Conteh, Dyson, & Gallanaugh, 2007 p9). Pressure to meet Strategy targets dominated. Interview analysis revealed a direct link to behaviour concerns impacting negatively at Lillywhites and Tillbridge, whereas at Barlingtown, with more staff and resources, staff were positive about on-going improvements in behaviour, although they admitted that they “*still had a long way to go*”.

- ***Dealing with urgent needs of parents (whether challenging, aggressive, personal or with concerns that need time)***

In two schools no start up activities were set out for children. They were brought into school for registration and expected to sit quietly and read, or to fill in reading diaries during this time. TA support, targeted at literacy and numeracy, did not start until after registration and finished before the end of the morning session, saving 5 hours per week for each TA in salary costs. Support

often involved withdrawing a group of children from class to work in another room. One morning, in a Y4 class, a parent came in with the children concerned that her daughter had lost her glasses. This rapidly became a heated exchange in the classroom with the parent saying to the teacher that; *“This is not the first time that this has happened and I want something done about it.”* The teacher was not able to help search for the glasses or to placate the parent, who left shaking her head after searching her daughters’ drawer. The children were not on task and required attention and were waiting for registration. At the same time, as she arrived, the TA had been called out to deal with a problem with another parent and child, witnessed on the school yard the previous evening. The group that should have been going with her, after registration, had nothing to do and became restless. The teachers’ preparation was disrupted by the parent and it took until 9.15 am to complete registration and for the class to settle down. The planned guided reading did not take place. The teacher spent 10 minutes with the class looking at their ISP targets before the TA returned at 9.27 am and took her group away.

In Barlingtown School systems had been established to encourage parents to come into the Key Stage 2 area each morning. Doors were opened and start up activities ready for children (and parents) 20 minutes before the official start of the day. It was policy that staff throughout the school should be available at this time. Any immediate needs of parents could be addressed by one of the members of the team. As one parent commented *“We know that there will always be someone available to talk to.”* This created a very smooth transition at the start of the day. Even the one or two habitually late children were still able to be greeted supportively by TAs, as described earlier.

This illustrates how these schools had different priorities. One was very concerned to create a calm and welcoming start to the school day with all staff ready and prepared. In the other two, a different approach, with TA hours focussed on literacy and numeracy, appeared less successful in welcoming parents and creating a learning atmosphere. Both of these headteachers explained that external pressure to improve SATs results and limited resources had caused them to focus TAs on the 'basics'. Here was evidence of the imbalance identified in *Excellence and Enjoyment* clearly affecting pastoral care.

Excellence and Enjoyment almost seems to be in denial when it comes to challenging circumstances. It talks of joined up services and supporting parents with difficulties. One small statement about making this happen is revealing;

5.5... in making sure parents get the help they need with barriers to their involvement that are not obviously linked to education, like housing or drug problems (DfES, 2003a).

Housing and drug problems are very clearly linked to difficulties in education (Hirsch, 2007; Lister, 2004). One head expressed concerns that such difficulties might be hidden to the casual observer;

...it doesn't look so bad, does it? Unless you get round to the back streets where you see the burnt out cars, and you see the state of some of the houses that these children are living in, you can have no concept of what these children are going through. I think the problem with many of our families, is that they have never been in full-time work, because the mines have been closed for so many years now and they are young families, they've never had a job and there doesn't seem to be

any opportunity for a job on the horizon. So many of these have never ever been in full-time employment, and actually they haven't got, you know, that working class ideal or that working-class philosophy of the kids will be scrubbed, the kids will be clean, the kids will be well fed, and okay. You tell me they're in trouble, and I'll give them a bloody good hiding at home (Headteacher).

All three case study schools in challenging circumstances had very obvious examples of such associated problems.

- ***Withdrawing TA (Teaching Assistant) support to cover another class with little notice, in order to maintain stability***

A common theme across all of the schools was maintaining stability for the children when the class teacher was otherwise engaged. This is now a regular weekly occurrence, because of PPA time, and schools had planned to ensure consistency of cover. However, difficulties were identified when TAs were used in unexpected circumstances, such as illness cover or for management time. In one school the TAs assigned to the Y5 & 6 classes were both HLTAs and were training to become teachers. They were frequently used to cover classes with little notice, causing frustration for the newly qualified Y5 teacher, responsible for working with a lower ability maths set. This contained a number of children with behavioural and learning difficulties that the TA was meant to work with on a daily basis. However this was not the case, as in the words of the teacher – *“At the moment I am lucky to see her once a week.”* These children were not consistently receiving their planned support. They were not expected to reach Level 4 in SATs and were not being extended when

the TA was absent. Learning opportunities for the rest of the set were also being compromised as this group was not easy for the teacher to manage.

The authors of *Excellence and Enjoyment* talk of the creative use of staff through the opportunities created by workforce reform (DfES, 2003a p68) and manage to link this to curriculum enrichment (p66). Although used creatively to maintain stability, this role for TAs was observed to have a negative effect on curriculum support for children. There were not enough staff to fulfil both roles.

- ***Teachers demanding their statutory entitlement to PPA (Preparation, Planning and Assessment) time regardless of circumstances***

Some teachers were inflexible, with an expectation that they would get PPA time every week, even though the rest of the school might be struggling to cover classes. The consequences of this were that TAs were withdrawn from class support for PPA cover, unknown supply teachers were brought in (at great expense) and smaller classes were merged and managed by an amalgam of sports coaches and TAs. Once again this resulted in those children needing the most support missing out. Another consequence of weekly PPA time was that some teachers did not work with colleagues planning and preparing learning experiences. They worked in isolation because there were not enough resources to allow other teachers and TAs to be released to work together. When an HLTA that did PPA cover was ill the cost of putting a supply teacher in to those classes almost doubled PPA costs, if no other TA was available. The schools did not have sufficient budget reserves for such circumstances.

As an outside observer, with a long experience of primary schools, including being an advisory teacher visiting more than 50 schools each year for 4 years, this was one of the more disturbing pieces of evidence. The statutory nature of PPA time, when allied to inflexibility, appeared to be giving power and credibility to exactly the sort of staff whose reluctance to change has inhibited innovation and curriculum development in primary schools throughout the 20th Century (Alexander, 2000; English et al., 2002; Galton et al., 1999).

Such teachers are not ‘socially critical’ (Morrison, 1989) and certainly do not put the priorities of *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2004d) to the fore. This self-centredness undermines the ethos of teamwork and co-operation essential to develop and maintain an exciting and innovative learning environment, something that should be at the heart of the very best primary schools (DfES, 2003a p15).

Time to prepare, to plan and to assess (PPA time) has been introduced to ‘deliver’. However, the costs and consequences have not been thought through. Little consideration has been given to how appropriate that delivery is, or the damage of inflexibility in developing a creative learning environment. For some teachers it is a case of excellence in planning and enjoyment in being out of the classroom. This was not the vision of *Excellence and Enjoyment*.

- ***Staff illness disrupting daily routines and TA support for children***

Whenever a teacher or TA was ill there was very little scope or leeway for adapting the structure to ensure that support for children remained in place, except at Barlingtown where staff felt they were ‘very lucky’ with their resources. In the other schools the first action in coping with unexpected teacher illness was to put two TAs into the class, away from their usual support

activities. With no insurance cover for the first two days of illness this arrangement usually lasted for that time. Even if the head was able to get other supply TAs to cover in classes, they would not be familiar with the routines and support needs of the children. Again through no fault of their own these were the children that suffered. As the DfES stated in *Excellence and Enjoyment*, 'We know that our strategy cannot succeed if it is not properly resourced' (DfES, 2003a p72). Clearly there are serious questions here about how well resourced these schools are.

- ***Vandalism & police involvement taking staff away from classes***

In one school a considerable amount of vandalism took place during my time there, including climbing onto roofs and smearing security paint over classroom windows, breaking down fences, damaging gardens and breaking windows. Some intruders were seen by teachers and TAs who had to make individual statements to the police in school time, once more disrupting learning activities. Arrests were made. What was surprising was the amount of time such vandalism took up, even though the schools did their very best to carry on as normal. This links with the next concern.

- ***Urgent Social Services referrals & involvement taking staff away from classes***

When families were in difficulties, or if disclosure of abuse was reported, Social Services expected to be immediately involved. The needs of the individual child or family involved at this point took precedence over class activities. During my time in the three schools in challenging circumstances, staff were urgently called away from class to talk with Social Services on more than one occasion. Only at Barlingtown did this cause little disruption. In the

other schools group and individual support was abandoned at short notice, leaving either a TA or the teacher to manage the whole class with little or no preparation.

Working with other agencies is a very important part of both *Excellence and Enjoyment* and subsequently *Every Child Matters*. What was of concern was the amount of time this took which disrupted the learning experiences of the children. At Barlingtown, the one school that was temporarily well staffed and resourced, a member of the senior management team (SMT) was the special needs co-ordinator. This teacher worked with other agencies and parents every morning and covered classes for PPA time in the afternoons. This person was very difficult to pin down for interview because of the workload, but classes were not disrupted as this teacher and other non-class based SLT members, including the head, had time to work with these other agencies.

7.6 ‘Survival mode’ caused by short term ‘tripping points’

The structure of literacy and numeracy lessons, as well as the ISP and Hard to Shift initiatives, requires detailed planning and preparation, with whole class inputs followed by targeted teacher and TA group work and individual support and concluding with a plenary session. This leaves classes, teachers and TAs very vulnerable to interruptions where staffing is already pared down to a minimum, as was the case in two of the case study schools. When one of the adults leaves the class it then goes into what one teacher described as ‘*survival mode*’. Support structures for those children struggling with learning were the first to be affected, bringing into question how ‘secure’ these children are in their school experiences. A constant theme from staff in all of the schools was that because of their backgrounds the children needed to feel secure. It is ironic

that the imposed structure, allied to a lack of resources and external demands, undermines this. These children seemed to accept missing out without fuss, as if it was no more than they expected. As an external observer this attitude was of great concern to me. Other contingencies were already in place to manage those children with severe emotional or behavioural difficulties, but the ‘silent minority’ always seemed to be the first to miss out.

These children, achieving below Level 3 in KS2 SATs, are clearly identified as needing considerable support in *Excellence and Enjoyment*;

4.6. we have developed a model of intervention for children experiencing difficulties in literacy or mathematics, based on three waves:

The first wave, already mentioned, was for all children to receive high quality literacy and numeracy lessons. The next two waves proved more problematic in the case study schools;

Wave Two: Small group, low-cost intervention – for example, booster classes, springboard programmes, or other programmes linked to the National Strategies, like Early Literacy Support (ELS).

Wave Three: Specific targeted intervention for pupils identified as requiring special educational needs support (DfES, 2003a p41).

In two schools ‘Waves Two and Three’ children were not getting enough regular support to make a positive impact on learning experiences over time.

7.7 Medium/long term ‘tripping points’

- ***Larger classes and less TA support, in order to manage PPA cover, impacting on day to day learning support of the most needy***

In the pilot study, immediately before the introduction of PPA time, headteachers expressed concerns about funding. Measures taken in one school included creating two larger classes from three smaller ones and reducing the amount of TA support available. In all of the case study schools long term budgeting for PPA time was still a problem. During the research period the experience of Barlingtown was very positive with SMT staff covering for PPA time, but the ‘transition’ budget was being cut, larger classes were being planned and the number of TAs was being reduced. At Lillywhites staffing reductions had already happened and smaller classes merged. Most now had about 30 children in them. Full time TA support had been abandoned a year earlier. It was now down to between 5 -10 hours support per week shared between two classes. Every person interviewed mentioned how beneficial it had been to have two adults permanently in the classes, in line with other research into the role of TAs (Groom & Rose, 2005; Hancock, Swann, Marr, & Turner, 2001). At Tillbridge, although it was initially stated by the head that classes had full time TA support, this was not really the case. In KS 2 TAs were limited to support for literacy and numeracy in the mornings and their hours were reduced accordingly. In the afternoons support was channelled towards PPA cover, with classes being merged, but with only one TA. Five out of 9 TAs were on full time contracts, but three of these were for statemented children who needed full time individual support, paid for by the local

authority. The other two were the senior TA, who worked in KS1 and did their PPA cover and the nursery TA. There was no full time TA support for any KS2 classes. At Waddingworth classes were large but little support was needed. There were two full time TAs for 8 classes. One was also the special needs co-ordinator.

Excellence and Enjoyment called for a creative approach to staff management. This evidence suggests that much of this creativity has instead become an exercise in logistics, with schools having insufficient staff to address the social and emotional needs of many children.

- ***Frustration of having to follow ISP (Intensifying Support Programme) routines limiting creativity***

In interviews frustrations were expressed by teachers about having to follow the ISP programme;

And if you're also trying to drive things it can take over, if you allow it to, it can take over. If you're trying to broaden the curriculum and give your children lots of experiences, then in many ways it narrows it because you're setting your six weekly targets, looking at the whole school layered targets, driving the children forward and staff quite naturally wail -- well, how can I do this in the time allotted? (Headteacher).

...we do focus on the children and their attainment, but it's only in isolated areas, that's the trouble about ISP, it's not the be all and end all to it. It's just focusing on certain areas isn't it? And they are good at doing what they are doing at the time, but it's retaining it (Deputy Head).

I could possibly argue the case that I think that Excellence and Enjoyment might be more beneficial, but the powers that be, wouldn't see it that way

and we have to do it. Our hands are tied on the ISP, we have no choice. It was put on us and we were told that we were doing it (Y4 teacher).

Many similar comments were made about how time consuming ISP was and on several occasions, particularly at Tillbridge, it was used as an explanation for not being involved in more creative days or weeks. At Lillywhites great efforts were being made with creative events but they were isolated from other areas of curriculum development. Two teachers explained their frustration in different ways;

Yes the French week did work very well ... and I suppose as I was saying... that it was more coming off a sort of stated curriculum as such and that is obviously where your Excellence and Enjoyment should be going and globalising everything and bringing it in together. I think we just get hemmed in to feeling like – oh God – boxes. It's trying to get away from the boxes (Y4 teacher).

So whilst on the one hand, there are quite liberating statements in the Primary Strategy, because of our position and our statistical context, alongside those liberating messages that you are getting, there is also an iron hand in a velvet glove, shall we say (Y6 teacher).

At Barlingtown, as mentioned above, creative days, weeks and even longer periods were at the heart of curriculum developments and supported ISI work. Waddingworth did not have an externally imposed support structure as results were well above floor target levels. In these two schools there was less frustration and much more evidence of 'excellence in teaching and enjoyment in learning' although concerns about externally imposed targets were still clearly evident and inhibiting the creativity of some teachers.

- ***Theft & vandalism affecting development of outdoor learning environments***

Security is a big issue in primary schools. The arrival of New Labour money for security has seen fencing erected across the country, supposed to make school sites less vulnerable to intruders. Instead, in the case study schools, whilst it has made sites more secure for keeping children on the premises (a necessity when coping with some autistic children and others with behavioural difficulties) it has caused problems for children being able to work outside classrooms. One school had only key access to all external doors and these were never left open, two laptops and a handbag having been stolen only weeks before my visit. Another was battling to establish an environmental area but wooden fencing and seats had been broken and attempts made to burn them. This was not in a secure area. In the third a climbing wall had been damaged several times because secondary school students passing through the site, on a short cut, regularly undid safety bolts securing the footholds, using equipment borrowed from their school. None of the schools could leave anything valuable outside unless it was chained down. Plants and gardens were regularly damaged.

Excellence and Enjoyment makes no mention of outside learning environments. Under New Labour considerable capital funds have been allocated. Security of buildings has been addressed and the security of premises attempted. Unfortunately, in the case study schools, they have become barriers to learning opportunities, containing children in classrooms and inhibiting movement around buildings. The socio-economic difficulties of their localities were seen to be impacting negatively on the school environments. At Waddingworth, in the leafy suburbs, no such barriers existed. Opportunities for outside learning

were encouraged. Children, already more privileged, were further able to enhance their learning experiences in the school grounds and gardens. Such differences perpetuate 'the acceptable face of state education' for middle class parents (Vincent & Ball, 2006 p152).

- ***Redundancy threats and changing roles counteracting planning for long term support of needy children and demoralising staff***

Staff working with children with learning difficulties, particularly those without a legal entitlement to support, were frustrated by the threat of redundancy, or the reduction in their hours and by their changing role, associated with workforce reform, removing them from working with individuals and groups of children (Gunter, 2007). As one explained when talking about redundancy pressures;

Every February, this is going to happen. It's just going to fall apart, because I don't think you can take it for that many times before you start walking away and thinking well. I tried, but... (TA).

Most children benefitting from support do not have a statutory entitlement to it, despite the introduction of personalised learning. This support is expendable. One TA, already having to do PPA cover for two afternoons a week, was not happy with her changing role;

I don't want PPA cover. If I wanted to concentrate on teaching, I would do teaching. I see PPA cover as teaching. It's not what I want to be doing. I would sooner be supporting children doing group work, and focusing on the social, and that side, all the autism ... (TA).

It is ironic that the most effective TAs, those willing and able to teach, are being expected to cover classes and, as funding declines, it is the original

support role for children which is reduced, further compounding the difficulties. Falling roles and the associated budgetary reductions take little account of the needs of children with difficulties remaining in the schools. It is not surprising staff were demoralised.

- ***Threat of Ofsted phone call inhibiting spontaneity of teachers***

The pressures of the imposed initiatives, ISI , ISP and Hard to Shift, allied to the expectation of a phone call warning of an imminent Ofsted inspection caused considerable anxiety amongst staff and, for some, a reluctance to abandon prescribed structures and lessons previously planned. As one teacher explained;

We had to be... making ourselves appear and feel that we were on the right track so that in light of the 'Big O' appearing in the doorway we would be able to justify completely what we were doing but that was in a kind of slightly more staid way I suppose (Y4 teacher).

Other research suggests that there is already evidence of reluctance in some teachers to change or move away from established methods and routines (Alexander, 2000; Earl et al., 2003; Ofsted, 2003). It may well be that this is just the latest in a long line of excuses for teachers not prepared, or confident enough, to think for themselves or to challenge imposed routines. However this evidence suggests that for some teachers it may be a lack of support and guidance, when the school is under pressure, which undermines their confidence. This results in a reliance on the 'getting things done' approach (Robinson & Fielding, 2007), mentioned earlier, devoid of any innovation or creativity, in the mistaken belief that this is what Ofsted wants to see. Unfortunately the pressure to perform to meet targets was deeply embedded in

Excellence and Enjoyment and the new data driven Ofsted inspections, introduced in September 2005, have further entrenched the ‘terrors of performativity’ (Ball, 2003). This links in closely with the next area of concern.

- ***SEF (Self Evaluation Form) for Ofsted changing priorities for Senior Management***

Despite claims by the DfES that, once completed, the SEF would not be excessively bureaucratic to update (Ofsted, 2004), since 2005, it has had a considerable impact on the case study schools. Rapidly changing circumstances such as school closure, redundancies, government initiatives such as ISP and Hard to Shift, along with mid-year publication of SATs results and the introduction of school profiles, the arrival of SIPs (School Improvement Partners)²³ and the ever present threat of an imminent inspection meant that the headteachers in the schools in challenging circumstances were concerned to keep their SEFs up to date. This is how one deputy head described the situation;

So your SEF has got to keep changing, and that I think is the problem because if you don't change your SEF as the changes take place in school and OFSTED read it and they come in and they say well you've written that you do this and actually you don't and so they're saying to

²³ ‘A school improvement partner (SIP) provides professional challenge and support to the school, helping its leadership to evaluate its performance, identify priorities for improvement, and plan effective change’ (DCSF) <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk>. A more realistic view is that a SIP usually visits the school 3 times annually and manages the performance related pay of headteachers. SEF data is used at these meetings. A report is presented to the governing body by the SIP as to whether the headteacher has met agreed targets for the year. Governors then decide if a pay increment is awarded.

the head that you don't know what's going off in your school (Deputy Head).

All three heads reported spending several days each term working on the SEF with their SMTs, governors and LA inspectors (now SIPs). Once more it was the emphasis on standards driven analytical data, and the interpretation of it, which proved very time consuming because of the circumstances these schools were in. The DCSF call this challenge. The headteachers felt they had less time to directly influence teaching and learning because of the SEF. Also, as if to emphasise the necessity for keeping the SEF up to date, following an Ofsted inspection schools receiving a satisfactory overall judgement but ‘underperforming’ in certain areas, as happened with one case study school, have in their report an inbuilt warning that;

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit from an Ofsted inspector before their next Section 5 inspection.²⁴

Further to this the TES has reported proposals from Christine Gilbert, Chief Inspector of Schools, in a forthcoming review of inspections, for all such ‘satisfactory’ schools to be visited annually, whilst ‘good’ schools may not be visited for 6 years (Lepkowska, 2008), further emphasising the importance of SEF data.

Quite what happened between *Excellence and Enjoyment* mentioning the new inspection framework for September 2003, which required;

²⁴ This statement is found in Ofsted Section 5 full inspection reports, across the country, where the overall grade is satisfactory. <http://www.Ofsted.gov.uk/reports/>

2.38... inspectors to evaluate the extent to which the curriculum ‘provides a broad range of worthwhile curricular opportunities that caters for the interests, aptitudes and particular needs of all pupils ... (and also) encouraging schools to use their own professional judgements, and make full use of curriculum flexibilities, in order to take ownership of the curriculum (DfES, 2003a).

... and September 2005 when a further new data driven framework was introduced is an area of research which should be investigated, but is beyond the remit of this study. However it is clear that the identified dominance of excellence in *Excellence and Enjoyment* had by 2005 become the reality of Ofsted inspection, despite the earlier rhetoric.

- ***Time spent working with other agencies, including fund chasing***

The headteachers had developed roles as entrepreneurs in their attempts to raise funds to keep their schools on an even keel financially. This was particularly the case with the schools in challenging circumstances. One school had obtained funding for their breakfast club from three different sources in the last five years and was currently looking for another funding source. As the headteacher explained;

Every time a bid runs out, I have to seek another way of supporting it, but we heavily subsidise it, so instead of charging say the people a pound per child per day, we only charge half that, because the people who need the breakfast are the people who can't afford it. So, currently we are seeking more funding to sustain it, basically. There is a pot of money for extended schools, but we're not seeing it for breakfast club, that's not how ours is run (Headteacher).

Another head had struggled to obtain funding for a nurture group for a long time;

For at least 4 years I have tried to gain extra funding to establish a nurture unit. I've spoken to people like behaviour support services – Is there any funding? – Is there any support you can give? Is there anything like this that can do it? In the end I had to go it alone to do it, to establish it, because that's what the school needed. So it's actually done with no further funding at all (Headteacher).

This resulted in a reduction of TA support in classes, but did give extra support to the 8 children in the group, helping to address their difficulties, whether emotional, behavioural or learning. The head was now trying to get the funding needed by proclaiming how successful the group was to the same agencies previously approached.

Identifying funding sources was difficult, when discussing budget allocations, even for a school budget manager;

...the only other one is PSHE and she seems to get a lot of free money for it from places. I don't know how she manages it, and healthy schools money comes in and money from sex and relationships education and things like that, we are given lump sums of money. So we put that into the PSHE budget and she uses that (Budget Manager).

One headteacher, despite being very successful at fund raising, working with the budget manager, questioned whether it was appropriate;

We, both of us go out and seek funding, support from all sorts, neighbourhood renewal, different places and that's what's sustained the staff – the fact that we've gone out and where ever possible have put in bids

or whatever, and that's not really the role of the head teacher or secretary. But we have both done it and that's helped us to have a big carry forward to sustain the staff for two years, plus the authority has put in money, if you are part of ISP, you get, it's not so much money, its consultant support (Headteacher).

The impact of a headteacher spending time out of school was described in the concerns of one TA;

I think that probably the headteacher could be more accessible towards parents... because some parents find it difficult to sort of talk to the head, when the head is busy or not available, and sometimes parents need the opportunity there and then. They don't want to go away, they want to actually say what they're saying, otherwise, it goes away, it festers and it is passed around the playground (TA).

This sums up many of the difficulties of headteachers being expected to multi-task in schools in challenging circumstances. *Excellence and Enjoyment* dismissed such difficulties by simply stating;

6.4 ... as we ask more of schools – so that they can offer more to children – we must make sure that we continue to support the school leaders who will make a reality of our shared vision. This is increasingly important as we offer more autonomy to schools, and ask them to take more control of what they are offering and how. We need to support heads in developing professional self-confidence so that they do not focus on ‘complying’ with the National Curriculum or the Primary Strategy, but on actively

shaping both, to meet their own children's needs and improve their outcomes (DfES, 2003a).

I saw little evidence of effective support but considerable evidence of high challenge. Once again the rhetoric and the reality appear to be at odds with each other.

At Barlingtown proposed budget reductions were absorbing a lot of headteacher time, but in this case there were still enough other responsible staff accessible to parents on a daily basis. Ironically in two of the case studies the local authority had invited heads and senior staff to work with other schools, helping them to implement various initiatives (eg ISP) which had improved short term results. Once again cover structures meant that, to maintain stability, TAs were withdrawn from supporting children to take classes, even though, in these cases, supply teacher funding was available.

- ***Negative Ofsted reports, both of schools and feeder secondary schools, as well as positive reports of other schools impacting on morale and causing drift away of pupils***

The introduction of the quasi market into primary schooling (Whitty, 1997) has had a direct effect on all three schools in challenging circumstances. The spectre of Ofsted influencing this market loomed large. Two out of the three schools had experience of being put into an Ofsted category of serious weaknesses or special measures. The third had fought, during the last inspection, to avoid being put into serious weaknesses because of particular circumstances. As one headteacher observed;

And the threat of Ofsted, if you just took that away, it would be good.

Because you just know that they could come at any minute and put the

noose round your ruddy neck again. And then it all starts again, it's a vicious circle (Headteacher).

Another headteacher was more candid about the impact of an Ofsted inspection in 1999 destroying much of the creative curriculum that staff had carefully built up in the school over a number of years;

...because the whole history of Ofsted, fills me with dread, fear, anger, disrespect and all those feelings, those negative feelings that no professional person involved with education, should ever have entering his or her head. I will never forgive them. I have never forgiven them for doing it. They effectively destroyed this school in their first visit. The quality of education in the school was definitely lowered and close on wrecked by their input (Headteacher).

Four years later *Excellence and Enjoyment* (DfES, 2003a) in allowing schools to 'feel empowered to develop their own rich and varied curricula' (p15) gave this school the opportunity to re-discover and implement its own curriculum. But by this time, as can be seen by the recent comments of the headteacher, a lot of damage had been done.

When other schools in the locality received good Ofsted reports the case study schools had to justify to parents why their reports were not so positive. Headteachers reported losing children following the publication of their own inspection reports and also when other schools received 'better' reports. It was also clear in two schools that parents had moved children when Ofsted put into special measures local secondary schools. These parents were hoping to get places for their children at other secondary schools by attending their feeder

primaries. These reductions in pupil numbers had considerable financial and staffing implications.

Nowhere in *Excellence and Enjoyment* does it mention the marketisation of primary schools created by parental choice, performance data and LMS being based on pupil numbers. Yet this was having a considerable negative impact on these schools. It merely talks of ‘helping parents and the public understand the progress of pupils and the performance of the school’ (p5). The damage marketisation does to schools in communities struggling to overcome socio-economic difficulties merely helps perpetuate their problems, as has been found in other research (Thomson, 2002; Thrupp, 1999).

- ***Press criticism of the locality discouraging prospective parents***

Local newspapers tend to identify the localities where these schools are situated as ‘problem estates’, rife with drug dealing and unemployment and where it is not safe to walk at night. One headteacher summed up the difficulties this caused in attracting new children to the school, a particular problem in the locality because of a falling birth rate;

If I did want to close a school the school I’d want to close is this one – because I don’t want this name – because it’s a hot potato within the community. It’s the only one that carries the name of the place where nobody wants to be in town (Headteacher).

It is important to appreciate that the above list of incidents should not be themselves regarded as ‘tripping points’. Indeed the headteachers interviewed regarded dealing successfully with such incidents as an integral part of their jobs. However it is the cumulative effect of the multitude of events, initiatives

and expectations, and the way in which they combine to create ‘tripping points’ that causes concern.

7.8 How the schools coped

In two of the schools ‘tripping point’ incidents, along with time consuming bureaucracy, dominated all aspects of school and class management and impacted directly on teaching and learning. Only in the school with the extra members of the SMT and full time TAs in every class were incidents managed effectively, freeing up time for the development of a more reflective approach to teaching and learning. In the other schools sacrifices were being made in order to complete expected tasks and to meet statutory requirements. Limited TA support was focussed on literacy and numeracy but this was not consistent. As in the examples TAs were often withdrawn to cope with behavioural difficulties and some were also expected to cover classes for absences. Their roles and responsibilities appear to have become diluted as expectations on them have increased. Gunter raises similar concerns about this approach to workforce reform; ‘Remodelling is being legitimised as practice through organisational efficiency and effectiveness, and not teaching and learning’ (Gunter, 2007).

7.9 Is workforce reform a tipping point?

Workforce reform may appear to be a ‘tipping point’ in addressing the issue of work/life balance for teachers, but a lack of funding, an inflexible structure and increasing bureaucracy was frustrating the case study schools in its implementation, leading to potential ‘tripping points’. This research has

highlighted subtle differences in the reaction of teachers to PPA time. Teachers fall into three categories;

- The reluctant
- The welcoming
- The overloaded

The Reluctant

Some teachers, although welcoming the idea of PPA, were concerned about losing time with their classes. These teachers appeared concerned with the overall development of children and did not want to miss opportunities for success in any areas of learning. As one explained;

...as a teacher you want to be involved, you want to know what's going on, and I feel very detached from it now and I just think what are the kids doing? I do know what they're doing because I've seen it but I'm not there to listen to what they say. It's quite frustrating (Y5 teacher).

There were also concerns expressed about working in isolation, from teachers, because of cover limitations, and from their classroom support staff having to work elsewhere during PPA time. These teachers would have liked more flexibility to be able to work regularly with their colleagues.

In a similar way, although they did not question the principle of PPA time, all four headteachers were concerned about the inflexibility of the system, with the statutory weekly provision frustrating previously successful approaches where, for example, two staff could spend a day out of school in preparation for a visit. Their classes would be covered for the whole day with cover teachers having freedom to be more creative in giving the class a positive experience for that day. Some heads and teachers were able to negotiate flexibility, but the

expectation of the weekly cover made this difficult because of balancing the availability of cover staff. Two headteachers expressed concerns about teachers expecting PPA time in the first few days of term, before class routines were established.

Primary schools are being encouraged to be more creative and innovative but the inflexible structure of PPA time was observed to be having the opposite effect in some circumstances. Children were not seen to be the priority.

The Welcoming

Several interviewees welcomed PPA time without reservation, even though the cover experience for their classes, as observed, was not as positive as they, or headteachers, claimed. These teachers appeared under pressure to produce documentation for ISP or Hard to Shift initiatives, or were concerned with producing detailed lesson planning and believed in ‘getting things done’ (Robinson & Fielding, 2007). They did not consider their absence from the classroom to be problematic and seemed happy to work in isolation.

Teachers who were able to work and plan together during PPA time were very enthusiastic about the experience. At Barlingtown this structure was consistent throughout the school. Senior teachers in KS2 or TAs in KS1 took classes. One teacher described this as an “*almost seamless transition*”. In two other schools some staff worked together but for others logistics made this impossible.

A number of teachers and heads talked of the benefits for children of PPA time, claiming that they enjoyed sports and other activities, or the change of teacher, but the level of enjoyment was not obvious in sessions observed. Alternative cover to teachers was described very positively, but the reality did

not always match the expectations. Some cover teachers were observed giving all children identical worksheets to fill the time.

The Overloaded

Those responsible for literacy and mathematics spent much PPA time managing these subjects rather than concentrating on classroom work. Other senior staff were also tied down by a variety of managerial responsibilities. In one school, in the seventh week of term, not one PPA time had been used for the intended purpose by a deputy and senior teacher, because of other expectations. In the seventh week they managed to 'hide' in another part of the school to do their medium term planning together. Another deputy lost all PPA time in managing the paperwork associated with the ISP initiative.

Across the four schools one teacher refused to take PPA time. However the cover teacher provided was used to produce and manage the expected preparation and planning documents for this teacher. This was also the only teacher who was too busy to talk to me, even informally, because of involvement in activities at lunchtimes and after school.

The example of PPA time highlights the difficulties individual schools are facing in implementing externally imposed requirements with uniform expectations. It is the different circumstances and contexts which can transform an incident into becoming a 'tripping point' rather than the incident itself.

7.10 No simple solution to these difficulties

Unfortunately there appears to be no simple solution. In one case study school sufficient staff and resources had been in place for almost two years to smooth out 'tripping points' and to ensure that disruption of the classroom learning

environment was kept to a minimum. The quality and commitment of the ‘extra’ SMT staff was outstanding. Not only did they have enough time and support to address curriculum, behaviour and special needs issues effectively, they brought to their posts intellectual rigour, empathy with the philosophy of the headteacher and an ability to work as a team in supporting other staff.

However the school had not yet reached a ‘tipping point’. Extra transitional funding and resources were being cut during the research period. Staff expressed grave concerns about this. It does not bode well for achieving long term, sustainable change, as expected in the Primary Strategy.

In the other two schools, in challenging circumstances, the impact of ‘tripping points’ was much more obvious. The role of one headteacher was described as being like that of a music hall plate spinning act. The Primary Strategy has added to the number of plates being spun and these headteachers were often ‘tripped up’ going between them. Add to this the ‘domino effect’ of the ‘tripping points’ and it is clear that these schools are a long way away from achieving a transformational ‘tipping point’.

In the next chapter I consider the potential of creativity to bring about such change, critically examining New Labour discourse and policy. I look at evidence from one school of creativity helping children achieve success and how this challenges the orthodoxy of compliance and performativity associated with the Primary Strategy. I then review evidence from the other schools of factors which have encouraged and hindered their development of creativity, before considering the capacity of schools to change further within the current education climate.

Chapter 8 Enjoyment: creativity or compliance?

If too few opportunities for curiosity are available, if too many obstacles are placed in the way of risk and exploration, the motivation to engage in creative behaviour is easily extinguished (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996 p11)

In this chapter I consider the place of creativity in primary schools, setting it critically within the policy context of New Labour, before identifying clear evidence in one school of enthusiasm and energy, along with teaching and learning of the highest quality, supporting creativity and innovation across the curriculum. I describe how, in this school, children were challenged to think creatively and independently and the positive impact this had on standards and achievement, potentially moving the school towards a ‘tipping point’. However evidence from this and the other case studies suggests that whilst creative themed days and weeks have been very successful, limitations on time, a lack of human resources, insufficient understanding of learning processes and external performative pressure have frustrated overall development of such initiatives. I argue that where schools were creative in using approaches which challenged the orthodoxy of structured learning, associated with the strategies, a more positive learning environment was created, the dichotomy of security/insecurity for children greatly reduced and staff enthusiasm re-ignited. I describe how there is a pattern of external expectations across the schools which re-enforces conformity (Webb & Vulliamy, 2007), does not acknowledge difficulties and fails to encourage those most able to think creatively, both children and teachers. Finally I suggest that, despite evidence of government commitment, opportunities for creativity to be a catalyst for deeper change in curriculum development and pedagogy are being

overshadowed by performativity and a lack of human and financial resources in the case study schools.

8.1 What place is there for creativity in primary schools?

There is an enormous amount of literature associated with creativity. A number of different definitions and interpretations are considered in this chapter. Of particular relevance is vocabulary used to describe different forms of creativity identified in qualitative research associated with primary education. Jeffrey and Woods talk of ‘motivation, stimulation, inspiration, confidence and relevance being significant factors in learning’ in their study of a creative school (Jeffrey & Woods, 2003 p37). Jones and Wyse state that ‘research shows us that something is creative if it is novel; created with an understanding of the field; and valued as creative by observers’ (Jones & Wyse, 2004 p1). Beetlestone considers that ‘creative teaching involves a complex interplay between the child, the teacher and the context in such a way that each element is pushing forward, seeking new boundaries, striving towards new territories, always looking to extend in the search for something new’ (Beetlestone, 1998 p6). Osborn et.al. identify common elements of creative teaching, highlighting ‘the ability to make choices, to be adaptable and flexible, to see alternatives, although working within restraints, and to have the confidence and motivation to put values into practice’ (Osborn et al., 2000 p77). Further to this, quoting Woods (1995) study of creative teachers, they state that;

... such teachers often had in common holistic perceptions of children, of learning and of the curriculum, and were concerned with the affective as well as the cognitive. They ‘possessed the ability and flair to formulate and act upon hunches, to ‘play’ with ideas but within a

disciplined framework (Woods 1995 quoted in Osborn et al., 2000 p77).

These statements give some indication of how creativity is regarded by qualitative researchers and practitioners in primary schools. It is interesting that these descriptions include such words as *confidence*, *understanding* and *ability* and phrases like *a complex interplay* and *putting values into practice*. This suggests that, for teachers, the development of creativity in both teaching and learning is a complex process, requiring a great deal of skill, intellectual ability and belief, and that it is not something to be treated as an add-on to formulaic practice to raise standards. This has significant implications for the primary workforce. It is not enough just to ‘deliver the basics’, as research evidence has shown (English et al., 2002; Mroz et al., 2000; Tymms, 2004; Tymms & Merrell, 2007) . However the skills needed to work creatively with primary school children do not seem to be appreciated or acknowledged within the ‘elementary’ school discourse so deeply entrenched in this country. Identifying sufficient teachers, with the sophisticated skills and ability to move schools away from a standardised approach, towards a more advanced pedagogy, also appears problematic.

Nevertheless the discourse of creativity and innovation has been incorporated prominently into documents such as *Excellence and Enjoyment* (DfES, 2003a). In the next section I consider critically why this politicised discourse has become so prominent and look at how, to maintain the status quo, the rhetoric has been manipulated within various policy contexts of the current government.

New Labour creativity

Language promoting creativity has become very popular in the vocabulary of policy makers and politicians and is clearly evident in *Excellence and Enjoyment*. Creativity is claimed to be the catalyst to further raise standards in order to position England advantageously within the competitive global economy. A memorable sound bite which exemplifies this was made by Prime Minister Tony Blair, in a speech to the City of London Lord Mayor's Banquet during the first year of the New Labour government;

...we focus policy on using the creative talent of all our people to build a true enterprise economy for the 21st century. We compete on brains not brawn (Blair, 1997).

This is an interesting statement, with creative talent linked to a 'true' enterprise economy. Creativity becomes regarded as an economically useful talent, part of the language game of assimilation where vocabulary is subtly altered to accommodate a different set of meanings and values (Lyotard, 1984). As mentioned in Chapter 5 *Excellence and Enjoyment* contains a number of such statements treated as unquestionable fact. So how has the discourse of creativity developed within policy and subsequently been interpreted in the case study schools?

Developing Creativity in Schools

The discourse of creativity frequently appears within school contexts, but it can prove difficult to categorize and takes many forms (Craft, 2005; Craft et al., 2001) . Creativity in schools is far removed from what is considered the creativity of genius where 'for most of human history creativity was held to be the prerogative of supreme beings' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996 p5). But in the

same work Csikszentmihalyi positions what he calls personal creativity as being important to everyone in that;

...it can do something that from the individual's point of view is even more important: make day to day experiences more vivid, more enjoyable, more rewarding. When we live creatively boredom is banished and every moment holds the promise of a fresh discovery (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996 p344).

With regard to the context of this research Csikszentmihalyi also makes some telling comments concerning the application of creativity to the education system. He talks in general terms of lip service being given to creativity but that far too often the arts are treated as dispensable luxuries (p11). When his comments about schools are considered the picture is worrying;

When school budgets tighten and test scores wobble, more and more schools opt for dispensing with frills – usually with the arts and extra curricular activities – so as to focus on the so-called basics. This would not be so bad if the “three Rs” were taught in ways that encouraged originality and creative thinking; unfortunately they rarely are. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996 p12).

New Labour politicians claim that at the policy level it is exactly these issues which they are addressing, through initiatives developed from *Excellence and Enjoyment* such as Creative Partnerships, extended schools, renewed frameworks for literacy and mathematics, teaching a modern foreign language to all primary pupils, extending opportunities for music, personalised learning and the gifted and talented programme. All of these initiatives have considerable cost implications if they are to be implemented successfully.

However an article in the TES (16.06.06) *Don't count on Brown's promises* reported that David Bell, the Department for Education and Skills permanent secretary, responding to questions by MPs, stated that schools face some difficult years financially. *"It is going to get tighter. I don't think there's any doubt about that"* (Stewart, 2006). The reality of the case study schools, where test results have wobbled and where budgets are now being tightened, suggests a less than favourable environment for such initiatives to flourish. By implication creativity is also likely to struggle.

Despite initially appearing wholeheartedly welcoming, the political discourse of creativity positions it as an add-on to the performative agenda, rather than as essential to the development of high quality teaching and learning. This discourse ignores the skills, intellectual ability and beliefs described earlier. Using these qualities to consider creativity gives a different perspective on how it is situated in schools, where success or failure is judged by standardised testing. The risk taking involved in developing creativity does not sit well with the expectations of the system. Further evidence from the case study schools, related to both confidence and competence, is considered later in the chapter. Before this it is worth considering how the discourse of creativity came to be part of *Excellence and Enjoyment*.

8.2 The 'All Our Futures' Report

Concerns about a lack of creativity in schools were raised in 1999 by the New Labour government commissioned report *All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education* (NACCCE, 1999). This wide ranging report linked cultural development with creative activity. It defined creativity as;

Imaginative activity fashioned so as to produce outcomes that are both original and of value (p29).

This definition does not quite seem to mirror the research perspective of creative teaching and creative schools given earlier. Craft highlights a concern;

We may think that, because we have this statement for creativity as applied to education that many of us may unify behind, our task in fostering creativity would be straightforward. However (*she suggests*)... that if we are to foster student creativity effectively, we need precision in associated terms too (Craft, 2005 p25).

This illustrates the difficulty of linking creativity in its various forms to the enterprise economy. Politicians and policy makers very often have a different view to NACCCE of what is of value, and, for them, outcomes are frequently reduced to what can easily be measured. Nevertheless *All Our Futures* had great potential for influencing future policy moves and certainly was precise in making a series of detailed recommendations in three areas which I have summarized;

- *The School Curriculum and Assessment* It recommended, in great detail, reducing curriculum prescription and summative assessment.
- *Teaching and Training*. It aimed to give both teachers and children time to be creative. Imaginative activities and the ability to be innovative were to the fore.
- *Partnerships and Resources* Overall the objective was to raise the profile of creative and cultural education, not only in schools

but in the wider community, with sufficient resources to enable it to flourish.

Unusually, but encouragingly, there was a consensus of opinion between business leaders, trade unionists, educationists, scientists, the arts world and the committee that this was the right course of action to follow (Joubert, 2001 p28).

However this report, produced at the same time as the literacy and numeracy strategies were being implemented, had little initial impact. No effort was made by government to promote it; the lead author Ken Robinson was out of the country when it was released; copies were difficult to obtain; it was only sent to schools on request; it was soon claimed to be out of print (Jones & Wyse, 2004 p2; Joubert, 2001 p28). The government did not send out an executive summary and only responded to the report in 2000. Interestingly in the same year the National Curriculum was revised, but the recommendations of *All Our Futures*, were ignored (Joubert, 2001 p28). Curriculum overload was addressed but only, it seemed, to allow schools to further concentrate on teaching literacy and numeracy.

8.3 Expecting the Unexpected: an Ofsted report

Meanwhile other researchers identified schools and teachers that continued to promote creativity (Craft et al., 2001; Jeffrey & Woods, 2003; Martin, Craft, & Tillema, 2002; Woods & O'Shannessy, 2002). Even Ofsted produced a report about creativity '*Expecting the Unexpected*' (Ofsted, 2003) 3 months after *Excellence and Enjoyment*. The inspectors used the same definition of creativity as that used in the NACCCE report. The conclusions reached are interesting;

Although there can be barriers to the promotion of creativity, these can be overcome. First, however, teachers and school leaders have to recognise that the development of creativity in pupils is an essential part of their job, and then an appropriate climate has to be established. The danger lies in such an aspiration being seen as modish, or just one other thing to add to schools' lists of priorities. Creativity is not a new concept in education, and many schools, as this survey shows, have found ways of promoting it, simply and effectively (Ofsted, 2003 p19).

The issues raised are about overcoming barriers, many of which Ofsted itself established. Recognising the development of creativity as being essential and having the right climate for it sounds quite straightforward. To imply that it can be promoted 'simply and effectively' brings into question the premise upon which this statement was made. However, hidden within this report, and identified in other recent research, there is a more significant issue – the ability of teachers to be able to think for themselves (Alexander, 2000; Earl et al., 2003; Hall & Thomson, 2007; Pollard, 2002a).

The following extracts come from the section describing factors which inhibit the development of creativity. This is of particular concern when the schools visited by Ofsted either exemplified good practice, or were involved in creative projects;

There are many schools where there is some uncertainty or vagueness about what is being sought and enabled in pupils.

Overly constraining curricular organisation - a predictable, rigid timetable reduced the capacity of teachers to forge the productive

curricular links often associated with high-quality creative work (Ofsted, 2003 p 17 & 18).

Other weaknesses involved a lack of intuition for ‘the creative moment’, too much control, spurious links between subjects and gullibility in the use of ICT software. When these concerns are considered, alongside the characteristics of creativity associated with primary education identified at the start of the chapter, an all too familiar question is raised. Do sufficient teachers have the skills and ability to ensure creativity takes its rightful place at the heart of primary schools, as hoped for in *Excellence and Enjoyment*?

Ofsted collected evidence for this report between 2001 and 2003 when the climate for creative change was not good. By this time SATs results had stalled, with government failing to reach its own performance targets. The Ofsted findings were quite clear. It seemed that creativity could be the key to government plans to further raise standards. *Excellence and Enjoyment* had already signalled this. An appropriate climate was being created, or was it?

8.4 What place for creativity in Excellence and Enjoyment?

It was almost four years after *All Our Futures* that the importance of creativity was acknowledged in government policy through *Excellence and Enjoyment* (DfES, 2003a). But there were worries that it paid little attention to the well-researched recommendations and ideas found in *All Our Futures*.

Alexander highlighted the concerns of many;

The Primary Strategyshows little awareness of evidence from outside the charmed circle of government and its agencies... (Alexander, 2004 p17).

Robinson, chair of the committee that produced *All Our Futures* (NACCCE, 1999), was more optimistic that at last in *Excellence and Enjoyment* the objectives his report promoted seemed to be acknowledged;

The first was the need for schools to have greater freedom in curriculum planning and teaching so that they can really promote creativity, innovation and diversity. These are key themes of ‘*Excellence and Enjoyment*’ which encapsulates the Government’s new approach to primary education (Robinson, 2004 p23).

But how key are these themes? The Primary Strategy was introduced to further raise standards and achievement. It claimed that if some excellent schools produce good results in socially deprived areas then, logically, all the other ‘under-achieving’ schools in such areas should be expected to do the same. Using this approach has recently been described by one of the New Labour policy architects, chief adviser to three secretaries of state from 2002-2005, David Hopkins, as ‘intelligent accountability’ (Hopkins, 2007). Other research challenges these assumptions (Lupton, 2005; Thrupp, 1999; Thrupp & Lupton, 2006). Further to this a recent headline article in the TES ‘*Plan to measure creativity*’ describes how the government is investigating ways to measure creativity in areas not covered by current tests (Stewart, 2008). Quite how such ‘intelligent accountability’ fits in with the optimism of Robinson, in welcoming what he saw as the government’s new approach to primary education, still remains open to question.

As already mentioned, in Chapter 5, *Excellence and Enjoyment* appears to struggle to accommodate creativity referring the reader to a web site. This is hardly conducive to believing that creativity is at the heart of *Excellence and*

Enjoyment. A 2005 evaluation of the Primary National Strategy by Ofsted states that;

Most headteachers and subject leaders have concentrated on the raising standards agenda, which is at the heart of *Excellence and Enjoyment*, but have been more cautious in promoting greater flexibility within the curriculum (Ofsted, 2005e).

Although, two years earlier, the development of creativity had been described as an essential part of the teacher's job, it seems Ofsted believed measurable achievement to be at the heart of the Strategy. Despite this emphasis, some recommendations of the NACCCE committee appear to have been included within the Strategy.

Have the authors of *Excellence and Enjoyment* listened to advice to improve creativity?

How far does the Primary Strategy fit in with the 1999 NACCCE recommendations for encouraging and developing creativity? One recommendation for assessment was that the DfES should arrange to ease pressures on assessment. In 2003 OISEUT, in their final report of the external evaluation of the literacy and numeracy strategies, also addressed the issue;

We caution that setting ever higher national targets may no longer serve to mobilise and motivate, particularly if schools and LEAs see the targets as unrealistic (Earl et al., 2003 p7).

But in *Excellence and Enjoyment* Charles Clarke, at the time Secretary of State for Education, clearly ignored this concern;

2.18 The Secretary of State has said that testing, targets and tables are here to stay.

The rest of the paragraph claims that we (whoever that may be) are open to suggestions about how testing, targets and tables might be improved and refined to help teachers do their job better still. It is clear that the government is not even open to suggestions from their own commissioned research. This is illustrated in the next but one paragraph;

2.20 So maintaining the 85% target is right – both morally and educationally.

Targets have become a moral issue.

Some ideas are gradually being accepted but.....

Has the Primary National Strategy really addressed the recommendations of *All Our Futures*? In terms of the school curriculum and assessment there has been a slow and selective percolation of knowledge from research sources, through commissioned reports, to policy and eventually into practice. The Primary Strategy is now promoting ‘*Assessment for Learning*’ and even acknowledges in the booklet (DfES, 2004b) the excellent work on formative assessment done by Kings College, London since the 1970s. Black and Wiliam highlighted this research in an imaginative way through publishing *Inside the Black Box* in 1998. This booklet made their work much more accessible to the general public (teachers, the press and politicians). This has influenced assessment for learning within the Primary Strategy. Certainly it is one of very few pieces of independent work quoted in DFES publications. It too contains a warning about the pace of innovation and change:

This (the improvement of formative assessment) can only happen relatively slowly, and through sustained programmes of professional development and support (Black & Wiliam, 1998 p15).

At the time it seemed a very positive move by the DfES. However Professor Black, along with other academics, claimed recently in the TES that the AfL (Assessment for Learning) agenda had been hijacked by the DCSF and that it no longer followed his recommendations. He was reported as saying that;

The main idea conveyed by this strategy is the belief that target-setting and frequent assessment of learning will help pupils learn more effectively. This is not assessment for learning. It may help learning, but it is not what I and colleagues have been writing about and helping teachers with since 1998 (Mansell, 2008).

So one of the few authorities quoted in Primary Strategy documents is politely dismissive of DCSF policy. The sustained programmes of support he calls for appears undermined by a more performative regime based on data already available. Formative assessment challenges teachers to think creatively. All such challenge appears removed from the DCSF approach. The emphasis on standards remains. The opportunity for the establishment of more ‘socially critical schools’ appears to have been removed (Morrison, 1989).

In other Primary Strategy materials published in 2004, creative education had become ‘creative thinking’ with the headline quote from National Curriculum 2000 describing creative thinking skills;

These skills enable pupils to generate and extend ideas, to suggest hypotheses, to apply imagination and to look for innovative outcomes (DfES, 2004a p22).

This suggests more control than in the original definition ‘Imaginative activity fashioned so as to produce outcomes that are both original and of value’ (NACCCE, 1999). The activity has gone. A linear structure has been imposed

and creativity has been reduced to a thinking skill. There is no mention of cultural education at all. Creative and cultural education is not explicitly recognised and provided for, as recommended in 1999.

The second major NACCCE recommendation was to ensure that teachers and other professionals were encouraged and trained to use methods and materials that facilitated the development of young people's creative abilities and cultural understanding. The problems highlighted earlier in getting teachers to change have made this a very difficult task.

Is Creative Partnerships enough?

The third main recommendation was 'to promote the development of partnerships between schools and outside agencies which are now essential to provide the kinds of creative and cultural education that young people need and deserve' (NACCCE, 1999 p174). A great deal of money, £110 million over six years, has been spent on this through the Department for Culture Media and Sport setting up in 2002 the Creative Partnerships project, concentrating on areas of economic and cultural deprivation and rural isolation. This shows clear evidence of a real commitment by the government to creativity and culture. The working definition of creativity used is the same one as created by NACCCE. Unfortunately, as exciting and inspirational as Creative Partnerships is, there are still some difficulties. One study suggests that;

..there are strong limitations built into the Creative Partnerships programme which, even in the hands of a singularly willing and experimental school, produce results that are beneficial to children, but do not challenge the status quo (Hall & Thomson, 2004 p4).

Nevertheless there is much to recommend Creative Partnerships. This is clear from an evaluation by Ofsted in 2006. But sustainability is a concern because of the high costs, as is the relatively small number of children being directly affected by projects. Ofsted also identified concerns about variable teacher attitudes;

Where partnerships were less effective, teachers were too passive when creative practitioners took the lead, or creative practitioners were too prescriptive in their approach. Although the immediate outcome appeared impressive, it contributed little to pupil's long term creative development. Such weaknesses were often not recognised or communicated to schools and creative practitioners (Ofsted for DCMS, 2006 p13).

The number of schools directly involved is relatively small (approximately 2500 to date). A widely influential part of the project was an experiential programme for creativity working with 50 advanced skill teachers from across the country in 2004/5 (Jeffrey & Woods, 2009). However this well funded and inspirational project had not managed to reach the case study schools. As in 2003, creativity still seems to be struggling to exist in many schools (Jeffrey & Woods, 2003 p1).

8.5 Enjoyment in the case study schools

There are no statutory requirements for *enjoyment* anywhere in the legislation associated with the Primary Strategy. There was no documentary evidence from the case study schools of external expectations for enjoyment in learning. The only external policy in the schools to contain 'enjoy' is the Every Child

Matters initiative (DfES, 2004c). One stated aim being to have the support to 'Enjoy and achieve'.

Interestingly this is only an aim. Enjoyment is not easily measured. Barlingtown Primary School was described as a 'happy' school by Ofsted. It had received considerable extra support enabling it to be working towards the Every Child Matters aims, but this was ignored in the Ofsted report. It could have been measured, but not easily, and there would have been significant financial implications. This is not the remit of Ofsted (Jeffrey & Woods, 1996; Thrupp & Lupton, 2006).

8.6 Positive signs: enthusiasm and enjoyment could lead to creativity

Across the schools a number of occasions were identified where real enthusiasm and enjoyment was apparent. Such events were not always in lesson times.

Breakfast Clubs

In Tillbridge School breakfast club, already established before the introduction of the extended schools agenda, children were able to develop social skills by taking responsibility for their actions and behaviour. Dance routines were rehearsed, homework supported, books read, breakfast taken and cleared up by the children, with the older ones able to make their way into the main school without lining up. James, aged 9 yrs, liked being able to draw each morning. The observation notes describe the atmosphere; *23 children, TA and kitchen assistant. No rush, no pressure, no raising of voices. A very sociable occasion with children warmly greeted by Julie the TA in charge. Other TAs called in to say 'Hello' to both colleagues and children before school started.* A similar

atmosphere was apparent in the breakfast club at Barlingtown School. This was run by two parents and two TAs in a small hall using just two domestic toasters and a kettle. The deputy head attended to give Omega 3 tablets²⁵ to the twelve Y6 children who attended daily. Other years groups attended once a week. Numbers attending fluctuated between 20 and 30. At Lillywhites School only the nurture group had breakfast. This was for eight children with two TAs. These children had emotional and behavioural difficulties and there was a real pride shown by the staff in how they managed breakfast;

We modelled it, and then they just have their jobs and they just get on with it, even if it takes them 45 minutes to make the toast, and it is cold when you get it, the point is that they've done it (TA).

This activity helped to set a positive learning atmosphere for the rest of the morning. The headteacher would have liked this activity to have been extended to the rest of the school but could not afford to do so. At Waddingworth School there was no breakfast club. The different social context is clearly evident from comments by the head about extended school provision;

We, here, have been mindful of the expectation and watchful for the demand, but there hasn't been a demand, and I find that reassuring that parents for whatever reason are not expecting us to do it (Headteacher).

Creative Days and Weeks

All of the schools displayed enthusiasm for doing things differently, for breaking away from the rigid structure of literacy and numeracy to give their children broader and more varied learning experiences. However it was the

²⁵ There is, in some scientific journals, trial evidence that Omega 3 oils may improve behavioural and learning difficulties. This supplement was being administered in the hope that it would improve SATs performance.

way these challenges to the orthodoxy of the strategies were implemented that highlighted huge differences between the schools. Some of this could be interpreted as a lack of enthusiasm for change (Alexander, 2000; Webb & Vulliamy, 2007), or as an excuse for 'playing safe' when under severe pressure, or when not challenged to think differently. At other times it was clear that when there was sufficient support a lot more opportunities for thinking creatively about the curriculum could be developed. At Barlingtown the support came through having enough staff to be able to manage the challenging behaviour and difficult circumstances of many children without disrupting the learning environment, whilst at Waddingworth parental support with children eager to learn, enabled staff to develop a creative curriculum, which further enriched the already positive experiences of their children (Reay & Wiliam, 1999; Vincent & Ball, 2006; Whitty, 2002).

In the other two schools creative days had taken place and staff felt they made a positive difference, but at Tillbridge it had been a long time since there had been one. However an open maths morning for parents was observed, followed by a small fund raising event in the hall. This attracted a number of parents. The atmosphere in the hall was very calm and orderly, with children running stalls and mingling with parents and teachers, buying cakes and drinks and playing games. This was very much in contrast to behaviour at normal playtimes and lunchtimes which appeared more confrontational. At Lillywhites creative days were planned regularly, a French week had taken place earlier in the term and a 'creative' day was observed with a variety of activities such as puppet making and pottery available. Children chose options for the day and moved from one to another at set times without supervision. A lot of extra

adults were in the school and the atmosphere was calm and purposeful. The small minority that regularly disrupted normal school days became absorbed into their chosen activities and were as successful as the other children in what they created. At other times these children stood out, but on this day it was difficult to even identify them. The headteacher and staff were also more relaxed, despite working very hard to ensure that all activities were well resourced. Self discipline, it seemed, in this school, produced a calmer atmosphere, with the potential for encouraging further innovation and creativity.

During the research period Barlingtown had sufficient staff, themselves with the ability and willingness to learn, along with enough resources, to build flexibility and imagination into the curriculum in a way which encouraged and supported the children in developing both social and learning skills. I now describe the creative approach used in this school.

8.7 TASC - Thinking Actively in a Social Context

TASC (Thinking Actively in a Social Context) was used, as a tool by Barlingtown school, to develop creativity, and as a catalyst for change across the curriculum. TASC is described on its website as a universal thinking skills framework which empowers learners to:

- Work independently yet within an inclusive school policy
- Develop skills of research, investigation and problem solving that can be used across the curriculum
- Develop a positive sense of self as an active learner
- Develop their strengths exploring and using the full range of their human abilities

- Develop skills of self assessment (Wallace, 2008; Wallace et al., 2004)

As with any commercially produced product, or nationally imposed framework material it should not be considered a stand alone solution to problems which schools in similar circumstances to the case studies face. However it is the nature of the TASC activities and the underlying training for staff which encouraged both teachers and children to think creatively. The open ended nature of the questions involved and the approach taken was observed to be moving this school towards becoming 'socially critical'. This did, of course, depend upon the quality of staff, with both the ability and opportunity to develop in this way, which the unusual circumstances had ensured was in place. Interview analysis revealed a determination to include TASC like activities routinely throughout the year, not just in TASC weeks;

We try and fit that in wherever possible as well but we have designated TASC weeks in your induction week at the beginning of every term. We are required to do a TASC activity then. But then it's up to the year groups as to when they fit it in at other times as well. We did it with the powered vehicles, two weeks ago, we made our powered vehicles in DT.

BC: *How did that go?*

Teacher: *Brilliant. Yes. Obviously, TASC was the basis of it, and from that came science, circuits work with the powered vehicles and measuring the wood accurately which is maths. We're still doing interesting work from it now, we've done explanations, and how the*

motors work and instructions and recounts so we are still doing literacy work from it, now (Y6 teacher).

Interestingly, this was in a Year 6 class under pressure to perform in SATs but sufficiently supported, with a teacher confident enough to appreciate the benefits of this approach.

Much use is made of the TASC planning wheel (Figure 1) when working with children. Completed charts were used on every display of TASC activities at Barlingtown.



Figure 1TASC planning wheel²⁶

The use of displays to promote what was being achieved had knock-on benefits as one teacher explained;

²⁶ The TASC wheel is copyright Belle Wallace (2000) and is used with direct permission. (Wallace, 2004; 2008)

Just to know what the other children are doing, what other teachers are doing and seeing how proud they are for their work to be out on display. Again, it just shows you what is going on in the classroom that the children are enjoying because the displays are so bright, there's no worksheets on them, it's all children's work and photographs. You can just see what the children are doing and that they are enjoying it. Obviously, you can see from that what they are getting out of it, without doing a test. You can see that they've got the experience out of it really. So I do often have a walk around and have a look (Y3 teacher).

This also emphasises how important display is in the primary school context when it is treated as an integral part of the learning process, for all concerned, not just children, and not merely something to fill the walls.

A week on TASC

Two days before the start of the first full week of Spring Term, as part of the whole school theme, Italy – Carnival time, the two Y4 classes at Barlingtown school were given the challenge of organising an Italian Masked Ball to take place on the Friday of the next week. It is important to note here that daily routines such as start up activities, 15 minute phonic groups across the school, five a day maths challenges and reading homework continued. Working together the two classes followed the structure of the planning wheel. There were 48 children in the two classes supported by 6 adults - 2 teachers, 2 class TAs and 2 special needs support TAs. After a series of brainstorming sessions over the first two days of term, with groups of 8 or 9 children working with an adult to find out what a masked ball was, the classes came together again to decide what they needed to do. As had happened with previous TASC activities the children decided that they needed to form working groups to

focus on the different aspects of the ball. Having shared their ideas, committees were formed, involving all the children, to address the different aspects identified. In this case these were;

- Event Organisers
- Entertainment
- Food and Drink
- Music
- Decorations

Throughout the week these groups, each supported by at least one adult, worked on planning, making and preparing things for their part of the event, during sessions that would otherwise have been timetabled for literacy and numeracy. PE sessions were used with both classes together to develop dances for the ball.

One session observed showed the balance between teacher input and challenge for the children. The two classes came together in the school hall to discuss plans for the parade that was going to take place through the school before the ball. Waiting for the second class to arrive the teacher, having told the class to go into the hall, to find a space and sit down, led them through a series of exercises including lung expansion and various hand and leg movements, which she modelled²⁷. As the other class arrived they also joined in, without having to be told. After this the teacher explained that they were going to practice their dances, but before that the organisers would give details of how the parade was going to be managed. Six children, the organising committee,

²⁷ Although the teacher called this Brain Gym, none of the ‘pseudoscience’ associated with that name was used. The exercises were more like yoga or a form of relaxation and helped to settle the children. This teacher had a very good relationship with the children. They were very attentive.

then talked through the running order of the parade for five minutes, using a flip chart which they had prepared, including instructions on what each part of the parade, such as the jugglers and musicians, should do when they entered a classroom. They talked about how they should wear masks and what they should say to the younger children. Without prompting from the teachers, they then asked for questions from the other children which were very relevant and answered effectively by the organisers. One child asked about the difficulty of carrying a xylophone and the leaders asked for volunteers to help with it.

It was interesting to observe the expectations of listening and of participation in this process from the children themselves. In more formal situations there were the same expectations between teachers and children. If children were disruptive there were sufficient adults in the school to be able to deflect this in a low key manner without disrupting the learning environment. I was involved in a brief conversation during the ball which shows what a fine line there is between positive and negative experiences;

Sitting with two children, Eric and Brian, Brian explains to me that he's a musician, which is why he enjoyed playing his cornet on the parade.

Eric then says to Brian; *You're a schoolie.*

BC; *What's a schoolie?*

Eric; *He likes school.*

BC; *Don't you?*

Eric; *No.*

BC; *Is there anything you do like?*

Eric; *Swimming.*

BC; *How far can you swim?*

Eric; *About 20m.*

Eric then drifts away looking for some more lemonade. Brian did not react to Eric's comment and continued to enjoy his pizza. A few minutes later Eric and Brian were smiling at each other as they linked arms during one of the dances.

The word 'schoolie' had come from Eric's older brother, now excluded from secondary school (Observation notes).

In a less supportive environment this incident could easily have escalated with Brian complaining to the teacher about name calling by Eric, but in this situation the children had learned to work together and appreciate each others differences and difficulties. They both wanted to enjoy the ball, even Eric, despite his protestations about school. There were enough adults present to diffuse such incidents.

Even though there had been just a week for the children to organise and prepare the event, both the parade and ball were a great success. Pizza and lemonade may not have been the most authentic items on the menu, but the food and drink committee had collected more genuine Italian food, such as plum tomatoes and pasta from the local supermarket, and displayed this along information they had collected from internet searches and the local library.



Photographs 7 Two TASC Displays The Masked Ball and African Art

Feedback from all those invited, including the headteacher, was very positive and the children themselves talked and wrote enthusiastically about the event in a variety of literacy reports and recorded conversations the following week, as well as creating their own display in the corridor. Staff throughout the school appreciated the benefits of the TASC approach;

They really love using their own ideas, and focusing on what they need to do and then designing and choosing the best one and evaluating what they've done, so they do enjoy that. That does a lot for their creativity (Y6 teacher).

An Ofsted inspection, under the new system, experienced by Barlingtown just three days after my final interview with the head, ignored the creative elements of excellent schools promoted in *Excellence and Enjoyment* where staff learn and develop, and where the curriculum changes and improves over time. Developments in these areas had rapidly transformed this new school in only 18 months. Instead the inspectors relied on performative data to make judgements. All of the activities associated with the regular TASC half termly programme throughout the school were dismissed in one sentence as ‘several innovative projects.’ The headteacher and leadership team regarded these activities as core ingredients for delivering long term curriculum change. This inspection raised a number of concerns about both creativity and compliance with far reaching consequences. I now consider in more detail the Ofsted interpretation of the school, having myself just spent six weeks there collecting evidence.

8.8 New Ofsted – the data driven inspection of a case study school

Barlingtown School was inspected over two days, with just three days notice of inspection. The school was described as being ‘a happy school’ where ‘a sense of calm and order prevails’, but little account seems to have been taken of the journey taken to get it to that point in only 18 months. It is important to consider what is missing from this inspection report, because so much about change seems to have been ignored. I returned to the school to discuss the report with the headteacher, as it did not seem to be a true reflection of all their hard work, and factors which had created the ‘happy school’ had been omitted.

The SEF and other evidence

To begin with the headteacher felt that perhaps the bleak reality of the school, when it opened, had been played down in the SEF (Self Evaluation Form). In this document the head did not want to professionally damn colleagues placed in an impossible position at the time of the closure of the junior school, and who were still employed by the local authority. The feeling was that the SEF should be about self evaluation of the present and of planning for the future, rather than criticism of others in the past. However decisions to create this school were made using evidence from Ofsted, the local authority and the DfES. It seems that this background was completely ignored by, or was not made available to, the inspectors that conducted the inspection. Progress from one inspection to the next is usually the backbone of Ofsted reports but because this was a ‘new school’ the system seems to have been unable to cope with the transformation. This exposes how such a data driven model of inspection, created by cost savings, but claiming to be providing a more effective and

efficient service, cannot cope with exceptional circumstances which require much more time and effort to be appreciated and understood.

In this school the imposed model of school improvement, through enforced closure, although traumatic for those involved, had clearly made a considerable positive difference for children, in a relatively short time. It is particularly ironic that Ofsted has ignored the evidence of this transformation, because the DCSF seems to be promoting exactly this closure model for schools not reaching their 'floor targets' (see Appendix 7). The headteacher of Barlingtown has even been invited by the Local Authority to support other schools facing forced closure because it has been so successful. This was not acknowledged in the Ofsted report.

An emotional experience

A further reflection on the system is that although not happy with the omission of the effort and resources which transformed the school, the headteacher, having been emotionally drained by the Ofsted experience, did not feel sufficiently motivated to challenge findings of the inspection. When the school was labelled as being satisfactory overall it was such a relief that no one felt it worth expending any more energy disputing the judgement. The head felt that the appeal process was extremely time consuming and reported that challenging inspection report findings was not regarded as a constructive experience by other headteacher colleagues. Earlier research has recorded similar post-inspection emotional exhaustion (Jeffrey & Woods, 1996; Troman, 2000; Woods & Jeffrey, 1998). Fielding, in considering the apparatus of inspection, may help explain why inspectors overlooked so much evidence;

... the system for inspecting schools in England carries with it an over-confident and brusque carelessness born of too much power, too much questionable data and too little thought (Fielding, 2001 p695).

The uncertainty for staff of the inspection being driven by standardised external data caused a considerable amount of doubt and anxiety about the process. The short notice for inspection caused further anxiety, particularly when Ofsted phoned once, a term earlier, announcing an inspection for the infant school, unaware that it was now a primary school. Clearly government departments do not keep each other informed of their individual actions.

What Ofsted omitted

It is fascinating to consider what was left out of the report about the current structure and resources available within the school. Whether these elements were ignored because in schools facing challenging circumstances in more metropolitan settings such resources would be considered normal, I am not certain. The obvious report omissions were as follows;

- As well as the head, three members of the senior management team (SMT) being non-class based and responsible for curriculum, behaviour, and special needs
- All staff in KS 2 being appointed prior to opening, including two of the SMT, with only 4 teachers being retained from the old junior school
- Small classes of 20 -25 children
- Every class having a full time Teaching Assistant (TA)
- Extra TAs assigned for children with specific special needs
- SMT staff covering for PPA time in KS2
- All classrooms having been refurbished with interactive whiteboards

- Acknowledgement of the whole tranche of TASC (Thinking Actively in a Social Context) work planned throughout the school each half term
- The difficulties which caused the authorities to implement school closure and bring in all these extra resources.

Areas for improvement?

In the report, areas for the school to improve further are identified as; standards and the tracking of individual pupils, particularly higher attainers, planned opportunities for raising standards in speaking and listening and getting pupils involved more in assessing and improving their work. I observed evidence of such expectations in all three areas being implemented during TASC weeks throughout the school and being extended into regular class activities as described by the Y6 teacher above. Unfortunately it seems that these activities are not compartmentalised or labelled clearly enough to enable inspectors, with limited time and little understanding of this approach, to appreciate how important these activities are to the school. For the acronym TASC to be omitted from the report indicates that the inspectors failed to appreciate how crucial this was to the ‘passionate and ambitious leadership’ (*Inspection report quote*) of the head and SMT. Every teacher I interviewed talked enthusiastically about TASC. It was mentioned 65 times in 9 interviews, as well as being given importance in observed staff meetings about the renewed frameworks for literacy and mathematics.

It is clear that the data and statistics used and the boxes expected to be ticked, within the Ofsted format for inspection, struggled to reflect the every day experiences and needs of this school and these children. It seems that data is being used selectively to categorise and control, rather than clearly

encouraging the development of creative initiatives, such as TASC, which was being used as a catalyst for deeper change in curriculum development and pedagogy.

8.9 Creativity does make a difference

At Barlingtown the structure, resourcing and quality of staff ensured that creativity was high on the agenda. In the other case study schools, when creative activities did take place there was a very positive reaction. One teacher at Lillywhites summed up the enthusiasm that a 'French week' had generated;

It was great. On the last Friday that we had it, it was brilliant because everyone planned an activity they would like to do and a list was sent round stating X amount of children can do this activity and they signed up for something they liked and they had the choice and certainly in my class there were no children who ended up in a group they didn't want to be in. They all got the thing they asked for and certainly the children that ended up coming with me – it was just brilliant because it was all something they had chosen, they were all wanting to do it and they did some really good work (Y4 teacher).

There were plans for more events because of such positive reactions and the freedom to innovate, associated with *Excellence and Enjoyment* (DfES, 2003a) was having a positive effect;

I think with the nature of our school anyway they're very keen to make sort of general community links and have people in. Like we had the grandparents day last week along with the book fair and I think they're just wanting us to throw the doors open and say here we are – come and see what we're doing. ... I think the whole... throwing the door

open and having these weeks does help and it helps the children, especially if their parents come in and they're really proud to come and show their mums and dads how they work (Deputy Head).

All of the schools tried to get children out of school on day and residential visits. As with most other areas of primary schooling, simply doing a visit is not enough. It needs to be planned and thought through carefully to ensure that it is both stimulating and creative for the children. It is easy for visits to be ruined by worksheets. One teacher was well aware of the damage that could be done to a positive learning experience;

We have just been on a field trip, and we've really enjoyed that and basically on the field trip, we've used things like art as a stimulus and just generally being out in the environment and learning about yourself and what is around you, rather than just picking up a worksheet and ticking off boxes and that kind of thing (Y5 teacher).

Freedom to innovate

At Waddingworth there was clearly a freedom to innovate which encouraged some staff to think creatively;

We did think about at the time that we would do a Victorian day, but then we both just looked at each other and said "No we will do a Victorian week" because we wanted the children to have some fun and we wanted them to learn and be dressed up. We basically went sort of off timetable but we did activities that covered everything, and in the end we tried to look at every aspect whether it was mathematics, or literacy, or geography, or history, or science and then we did work that we compiled as a booklet. So at the end of the week the children had

some experience and something to take home that this is what they'd done (Y5 teacher).

It is ironic that this example of teachers planning creatively together happened at Waddingworth, where PPA time was spent in isolation, because one teacher covered both classes. These two teachers did stimulate and motivate each other, but the PPA structure adopted didn't help, despite giving stability to the children. They felt that if more flexibility had been possible, with PPA time being banked to allow them both to work together for a whole day, perhaps going on a pre-visit to a museum, even more ideas would have been generated. It was clear though that in this school there was enthusiasm for learning, as another teacher explained;

Last year, I did the Romans and I decided, a bit of off-the-cuff kind of planning, but also my own ideas, I got them to do, a Roman report, I got them in groups, and they were doing reports through literacy anyway, like newspapers, and I got the children to dress up and I videoed them and used a PowerPoint presentation and put that behind them and they worked in groups, and they presented the news from like a news background, and then we had a battle scene where there was a Roman centurion live at the scene and they were all in costume. And those things I don't forget and the children don't forget and they enjoyed it. It was hard work but it was really rewarding and I noticed that the children who were often quite quiet and found things difficult to express themselves through story or writing, they were so good just by verbalising - they were great (Y4/5 teacher).

There was similar enthusiasm at Barlingtown. As part of their study of the Romans I took in a museum collection of Roman artefacts from a villa, which the children drew, created larger pictures with oil pastels, researched information about and displayed.



Photographs 8 Observational drawing of Roman artefacts

The liaison teacher from the secondary school, who taught drama, worked with the class for 6 weekly sessions, on life in Rome. In groups the children acted out the roles of the various household characters. On another day the two classes went to the local country park, a reclaimed slag heap just down the road, and built miniature Roman road cross sections as part of their literacy work on instructions. As one teacher explained;

They weren't fantastic Roman roads, but actually just going through the process of -- they dug the pit and then they -- it was great for them, far more so than just reading the explanation in class, actually using the explanation was far more useful (Y4 teacher).

8.10 Schools under pressure

At another school the benefits of themed weeks were acknowledged by the head but there were other pressures:

We would all love to just go back to the old style of, well, what do they call it, integrated curriculum and excellence and enjoyment, it's called now, isn't it? Basically, we prove it because we have a themed week, every now and then and we get a lot from the kids and they love it.....we don't agree with it here, but you've got to coach to tests because they want the results, and while you're coaching to tests you can't be doing the themed weeks and you can't be freeing up afternoons to do art in the way that we want to (Headteacher).

This statement needs to be considered very carefully. Looked at critically it reveals a lack of clarity about the vision of excellent schools combining creative activities and high standards as set out in *Excellence and Enjoyment*. Talk of 'the old style' and linking 'the integrated curriculum' in a questioning manner to *Excellence and Enjoyment* and 'freeing up afternoons to do art' suggest an approach reminiscent of an era just prior to the introduction of the National Curriculum. Alexander described this as a time when there was a;

...more general neglect of hard thinking about curriculum planning, content, differentiation and delivery (Alexander, 1992 p57).

The comment about coaching restricting opportunities also reveals the pressure this headteacher was under, but more significantly these comments could be seen as an excuse for a lack of 'hard thinking' about what sort of curriculum is needed. Other staff revealed that there had only been one creative day that school year and raised further concerns;

I think if staff were honest they got more into the ISP and it's taken up more of our time. I think Excellence and Enjoyment has taken a back seat (Y3 teacher).

... the pressures of the fact that the children aren't obtaining the grades that they need to get means that the fun has gone out of the school and I think that that is a big issue in this school. I think it's not a fun place to be (Y5 teacher).

In another school there was more optimism from the deputy head;

We've done arts weeks in the past, we've done science weeks, and we've done book weeks, we regularly have book weeks anyway, where we focus on reading and writing. But all of those are just starting to give teachers permission to step outside the box and with involving parents in, always inviting parents in on an open day and getting parents to join in with what children are doing. They can see how the curriculum is changing as well and being a lot more creative. It's not all bums on seats, copy this off the board and numeracy - Heinemann maths, book 1, page 3 any more (Deputy head).

Mixed messages: confidence, understanding, frustration.

There was also a different perspective expressed which raised questions about whole school commitment to, and understanding of, creativity;

I think the big problem with our children is the fact that creativity, normally what counts as creativity is a lack of control and structure, a bit less control and structure, and I think that is a big worry with our children, because our children need very definite structure and the control element with the big issues that we have in this class. I think teachers are quite reluctant to let go of that control. We are all aware that we should do, and probably when we keep doing it it's better, but

the thought of a month of sheer hell before that happens, at the moment where grades and behaviour are issues, all those things, I don't think we are as creative as we should be quite honestly (Y3 teacher).

However the positive impact of a more creative approach was also apparent;

What we do, do which is really, really good is every half term, we have a themed week. The last one was healthy eating, and it was a week and a half because we came back after Christmas and did it then and that was brilliant. It does mean that you can drop, drop the curriculum is the wrong way of putting it, but it does become more of a themed, more of an excellence and enjoyment, and its topic work, so therefore you are teaching your literacy and your numeracy, but you are doing it through another way. So we have those every half term, and we've had one on different countries, we've had an art one, we've had a drama one. So those work really well (Y4 teacher).

At the same time there was frustration about how such initiatives were ignored by inspectors, reflecting the experience of Barlingtown;

They don't see all the other things that we do. They don't see the fact that we've had a maths morning this morning, and we've had a really good morning. You know, their non-uniform, and we've had cake sales, and we've had the themed weeks, because they don't count....They didn't see the 100 children milling about in the hall, with parents as well, quite normally without anybody telling them how to behave, because they were part of it....They were doing it but it is not seen so -- it's all about results and it's all about proof of results (Deputy Head, Tillbridge).

Elsewhere creative days and weeks were also used as a tool for curriculum change;

So in order to challenge that I think part of it was the induction weeks. Having Paddington Bear week, having World Book Day, having times when we were, well you couldn't really call it curriculum free, but that's what I'll have to call it for now. A week, based around the theme. I think that was getting people into the idea of planning without a scheme to prop them up so that was the start (Y4 teacher).

Also such themed days were seen by a TA as a positive way of getting parents involved;

We had a PHSE day as well where the children were food tasting and with various activities on the day on a sort of like round robin basis, and things like that. But I do think we try very hard to bring all the stakeholders in to show our creativity -- whether it's appreciated or not, I'm not sure -- whether they understand it (TA).

8.11 Cultural change

In one school attempts were being made, using themed days and weeks, to bring about cultural change regarding parental involvement in supporting children's learning. The assistant headteacher made some interesting links which suggest that they were succeeding;

It's got parents into the school more. When I came here, the policy was open door, but I never saw anyone come through the door, unless they wanted to come and shout at somebody, or bang on the head's door. Nobody really came in, but we tried to work hard and we've done lots of the questionnaires, sent questionnaires and tried to get them to come

in and be involved, and the ISP process has helped with that, through the targets and the rainbows and sending the letters out six weekly saying your children are doing this and talk to them about it. That's helped a lot (Assistant head, Lillywhites).

The headteacher felt that the ISP programme had been a real success because the school was ready for it;

We were beginning to look at processes that could improve achievement and attainment across the school and we'd got to the situation where, using support – external support, our own expertise and what we wanted for the school got to the position where the next natural stage was what ISP gave us- and if it hadn't have been there we would have invented it - we would have been doing it (Headteacher, Lillywhites).

It does seem that the creative initiatives associated with getting parents into the school had helped prepare the ground for the introduction of the ISP programme. Senior staff from this school, which had completed its ISP, were now working with other schools just starting the programme and talked about how important 'ISP readiness' was for it to be successful.

8.12 Still a long way to go

Evidence of creative activity was found in all of the schools. However it was at Barlingtown, at the time with sufficient staff, resources and understanding, and at Waddingworth, with few of the 'tripping points' associated with the other schools, that it was seen to have become well established. At Lillywhites great efforts were being made, but themed days and weeks had yet to be integrated into the rest of the curriculum, with staff under a great deal of pressure to meet

performance targets whilst coping with challenging behaviour. At Tillbridge, with similar difficulties, external pressure seemed to have isolated creative thinking. In the words of one teacher;

I feel that things like history, geography, the other subjects have been pushed out by literacy, numeracy and science, definitely you know. We try and make sure we do PE for the kids to let off a bit of steam, but I think things like art, creative things have been pushed out really, and they are sort of fitted in, when we can (Y5 teacher).

Barlingtown was competing for a declining number of pupils with a Catholic primary school, an infant and a junior school. They were set in more advantaged parts of the community and attracted children away, even though the transition into a primary school had been successful. Creativity had flourished but the legacy of the junior school difficulties was still present. Research evidence showed a transformation of behaviour and creative learning opportunities within the school, but there were concerns that much of this would be undone if financial limitations reduced the number of adults available to deal with the considerable number of challenging children still there. The good reputation that the school was building could easily be damaged. Similar problems of competition were encountered in the other case study schools.

8.13 Capacity for change

Only Barlingtown, of the schools in challenging circumstances, had the capacity to put creativity at the centre of its teaching and learning policies. This approach had transformed the working atmosphere, with the rich variety of learning experiences raising expectations and impacting positively on standards and achievement. It is ironic that little regard was paid by Ofsted to the

transformation of this school, and that the categorisation of it using SATs based analytical data did not reflect the true difficulties that it was managing, or the great successes which it had achieved.

These findings match well with comments by Brehony who states that ‘...the strategy shows few signs of a serious desire to move away from standards in favour of creativity and pupil-centred curricula’ (Brehony, 2005 p39). Despite creativity being well funded in certain areas through Creative Partnerships, including one project for ex-mining communities in the East Midlands, there was little evidence of such support reaching the case study schools. This piecemeal approach is of little benefit to the children in these schools and raises questions about how appropriate it is. Where creativity was being developed it was from self-generated initiatives that struggled to compete, financially and in time needed, with externally imposed initiatives such as the ISP and the standards agenda.

In the next chapter I consider the impact of this further pressure from the DfES/DCSF for the case study schools to reach targets through these externally imposed initiatives, before looking critically at the financial burdens being placed on them, as workforce reform and further elements of the Primary Strategy have been introduced. I highlight how government promises of an improving funding climate were not reflected in the case study schools. I draw attention to financial problems frustrating staff and suggest government policy solutions are limiting opportunities for those children most in need of support.

Chapter 9: Categorisation and costs

All parts of an experience are equally present, but they are very far from being equally valuable as signs or as evidences (Dewey, 1933 p122).

In this chapter concerns are identified which suggest that the root causes of ‘tripping points’ are both systemic and structural. I argue that the efficiency driven, narrow focus of central government categorisation of the case study schools, setting targets and imposing initiatives based on a set of questionable data associated with the Primary Strategy standards agenda, is not appropriate. I raise concerns that such an approach does not accurately reflect the needs of these schools within their unique contexts and settings, which appear far more complicated and diverse than the standards agenda criteria used by Ofsted and policy makers suggests. I then consider how these concerns are being increased by the long term financial difficulties facing primary schools and raise concerns that the current historically based funding structure is perpetuating inequalities and frustrating headteachers. At the same time, the financial burden of implementing initiatives, associated with the Primary Strategy, appears problematic. Evidence suggests that the demands of workforce reform, personalised learning and extended schools are, in the case study schools, exaggerating difference and causing difficulties, as heads try to balance already overstretched budgets whilst coping with the standards agenda.

9.1 The impact of categorisation: ‘shallow rituals of verification’

Statistical data, based on KS2 SATs performance, has been used by the DfES/DCSF and Local Authorities to focus on the performance of the case study schools. This system of monitoring schools, promoting certain measurable aspects of teaching, has developed to the exclusion of less tangible

longer term influences on the learning of children and has encouraged 'shallow rituals of verification at the expense of other forms of organizational intelligence' (Power, 1997 p123). Further to this Power highlights the irony that it is the democratic ideals which drive society, those of openness and accountability, that threaten to make it a closed society because of the trust which is put into these narrow methods of verification; 'They do not form a basis for communication and dialogue' (p128). I will now look at how deeply entrenched and inflexible the government is in categorising schools.

9.2 An efficiency drive; narrowing targets and experiences

Well before the economic crisis of 2008, following the introduction of the Primary Strategy, the UK Treasury was determined to reduce expenditure in government departments. Education was no exception, with the DCSF/DfES setting a target, in Efficiency Technical Notes to the Treasury, of saving £4.3 billion in the financial year 2007-08 (DfES, 2005a, 2006c). The impact on the case study schools of such budgetary reductions was not initially apparent, but could be identified through a number of 'tripping points' during the research period. To begin with I consider the way self evaluation and performance data have combined to dominate the more efficient and cost saving system of inspection introduced, with significant repercussions for the case study schools, struggling to reach government targets with finances already stretched.

9.3 A new framework for inspection

In order to meet Treasury requirements, manpower at Ofsted has been cut and a new data driven format for inspections introduced. The new Ofsted school inspection regime, started in September 2005, reduced the amount of time

inspectors spent in classrooms, and inspector days in schools, heralding a much greater use of statistical data analysis and school self evaluation to pre-judge the performance of schools, to identify those to be targeted and to decide which schools should be placed into special measures, or even closed. For primary schools which had previously received good Ofsted reports and achieved well in SATs and CVA analysis, now embedded in RAISE online²⁸, there was likely to be a brief visit for part of a day by one inspector. Other schools, such as the case studies, with more challenging previous reports and less resilient data, whether from self evaluation or ‘under-achievement’, receive more attention over two days, with the number of inspectors dependent on the size of the school. Before inspectors arrive in schools they produced a data driven pre inspection briefing document, from which they develop hypotheses about the school. It is interesting that the Ofsted guidance for inspectors seems to carry a warning;

All text, including any reflections that might also be made upon the overall effectiveness of the school, should be recorded in a way that does not **appear** to pre-judge the inspection findings (Ofsted, 2005d my emphasis).

It is claimed, anecdotally, that the DCSF has the power to override the judgement of inspectors. The use of the word ‘appear’ in this context suggests that this may well be the case. A recent survey for the Times Educational Supplement also highlights how influential the performance data is;

²⁸ RAISE Reporting and Analysis for Improvement through School Self Evaluation – an interactive analysis of school and performance data introduced by the DCSF/Ofsted in 2006 to support schools in self evaluation. It claims to; *examine context, attainment and value added data - explore hypotheses about pupil performance - analyse question level data for National, Optional and Progress tests - set and moderate pupil targets.* www.raiseonline.org

Ofsted visited 6,331 primaries in 2006-07. Of these 98% had the same verdict overall as they received for “achievement and standards”, based on pupils’ test scores (Mansell, 2008).

9.4 The Ofsted SEF

Along with performance data, the introduction of externally imposed school self evaluation is being used to drive the inspection process and was an area of considerable concern for all the case study schools. This move towards self regulation is via the on-line SEF (Self Evaluation Form), with schools now expected to carry out the groundwork for Ofsted. At the time of the research, more than a year after it was introduced, only two out of the four schools had completed their forms, although the heads claimed to have all the required details in paper form. A member of the Senior Leadership Team in one school explained;

We had a day off site, where we could actually focus on getting it done. But it's not online yet and of course since that day a lot of it needs updating. So, we've had a session doing section 3, and trying to update that as much as we can but know that magic button has not yet been pressed and it does drive us mad (Deputy Head).

In this school, for the headteacher, there was a worry that, once Ofsted was able to read what was committed to the SEF, it would not accurately reflect their rapidly changing situation. This is not surprising when the introductory guidance notes are considered;

... it should be an accurate diagnostic document with all conclusions fully supported by the evidence. It should indicate key strengths and weaknesses, and what needs to be tackled to effect improvement.

Inspectors will make considerable use of the SEF when discussing their arrangements for inspection. The impact of your self-evaluation in helping to bring about improvement will be a major factor in their judgements about the effectiveness of your leadership and management and your capacity to improve in the future (DfES SEF guidance April 2005).

The language used in the introductory guidelines for completing the SEF is very similar to that used in the analysis of performance data, suggesting that it is again the same standards agenda which is being pursued.

Access to this form is also revealing. Once on-line the school SEF is open to constant monitoring by Ofsted. It can be updated and altered at any time by the headteacher, but it is frozen three days before an imminent inspection, when the school is notified of the inspection.

Such a process of self evaluation has been identified by Power as a means of internalising the enforcement of compliance. He considers how the advantages of this outweigh the disadvantages and that 'inspection and external audit should eventually collapse into a quality assurance function, an audit of the arrangements for self inspection' (Power, 1997 p131). If this is the case it is unfortunate that the basis for quality assurance in primary schools is SATs results. Self evaluation is certainly cheaper for Ofsted as part of the DfES strategy for reducing inspection costs (DfES, 2005a).

However, centralised power and control have not diminished. The SEF is a very sophisticated technological development of panopticism being used to monitor schools. Ofsted inspectors now have a direct window into the heart of the school. No one knows if they are being observed until access to the form is

denied. The SEF is a large document covering all aspects of school life. The inspectorate now has detailed knowledge of the regulated domain (Power, 1997) that previously was unobtainable. Up to this point only computer analysis of Ofsted reports could feed generalisations, found in such documents as the annual report of the Chief Inspector of Schools. The experience of one teacher, describing the impact of the SEF, sums up how far it has permeated;

A lot of what they input, I think it's mainly the head that's does it, it's one of the things that she does when she is locked away in here trying to get it all updated, but what she puts on the SEF, a lot of it is from us anyway. I think for a lot of things, she very often says to us, Oh this is for the SEF. So I must have it by this time because I need to get it on the SEF. So she makes us all very aware of the SEF and what the SEF is for and what bits of information we are giving her that feed into the SEF. So we don't really have any experience of what the SEF looks like or anything like that, which from what I can gather it's a nightmare, but we are always feeding into it (Y2 teacher).

Here is evidence of the impact on class teachers working to support the headteacher in producing evidence for the SEF. Self evaluation, in principle essential for school development, has become, in meeting external demands, a control system instead. Self regulation has now been rigorously enforced. Shore and Wright summarise this; ‘...external subjection and internal subjectification are combined so that individuals conduct themselves in terms of the norms through which they are governed’ (Shore,C. & Wright, S. in Stratherne, 2000 p 61-2)’.

However it seems that self regulation is not enough. How far the data driven control over schools has been extended can be clearly seen in the performative initiatives, experienced during the research period, which I now consider.

9.5 Initiatives for raising achievement

All three case study schools in challenging circumstances have come under considerable pressure from government initiatives, directed through Local Authorities, to raise standards of achievement above 65% at Level 4 in literacy and numeracy (DfES, 2003a), now described as the floor target level (see Appendix 7). These have included the ISI (Improving Schools Initiative), the ISP (Intensifying Support Programme) and the Hard to Shift Programme. All are very similar, with Local Authority external consultants providing guidance on six weekly target setting, of what children must, could and should be able to achieve in literacy and numeracy (for example, in numeracy – being able to do subtraction using a number line) at all levels throughout the school. The pressure on schools has increased with each initiative. Some extra funding is provided through LAs to help establish the initiatives – between £5000 and £10,000, in the case study schools, for additional support for a limited time for ISP and Hard to Shift. The ISI is the least bureaucratic of the three, providing consultant support, helping to set school targets, but not focussing on fine detail. This proved popular with staff;

I like having the consultants in here and I think we are really up-to-date with initiatives. When I go on LA training ...We are already doing what they're advising schools to do and I think that's come from having the consultants in and working with the consultants because they know

they are giving us that sort of understanding to write our action plans ... (Literacy coordinator).

Without them we wouldn't have been as focused, and we wouldn't have got those targets in place as quickly (Maths coordinator).

The other two initiatives were much more prescriptive.

9.6 ISP – The Intensifying Support Programme

As the name suggests the paperwork for the ISP programme is more intense and time consuming, with detailed notes on the performance of each child being recorded, monitored and made available to parents each half term. Teachers, although appreciating the structure, were concerned about the bureaucracy and long term benefits, particularly for the lower achievers;

It's theoretically very good and it does work in practice for quite a number of the children... But it's hard to get your children who are the must group, or the lower attainers, ... on board... it's an awful lot of paperwork (Y4 teacher).

My concern is whether they can retain it and put it into practice once that six weeks is finished – when we did our optional SATs they didn't use their complex sentences targets at all (Y6 teacher).

A Teaching Assistant also had motivational concerns;

...it's still hard to get them to do, sort of, work. We've introduced literacy and they are more accepting of that so we've tried to match up those targets where we can. Numeracy is slightly harder, because they don't -- they see numeracy more as work (TA).

Interestingly the government commissioned review of the ISP pilot scheme in 2005 also raised the same issue, not highlighted by the DfES in their summary, but clearly evident in the case study schools;

Concern has been expressed that SEN and EAL pupils may not be fully integrated into ISP methods of working. This issue is particularly important for many low attaining schools, and raises questions for the future development of the ISP (Griffiths, Cotton, & Bowbrick, 2006 p55).

The future development became the Hard to Shift programme using the same approach. The views of a member of the Senior Management Team about ISP in one school were much more positive, in line with the DfES summary of the review;

It's a very rigorous process where accountability is paramount. All the way through, people are having to account for their actions, the results. It's enabling staff to be reflective in the way they work, what they do. If children aren't achieving in certain groups then staff need to say why and for the next focus, if they know why, it's then having an impact on improving the children's learning in the next focus because they're doing something about it (Deputy head).

However, in this school a number of 'tripping points' were observed to be frustrating teachers in being as rigorous as this interviewee suggested. In another school there was not so much confidence;

...we do focus on the children and their attainment, but it's only in isolated areas. That's the trouble about ISP, it's not the be all and end all to it. It's just focusing on certain areas isn't it? (Y3 teacher)

Although claiming to be targeted at the poorest children, the impact appears to have been on those more compliant to the system. In one school, teachers have focussed on the ISP targets, with the majority of classroom walls and corridors covered with targets and messages for parents, as recommended in the guidelines and as identified in other recent policy research (Webb & Vulliamy, 2006). The displays were dynamic but some parents did not come into school to access this information, whereas more supportive and aspirational parents were observed doing so.

In 2004-2005 there were 855 schools involved in the ISP programme (DfES, 2004f).

9.7 Hard to Shift

This is, perhaps, the most significant example of data driven centralised control to date. Early in 2007 headteachers in certain schools across the country (including, as already mentioned, one case study school) received letters from their local authorities explaining that the DfES had identified their schools as being 'Hard to Shift' because for 3 years they had failed to reach government created Key Stage 2 floor targets of 65% of children reaching Level 4 in English and Mathematics SATs (DfES, 2003a), despite having received ISP support. Appendix 7 is parts of a letter obtained from the DfES to local authorities outlining the funding for this initiative. This shows that it was now the responsibility of the local authorities to focus on these schools, even though the DfES had identified them. They were to receive extra funding and monitoring support from an external consultant because it was felt by the DfES that they could, or should, achieve the base level targets but had not yet done

so (DfES, 2007). This initiative was above and beyond the ISP and ISI initiatives already being implemented.

Performance evidence, based on aggregated raw scores (not CVA), has been used by the DfES to categorise schools as being 'Hard to Shift', without any visits to the schools, discussion with the heads, governing bodies or local authorities. There seems to have been a lack of protocol demonstrated by the School Standards Group of the DfES. This was taken even further by suggestions of schools being closed or for other drastic action to be taken if they were not expected to reach the government targets. The chair of governors in the case study school, with many years experience of working in the education system, was incandescent with rage at the way they were being treated and, between expletives, questioned the legality of what was being done.

It is interesting to note that legislation needed for such draconian action *was* introduced in the 2006 Education and Inspections Act, to commence in law from 1st April 2007 (DfES, 2007), and aimed at schools categorised by Ofsted as requiring Significant Improvement or Special Measures. The letter from the DfES Standards Unit to LAs (Appendix 7) implies that powers to close schools are much wider by suggesting they should be 'using statutory intervention powers promptly and robustly where appropriate' and that '... we expect authorities seriously to consider closure or other radical solutions for other schools stuck below the KS2 floor targets.' This suggests that the Standards Unit does not even need judgments from Ofsted. It appears confident that the statistical data is enough to categorise and target schools not performing. However the same Standards Unit does not appear sufficiently confident to

take responsibility for the actions it is proposing. It has distanced central government from its responsibility for the expected actions by delegating the task to local authorities.

9.8 Schools under pressure

Following the 2006 Education Act, the guidance on schools causing concern stated that ‘Local authorities are responsible for enabling schools to respond to the challenge provided by SIPs and Ofsted’ (DfES, 2007). Challenge from the Standards Unit is not mentioned, but three months before the guidance was even published, the DfES seemed to be taking control and setting its own agenda for school performance, using the same SATs data, to put pressure onto LAs, and through them onto schools it had already identified and categorised from statistical data alone.

During the research period there was extreme pressure on one case study school to reach the 65% Level 4 target. If it did not the LA was expected, by the DfES, to be committed to ‘using statutory intervention powers promptly and robustly where appropriate.’ It now appeared that the options for this were;

- Forcing the school to enter into partnership arrangements with another ‘successful’ school
- appointing additional governors (to provide more challenge)
- to appoint an interim executive body to replace an ineffective governing body (to remove staff)
- suspension of the delegated budget
- closure (DfES, 2007)

It is not surprising that the Chair of Governors (an experienced Ofsted inspector) was outraged. Until this point school closure procedures had

involved Ofsted inspections, going into Special Measures, much Local Authority support and subsequent visits by Ofsted and HMI. Now it seemed that Ofsted had been superseded by the 65% mark. No account had been taken of the earlier Value Added (VA) scores linked to Key Stage 2 SATs results that compare similar schools, which were supposed to make SATs more meaningful for schools in challenging circumstances. The case study school subjected to the Hard to Shift regime had a 2006 VA rating placing it a third of the way up the Local Authority table. In 2007 CVA (Context Value Added for individual pupils) scores were introduced, but it was the raw scores that were being used to measure performance and to 'punish' or praise schools.

For 3 weeks, after receiving the 'Hard to Shift' letter, the leadership team at the case study school was in turmoil. They did not know how to respond. As mentioned earlier, everyday routines were disrupted. It was only after receiving an e-mail from the LA, which inadvertently included other schools in the 'Hard to Shift' group, that the headteachers were able to get together (initially against the wishes of the LA) to support each other in their difficulties. The deputy head felt stigmatized;

...it really gets me that we are classed as a sink school and we get the sink kids, if that's what you want to call them. But we don't get the support that is actually needed. Instead you get people on your back saying, 68%. I've got to get 68% Level 4 this year and next year, and when you look at the number of children with special needs in the class it's an impossibility. And nobody looks at that. When EB (the LA Hard to Shift co-ordinator) came in, and he was talking about getting the 68%, I said, has anybody actually looked at the cohorts that you are

talking about and looked at how many special needs there are in that group. No, that's irrelevant (Deputy head).

This is an example of a one sided contract imposed by the DfES on both Local Authorities and schools. Little account has been taken of context. Such performative measures are clearly associated with the enterprise culture associated with central government control, driven by market forces which;

...involve the reconstituting of institutional roles in terms of contracts strictly defined, and even more frequently involve a contract-like way of representing relationships between institutions, between individuals and institutions and between individuals with one another (du Gay, 1996 p180).

The representation of schools being 'Hard to Shift' was created by the DfES using the raw scores from the SATs tests, with punitive measures built into the contract if schools failed to deliver. It is not clear why data generated elsewhere concerning deprivation, special needs, funding and resources, including CVA analysis, is being ignored. Is it possible that this other data is felt to undermine the expectations of ministers for all schools to reach the floor level targets? It also raises concerns about the purpose of CVA analysis, if it is ignored for those schools most likely to benefit from it. Is CVA just another attempt to placate those who question the value of SATs in the first place, or is it merely a form of self justification on the part of statisticians in order to keep national tests, which they believe to be such a valuable source of information?

9.9 SIPs data driven

A further development, originating from the Strategy, of this data driven approach, recently implemented, is the introduction of SIPs (School

Improvement Partners) into every primary school in the country. In a move which seems to further alienate input by local authorities, SIP training is managed by the NCSL (National College of School Leadership). However it is the responsibility of the local authority to ensure that each school has a SIP. At present this seems to have been achieved by a conglomeration of LA inspectors, former inspectors, heads, former heads and independent consultants – trained over a two day residential course and drafted in to work with schools to raise standards and achievement. This is reminiscent of the way Ofsted inspectors were originally recruited and trained, described by Inglis as creating a monstrous new regiment in Chapter 1 (Inglis, 2000 p425). The work of SIPs consists of, on average about 5 days a year, three of which are spent in the school. To achieve any sort of consistency with such a plethora of diverse talents, the DCSF has taken the same very rational attitude, already identified in its approach to testing and inspection in the case study schools; it expects headteachers to provide SIPs with an enormous amount of data, which is then used to judge the school. At the time of this research the headteachers in the schools in challenging circumstances were not considered suitable for SIP training themselves because of their ‘poor’ performance data.

This is a DCSF list of documents required from the headteacher for the SIP;

- school’s self-evaluation, linked to the Ofsted self evaluation form;
- school’s development plan;
- information on how the school ensures pupils make progress and addresses, where appropriate, the five outcomes from Every Child Matters;
- school- and pupil-level data and analyses;

- value for money comparisons
- most recent Ofsted report;
- local authority briefing on local issues (DCSF, 2007c)

There is a very clear pattern developing here. Enjoyment and creativity have, once again, been quietly subsumed into the standards driven agenda. As with the original analysis of *Excellence and Enjoyment* (DfES, 2003a) it is excellence which clearly continues to dominate and is being used to categorise schools. For those schools, seen as underperforming, the pressure, claimed to be ‘professional challenge and support’ (DCSF, 2007c) is immense and detracts significantly from efforts to promote creativity and enjoyment. Stratherne clearly describes the impact of such expectations;

Procedures for assessment have social consequences, locking up time, personnel and resources, as well as locking into the moralities of public management. Yet by themselves audit practices often seem mundane, inevitable parts of a bureaucratic process. It is only when one starts putting together a larger picture that they take on the contours of a distinct cultural artefact (Stratherne, 2000 p2).

Such was the accumulation of expectations within the case study schools. Added to this, not allowing headteachers to become SIPs from schools yet to reach floor level targets was felt by the case study heads to further undermine their professional standing. It does not bode well for attracting high quality staff to such posts in the future.

9.10 School profiles

Further evidence of the way in which the DCSF is ensuring that performativity is becoming ever more culturally entrenched is provided by the creation of

individual school profiles, to replace the governors annual report to parents and the associated meeting, so often ignored by the vast majority of parents in schools in areas of deprivation. It sounds reasonable enough in the initial introduction;

The report has been replaced by the school profile which is designed for schools to communicate with parents about the school's progress, priorities and performance. Profiles are completed and published online (DCSF, 2007f).

It is interesting to consider the language of this introductory statement when the reality of what has to be put into the profile is considered. It is the DCSF priorities and data that take precedence over what the school may want to communicate to parents. This further extract from the explanatory document highlights how specific the content is expected to be;

The profile contains, where relevant:

- data provided and updated by the DCSF on an annual basis
- a summary of the latest Ofsted report provided by the DCSF and updated at least every three years
- narrative sections written by the school, updated at least once every academic year.

The narrative sections include the following headings:

- What have been our successes this year?
- What are we trying to improve?
- How have our results changed over time?

- How are we making sure that every child receives teaching to meet their individual needs?
- How do we make sure our pupils are healthy, safe and well-supported?
- What have we done in response to our Ofsted report?
- How are we working with parents and the community?

(DCSF, 2007f)

Once again the categorisation of the school through the same questionable performative data dominated. The case study headteachers were worried about this. Even the school narrative element has pre-defined headings to further consolidate the narrow emphasis on excellence. As usual there are a couple of 'reasonable' elements included, for those concerned with the broader agenda. The opportunity to describe the uniqueness of the school context is missing. One headteacher explained the difficulties;

It doesn't work, because numbers change here by the week, by the month, some can come out, some can go in, that's the trouble with the statistics here, you are never talking about the same cohort of children. They move in and out, sometimes back; sometimes you just never know, families are always falling out and they ship them out to other family members, and it's never the same cohort (Headteacher).

There is no mention of enjoyment or creativity and of even more concern is the fact that learning is not even mentioned for inclusion. These are optional extras. These serious omissions reflect very badly on attempts to promote schools as effective learning communities, or ensuring that, in the words of Michael Barber, one of the originators of New Labour education policy,

schools remain 'crucial, providing the foundation of learning' (Barber, 2001 p39).

9.11 The quest for school improvement continues

It is clear that the continued emphasis on raw scores for SATs and the use of performance data to judge schools is a continuation of the legacy of the school improvement movement, so much to the fore in the early years of New Labour and discussed earlier. The DCSF claims it is following the Every Child Matters Agenda (Secretary of State Ed Balls quoted in Ainscow et al., 2007 p14), implying that the impact of hard line school improvement is diminishing and more of a consensus is being reached. However, what seems to be happening is that a more pernicious approach is being taken which attempts to blunt any arguments or challenges to its voracity. The same aggregated data continues to be used, and when this is challenged CVA analysis is used to justify it. The pattern of repetition and reproduction of the data can be traced from the individual pupil, through parents, class/teacher performance, school performance, governors, school profiles, School SEFs, Ofsted, Local Authorities, SIPs, media reports and league tables, QCA, Capita (the private company managing the Strategy), all the way back to the DCSF, the Treasury and 10 Downing Street. There is little wonder that ministers say that SATs are here to stay (DfES, 2003a). To remove them would undermine the whole structure on which these agencies and much of their centralised control depend.

9.12 Comply or go

The case study headteachers were right to feel concerned about threats to their schools. The TES reported recently that a Nottinghamshire headteacher, from a

school in an area very similar to the case studies, had resigned, despite being well respected in the local ex-mining community and having received an ‘excellent’ Ofsted report in 2003, because the local MP judged the school to be underperforming, consistently being in the bottom six of the national primary league tables.

The MP demanded that Ed Balls, the Schools Secretary, put pressure on the local authority to do something about it (Milne, 2008). It is reported anecdotally that the LA head of Children’s Services was summoned urgently to the DCSF and told what action to take. Within a week the head resigned and was going to leave that day until, unsurprisingly, an Ofsted phone call announcing an inspection was received. To support his colleagues he decided to stay for another week to see them through the inspection. A predictable pattern of events had been set in motion, reminiscent of the intrigue associated the closure of Hackney Downs secondary school in London ten years earlier (O’Connor et al., 1999). The school is now to be amalgamated with an ‘outstanding’ school in the same town and will cease to exist in name by December 2008.²⁹ All remaining staff will have to re-apply for their jobs.

This is exactly the sort of action which the DfES/DCSF School Improvement and Targets Unit was demanding from LAs in January 2007 (Appendix 7). Such is the pressure that local authorities, now awaiting Ofsted Joint Area Reviews (JAR)³⁰, and the case study schools are under.

²⁹ In 2008, soon after the old head resigned, 70% of Y6 children achieved Level 4 in KS2 SATs. This school would no longer have been regarded as ‘Hard to Shift’.

³⁰ The joint area review (JAR) is a three-year programme running until December 2008 and all 150 local authority areas will have **one** joint area review during this time. The JAR judges the contribution that the **council and its partners in the local area** are making to improve outcomes for children and young people’ Retrieved from the Ofsted website 28.02.2008 www.Ofsted.gov.uk

9.13 High stakes, low morale

Because of the 'high stakes' children are coached to perform (Tymms & Merrell, 2007). There was evidence of this in all four case study schools, with familiarity work starting in early November for SATs the following May. Throughout the year I was not invited to work in any Y6 classes, the explanation being that they had to concentrate on SATs. As mentioned earlier, some teachers questioned the validity of the 2007 tests in different school contexts, and worried that children only just confident in writing stories were now being expected to write a description of a leaflet about environmental issues.

There were also concerns that assessment results may be inflated by teachers at KS1, particularly in separate infant schools. One headteacher also felt that inflated KS2 results might be having a negative impact on subsequent, secondary KS3 results, also subjected to CVA analysis. The high stakes associated with the published test results distort not only their reliability, but also their usefulness as a tool for supporting teaching and learning.

9.14 Dubious data

The headteachers in the three schools in challenging circumstances did not feel that the CVA IDACI information they were given accurately reflected the amount of deprivation within their schools.

To attempt to get a clearer picture of this I used ACORN/CACI data³¹, which looks at the deprivation for a specific post code area (approximately 15 households). To ensure anonymity and confidentiality I analysed postcodes

³¹ ACORN is an analytical tool based on census data developed by private company CACI see Appendix 8

from each of the classes that I worked with but did not identify specific children or postcodes. I then compared these figures with the IDACI data for the same postcodes.

ACORN showed almost twice as many children from homes in challenging circumstances, when compared with IDACI figures (See Appendix 8), confirming the feelings of the headteachers that deprivation levels in their schools were being underestimated. This suggests another way data is masking the difficulties these schools are facing.

9.15 What is being shifted?

Performance evidence has been used to categorise schools as being 'Hard to Shift' by the DfES, including one case study school. The same process had been used a year earlier to classify all three struggling case study schools and to put pressure on them to perform. This time the DfES had not identified individual schools. The local authority was given DfES funds to identify and support schools through the Intensifying Support Programme (ISP) and the Improving Schools Initiative (ISI), both with the same expectation that they should achieve the 65% target or face further challenge. A year later one school was placed into the 'Hard to Shift' category, with the associated threats, because it had failed to meet the targets. A comment by one teacher sums up concerns about how the data is misrepresenting their situation;

It's that sort of misunderstanding of the whole situation, misunderstanding of this community and the region, misunderstanding of our children's needs, that I think is not just misguided, it's actually quite frightening (Assistant Head).

In the case study schools the current system of categorisation does not appear to work. The difficulties that these schools face seem far greater and more complex than CVA data, school profiles and Ofsted inspections indicate. There is already sufficient data available, ignored by the DCSF, to identify the needs of schools in challenging circumstances much more accurately and to categorise them to be funded accordingly. There is clear evidence from other research that all the current regime of categorisation does is to broadly identify the social class structure of the school and the community within which it is set, rather than acknowledging the wider issues involved (Lupton, 2005; Thrupp, 1999; Whitty, 2002).

In the second half of this chapter I consider the cost implications of the demands being made and long term financial difficulties facing these primary schools, raising concerns that the current funding system is perpetuating inequalities and frustrating headteachers. At the same time, the financial burden of implementing initiatives, associated with the Primary Strategy, appears problematic. Evidence suggests that the demands of workforce reform, personalised learning and extended schools are, in the case study schools, exaggerating difference and causing difficulties, as heads try to balance already overstretched budgets whilst coping with the standards agenda.

9.16 Budget problems

The introduction of LMS, along with the reduction of LEA powers, revised pay structures (long before workforce reform) and the drive to become entrepreneurial and innovative in fund chasing, has given the ‘illusion of autonomy and flexibility for the manager’ (Ball, 1994 p66). *Excellence and*

Enjoyment (DfES, 2003a), almost 10 years later, was seen to be perpetuating many of the same illusions. Statutory elements of the Strategy, such as PPA time, appear to be offering more flexibility to staff, but limiting opportunities for children and schools. A recurrent theme throughout both the pilot study and case study research is that a lack of funding was frustrating the schools in being able to deliver whatever was being expected of them. Such concerns are not new. The 2004 annual NFER survey of trends in primary education reported that budgets were the most common cause of concern for the eleventh consecutive year (Easton et al., 2005) in 70% of the 370 surveyed primary schools. By 2007 this had fallen to 53% (Lewis, Chamberlain, Riggall, Gagg, & Rudd, 2007), with staffing being identified as a concern by 50% of schools. The budget concerns, which were identical to those of the case study schools, were explained as follows;

This year, the main reasons cited by primary headteachers as to why budgets were an issue were: the budget not meeting the needs of the school, the budget share declining (in real terms or as a result of falling rolls) and the costs associated with issues such as staffing and workforce reform (Lewis et al., 2007 p1).

For such issues to be of concern for over half the schools in this large survey, four years after the introduction of the Strategy, suggests a deeply entrenched problem. There was one interesting point, in the 2007 survey, related to secondary schools with pupils likely to be from lower socio-economic groups. This identified more concerns about attainment and attendance, but less concerns about budgets, suggesting that this may reflect proportionately higher funding for education in more deprived areas (p4). Smaller primary schools

and those such as the case study schools, in isolated pockets of deprivation, appear less likely to be targeted for such extra funding under the present system.

Such a survey does not necessarily reveal what has been done to address concerns, or the impact of these measures on children. In the case study schools heads seemed determined to paint a positive picture of whatever actions they were taking, even though they acknowledged shortfalls in funding. They were managing, but there were repercussions that did not match their stated intentions.

To gain a further understanding of this problem I now examine evidence of how the attitudes and beliefs of those responsible for the funding system are perpetuating historical inequalities, and frustrating the case study headteachers in achieving long term sustainability for the individual initiatives associated with the Primary National Strategy.

9.17 The role of the Treasury

In his 2006 Budget speech Gordon Brown made some perceptive remarks about school funding and promised future investment;

- In private schools there is one teacher for every nine pupils compared with one teacher for every sixteen in state secondary schools.
- To secure better school results we have improved the pupil teacher ratio and doubled the money spent per year for the typical pupil from £2,500 to £5,000.
- But this figure of £5,000 per pupil still stands in marked contrast to

average spending per pupil in the private sector of £8,000 a year.

- Our long-term aim should be to ensure for 100 per cent of our children the educational support now available to just 10 per cent.
- So to improve pupil teacher ratios and the quality of our education, we should agree an objective for our country that stage by stage, adjusting for inflation, we raise average investment per pupil to today's private school level (Brown, 2006).

It is interesting to note the concern of the Chancellor about the teacher pupil ratio is set in secondary schools. He does not mention primary school teacher pupil ratios at all. Again, when talking about money spent on the 'typical pupil' increases, no mention is made of the differentiation between primary and secondary funding. Quite how these figures are achieved when the actual funding going to schools in 2004/5 was £2413 per primary pupil and £3160 per secondary pupil (NAHT, 2005) is not clear. Do the larger amounts claimed by the Chancellor include the £177.5 million contract over five years for the implementation of the Primary and Key Stage 3 Strategies awarded to the private company Capita, all the national testing and assessment costs, the costs of Ofsted and DfES administrative costs? If the expenditure also includes the capital cost involved in the school building programme and ICT investment it would seem misleading to claim that it is being spent on the typical pupil.

Gordon Brown stated he wanted to raise state school expenditure to the level of current private school expenditure as described above. No timetable was given for this target. A few months after the Budget speech some of the claims made by the Chancellor were being questioned. As already mentioned in the previous

chapter (p248) the TES article (16.06.06) *Don't count on Brown's promises* reported that David Bell, the DfES permanent secretary, in response to questions by MPs, stated that schools face some difficult years financially. *"It is going to get tighter. I don't think there's any doubt about that."* (Stewart, 2006). The DfES was already expecting 'more or better output for the same input' from schools (DfES, 2005a). I looked for evidence of this being achieved in the case study schools.

Significantly increased funding has gone into education since the arrival of New Labour. Much of this has been to redress the lack of investment by the previous Conservative administration and to support school improvement and the standards agenda (Ball, 2001). With initiatives still coming on stream, headteachers have expressed real concerns about sustainability, because of funding issues (Easton et al., 2005; Lewis et al., 2007).

In the next section I explore how these initiatives are being accommodated, the financial implications of these added responsibilities and their impact on school budgets.

9.18 More or better output for the same input?

One of the most welcomed achievements of New Labour has been the increase in teaching assistants (TAs) in primary schools, funded to support literacy and numeracy (Hancock et al., 2001). Many of these TAs were initially brought in to support children with learning and behavioural difficulties, as inclusion into main stream schools has expanded. However, through working in the classroom, the influence of TAs has been much greater. Their support has spread to give encouragement to other pupils across the curriculum (Gunter,

2007). The presence of a second adult has positively enhanced classroom dynamics and increased opportunities for cooperative learning. As one headteacher explained;

As far as TAs in main school go they all support teachers , they all do special needs work, they all do intervention work with individuals so they all do everything basically. So we've got a good team
(Headteacher).

9.19 Workforce reform on the ground

TAs and teachers have established good working relationships (Webb & Vulliamy, 2006, 2007). This was very clear in the case study schools. But, from September 2005, the government expected many TAs to be upgraded to Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTAs) capable of teaching a class during PPA (Preparation, Planning and Assessment) time for the teacher (DfES, 2003a). There were cost implications to this ambition. Government suggestions for PPA cover included bringing in specialists for PE, sport, music, foreign language, art, and drama, each requiring staff with specific skills to be employed. It is claimed that these staff are cheaper to employ than a fully qualified teacher, meaning that for 10% of their time children could be taught by someone without a teaching qualification, a move not appreciated by teachers in recent research findings (Webb & Vulliamy, 2006).

Headteachers in the pilot study expressed real concerns about the funding of PPA time. However, not one challenged the idea, in line with their national association, the NAHT. PPA has a proven track record in other countries - Australia, USA and Canada. In this country it is a utopian ideal, and for the leader of a team of teachers to be questioning the value of it would be divisive.

Rather, it was the implementation that worried heads. Evidence suggested that the PPA time element of workforce reform would continue because *“It is the law so we have to do it”*.

By the time of the case study research PPA time had been statutory for more than a year. In the pilot study schools there had been contingency plans to get through the first academic year (September 2005 –July 2006) which had been expensive, including in some schools, increased class sizes to reduce the number of teachers employed, releasing funds for PPA cover. As one headteacher explained;

...because of PPA time I have not been able to have three Y3/4 classes. I can only sustain it for a year but also we provide management time as well so I shall probably end up using capital devolved money from Easter to September to finish it off. I don't know what it will be like next year (Headteacher).

Costs associated with PPA time were starting to impact on school budgets and on the learning experiences of children. A year after implementation, two case study schools had lost full time TA classroom support. A less obvious cost appeared if an HLTA or specialist employed for PPA time became ill, with no similar cheap replacement cover readily available, TAs were withdrawn from classroom support activities. If these TAs did not have HLTA qualifications two would be required to cover a class, further exacerbating support elsewhere. To avoid this situation supply teachers were being employed at a much higher than budgeted cost in the first two days before insurance cover came in. Contingency funds were being used up.

Cost Cutting

Salaries of HLTAs were also a concern. The support staff union, UNISON, highlighted concerns about split contracts, identified in almost half the schools surveyed, which is continuing to impact upon schools (UNISON, 2007 p9).

The approach towards HLTAs of one case study head, driven by financial difficulties, reflects one of the possible causes of current national on-going industrial action;

HLTA is a qualification not a status. ... what we are doing already is where we're asking TAs to cover whole class situations in any form , whether that's PPA or anything like that we're paying them accordingly at the highest grade (Headteacher).

Investigating further, these HLTAs were paid on a higher grade for just the hours they were covering classes. The salary differential was described as “about £1 an hour” by the budget manager. This would be £5.50 per day extra to cover a class. To employ a supply teacher would cost £130 per day. This financial differentiation was unfortunate because the head was very proud of the TAs and encouraged them to further their careers;

We've got a particularly good teaching assistant workforce, that's under strain but very good. One, who's the acting senior, is already HLTA status, and in the latter stages of gaining Qualified Teacher Status (Headteacher).

The report by UNISON into the effects of remodelling also highlights the complexity of roles now being expected of support staff. Thirty five roles were described ranging from running breakfast clubs to family liaison officers (UNISON, 2007 p74-75). Many new responsibilities are associated with

secondary schools, but a considerable number of new roles were identified in the case study schools as follows;

- Play co-ordinator
- Breakfast club manager
- Nurture group manager
- Reprographics, stock and dishwasher operative
- Foreign language 'teacher'
- Display co-ordinator
- ICT manager
- Health and safety officer
- Special needs co-ordinator
- Senior TA
- SureStart liaison
- Dinner money collector
- Medicine administrator
- Publicity officer

These roles were either extra responsibilities given to TAs already employed, or were extra support staff employed on a part time basis for a specific role. Some TAs were employed on a higher pay scale for responsibilities, but hours worked, term time only employment, split contracts, temporary contracts, shared responsibilities, or goodwill without pay, made this a very complicated structure to manage for heads with limited resources. In the schools with fewer support staff each had more responsibilities, with less evidence of extra pay, as budgets were already tight. At the time of the research many of these extra responsibilities relied on goodwill or nominal extra payments. Recently the TES reported that there is to be a crackdown on such practice via the Teacher Development Agency for Schools and backed by the DCSF (TES Stewart, 2008 22.08). This will have a significant impact on staffing resources and roles in the case study schools, already being managed 'creatively' in order to fulfil statutory requirements.

As well as this, there is another longer term difficulty that the changing role of TAs is creating. More able TAs could take classes confidently and were seeking higher qualifications. In one case study school two HLTAs were leaving to become teachers by the end of the school year and a third would qualify within a year. They had all been nurtured by the school for many years and had ‘grown into their jobs’. Such a rich vein of talent had been available during the initial implementation of PPA time, but the head did not have a succession of similar staff for the future. This, allied to demands for more equitable pay for support staff, does not bode well for future support for those children, ‘the silent minority’, already identified as missing out because of other statutory requirements.

9.20 Treasury solutions

There is no evidence of any commitment for extra funding from the DCSF to address the concerns of UNISON, although it claims to support the campaign. This research suggests that, on the contrary, low cost solutions have been an essential part of DfES policy for saving money for several years. The DfES Efficiency Technical Note to the Treasury (DfES, 2005a), clearly outlined plans for the Department to achieve over £4.3 billion in annual efficiency gains in 2007-08, contributing towards the Government’s overall efficiency target of over £20 billion.

Below is the table used by the DfES to justify this approach for cover supervisors to the Treasury;

Element	A1 b) Using cover supervisors.
Description of efficiency	The benefit from using cover supervisors – appropriately trained support staff covering for short term teacher absences – to reduce the amount spent on supply teachers.
Recyclable?	Yes.
Type	More or better output for same input
Assumption: what would otherwise happen?	The amount spent on supply teachers would either stay at the same level or increase.
Benefit calculation, and measures.	The benefit is the reduction in the amount spent on employing supply teachers, freeing more resources for the schools to use elsewhere. The financial gain will be calculated as the reduction in real terms of the amount spent on employing supply teachers.
Monitoring	An annual assessment by DfES based on each year's data, the first one in Spring 2006.
Data sources	Consistent Financial Reporting (CFR) returns which identify thirty expenditure headings including staff and teaching time.
Data validation and control	School CFR returns are validated by the local authority before being sent to the Department where further checks are made, including year on year comparisons. School level CFR data is not public information but income and expenditure data at authority level and above is published through Section 52 outturn statements.
Data issues and risks	CFR is a new data collection and as such schools are still coming to grips with coding their own accounts to the CFR framework. However, staffing costs are generally free of error and taking national data should sufficiently deal with any minor discrepancies that may exist.
Baselines	2002 - 2003 data.
Quality measures	Progress towards the full range of PSA* school attainment targets

* PSA - Public Service Agreement

Table 5 Using cover supervisors. Extract from DfES Efficiency Technical Note Dec 2005

Further to this the same document also states that the DfES plans to:

... enable frontline professionals in schools, colleges and higher education institutions to use their time more productively, which we expect to generate around 30 per cent of the total efficiency gains, enabling institutions to achieve more with their resources. Benefits will be generated through workforce reform, investment in ICT and

reducing administrative burdens (DfES, 2005a).

So it seems that any increase in funding to support PPA time and other aspects of workforce reform is questionable. Quite how the ‘front line professionals’ in the case study schools could use their time ‘more productively’, to generate ‘around 30% of the efficiency gains’, is not clear. This research suggests that this approach is, indirectly, having a negative impact upon children. Resources in two of the schools were already being spread far too thinly, with so called ‘efficiency gains’ resulting in support for children being reduced. The new CFR framework does not have a section to identify the costs of PPA time, even though there are new sections for extended school funding (DfES, 2006a). By not identifying the actual costs, the real funding problem is avoided. ‘Creative accounting’, shifting costs from one area of the budget to another, will enable schools to survive. The DfES is looking for a reduction in supply teacher costs. There appears to be no intention to allocate sufficient funds, over time, for primary teachers to be covered by other teachers, without sacrifices being made elsewhere. The phrase “more or better output for the same input” does not sit well with headteachers already worried about budgets (Easton et al., 2005; Lewis et al., 2007). The same assumption, that money can be created by juggling resources, seems to apply to other initiatives being promoted by the Primary Strategy. However the DfES Efficiency Technical Note highlights the tenuous nature of efficiency claims when it states that: ‘A reduction in expenditure which leads to a proportionate reduction in the quality or quantity of service is not an efficiency’ (p3). A responsible government should look for efficiencies and improvements in services, but the current situation in the case study schools makes such expectations problematic.

It may be that using a different sort of front line professional to save money is, in fact, a new interpretation of the idea of the 'Mums Army', promoted by the Conservative government of John Major in 1993, for teachers of younger children 'to qualify at sub-degree level' (Hill, 2005). This earlier incarnation of teaching on the cheap was much vilified and abandoned, but the carrot of PPA time now seems to be distracting teachers from protesting, despite not liking the idea (Webb & Vulliamy, 2006). There is a real danger that this will lead to an acceptance of much lower academic standards for those working with young children, despite government promoting higher qualifications for teachers at the same time. Once more there is the unwritten implication that primary schools need to do little more than the 'basics', however creatively this might be done. For the rest of the time children are a logistical problem, to be managed effectively and efficiently. At Waddingworth this approach was feasible, because of the positive attitudes which the children and their parents had about school. In the other three schools it was not appropriate. Simply managing these children was labour intensive. Focussing on the basics, through ISP or the Hard to Shift programme, and then expecting the rest of the day to be less of a priority, meant that many opportunities for enjoyable learning through excellent teaching were missed. Such are the problems of an 'elementary school' approach.

9.21 Extended schools

Another example of the questionable Treasury approach to funding is that of extended schools. Although included in the new CFR framework (DfES, 2006a) headteachers are having to bid for funding for resources to be placed in their schools. The long term sustainability of the funding and support is not

clear. As one headteacher who works very hard to attract funding and grants explained, with regard to a breakfast club;

...we more or less take on board the cost because it would be totally unreasonable for me to think this was something for working parents because we've hardly got any parents that work (Headteacher).

This headteacher was not confident that she could continue to fund the breakfast club and also to employ staff of high quality, already known to the children, to cover for PPA time;

... but we do have serious issues about consistency and continuity and about conditions for learning and about the children's emotional relationship with staff (Headteacher).

This is not a very secure base for building the foundations of extended schooling.

Schools are still in competition for places. If a neighbouring school offers extended care it could attract children. As one pilot study headteacher explained;

'...it's worrying because if neighbouring schools do start offering wrap around care (the people of this area are not the most discerning when it comes to educational standards) ... they're not going to come here if they want to get their kids in for breakfast. If the school up the road has got the facilities and I haven't got a breakfast club they won't send them there for breakfast if then they're getting them into a mini bus every day to come and see me- so it's a bit worrying' (Pilot study headteacher).

In the case study schools there was evidence that some elements of extended schools were established and working well, but there were also concerns about sustainability;

...budget restrictions affect the things we can do in school. We will be down on staff next year and that will affect some of the things that we can offer. It just affects staff morale, so the after-school activities that you can offer are not as wide, because less staff offer to do them because they are being stretched within the classroom (Headteacher).

Once more it seems that government is taking advantage of the goodwill of staff to promote their change agenda, expecting that, once established, initiatives will remain in place. This was clearly not the case. With start up funding gone and voluntary support dwindling, the headteacher did not have enough funds to run after-school activities effectively. Parents were unwilling or unable to pay for such provision, possibly reflecting the socio-economic problems of the area.

Such developments raise concerns about how sustainable the extended schools initiative really is. Guarantees that all children will have access to ‘childcare provision between 8am and 6pm all year round’ by 2010 (Blair, 2004) seem extremely optimistic, considering the transient nature of much already in place. Managing extended schools provision is likely to become yet another time consuming responsibility for headteachers and administrative staff, particularly if funding becomes problematic. Centralised efficiency measures do not consider time taken to sustain initiatives.

9.22 Is technology helping?

A huge amount of investment in ICT equipment has taken place under New

Labour, with laptops computers to support planning and assessment and interactive whiteboards for many classrooms. Recent evidence (Smith, Hardman, & Higgins, 2006) suggests that interactive whiteboards have not provided a quick technological fix in bringing about a fundamental change to the underlying pedagogy of whole class teaching. For more effective use of this innovative tool, considerable labour intensive and expensive investment is needed to enhance the skills of some teachers, as shown by earlier research into developing the literacy strategy (English et al., 2002). Evidence of teacher intransigence has been apparent over the last 20 years (Alexander, 1992; Earl et al., 2003; Mroz et al., 2000; Reynolds & Farrell, 1996). Schools need financial support to address this problem. As one headteacher explained;

...as long as they give us enough money, or if they make sure that people coming out of training colleges are equipped to do the job and they give school the time to train these people properly as well
(Headteacher).

In one case study school whiteboards were not interactive, but a laptop was used with a projector when children were involved. Unfortunately for three weeks in one room the laptop was not working. This school was struggling to maintain the system. Funds were promised, but classroom support for children was diminishing annually. In another bizarre experience a lesson was observed in an IT room. Children were given the task of identifying parts of the inside of a church. From the barred window of this room could be seen the local church, literally across the road. There were no plans to visit it, but the IT lesson box had been ticked. Such are the problems of developing a more creative

curriculum when teachers lack, or are not expected to have, vision in what they are doing or planning to do.

In the other case studies interactive whiteboards were used as a learning tool in an exciting manner, but the teachers observed maintained the same level of interest from their children throughout the day anyway. One teacher felt her whiteboard was in the wrong place in the room and was not easily accessible to the children. She was hoping for it to be moved, but by the end of the year it had still not been. In all of the schools children did have on-line access to computers each week, either through laptops being brought into classrooms or in IT rooms. Lessons observed were more successful when there were at least two adults present, except at Waddingworth where most children were already very computer literate and able to solve minor difficulties themselves. Again experiences outside school appeared to influence classroom achievement (Vincent & Ball, 2006).

Quite what the future for technology will be once the current rate of investment decreases was a further worry for the headteachers. Will there be sufficient funds to replace obsolete equipment? The government is very proud of the amount of money spent on ICT, with over £700 million being spent on the National Grid for Learning to get all schools on-line by 2002. Considerable investment in ICT was planned up to 2007/8 but the future after that is not clear.

The only ICT equipment that seems guaranteed to be kept up to date is that which communicates directly with the DCSF and Ofsted. Headteachers were concerned about having to continually update the SEF (Self Evaluation Form)

which was absorbing a large amount of time. There were particular worries about inputting progress of data driven initiatives, including personalised learning, ISP, Hard to Shift and performance targets. Short notice inspections and the New Labour change agenda mean that schools need to keep SEFs up to date to avoid criticism from SIPs and Ofsted. Such concerns raise questions about the time available for headteachers to effectively lead schools.

9.23 Time available for school development

Despite claims that workloads for teachers are being reduced there was little evidence of this happening for the case study headteachers. The SEF was the most obvious example, but workforce reform requirements, extended school initiatives and other concerns with foreign language teaching and personalised learning, all of which required the pursuit of funding, absorbed considerable headteacher time. Further to this pressures of SATs and performance targets³² detracted from time which headteachers had to work creatively with colleagues in curriculum development and leadership. Comments of the three headteachers were particularly telling.

You can bring staff in who do extremely well at interview, who you think will do the business, but then find that they don't do the business, who don't embrace your philosophy, who don't see the bigger picture, and then you can see it crumbling before your eyes.

I think Excellence and Enjoyment has taken a back seat. We have tried to reorganise our curriculum so that it is more topic-based. But staff

³² Recently RAISEonline (Reporting and Analysis for Improvement through School Self Evaluation) has further increased workload. It replaces the Ofsted Performance and Assessment (PANDA) reports and DCSF's Pupil Achievement Tracker (PAT).
<https://www.raiseonline.org/login.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2findex.aspx>

just haven't had time to get their heads around it, I think, if we are honest, I think the ISP is so intense that you don't have time to do it.

Attention is taken away from the actual curriculum and heads and other staff that may inevitably get involved with it (The SEF) either incidentally or knowingly are diverted from their major task, which is educating the children.

(Three Headteachers)

Here is clear evidence of headteachers being overloaded and lacking the funding and resources to lead their schools effectively. The hidden costs of such pressure have yet to be addressed by the government (Daniels & French, 2006).

9.24 Unfair implementation?

Teachers have been given support through PPA time. The struggling children (the silent minority), whose results continue to drag down the statistics, are being excluded, almost by default, as other priorities override their needs. The scope and opportunities for children in difficult circumstances, unable to achieve in literacy and numeracy, are being limited. Government claims that personalised learning will address these concerns, through the jargon of 'catch-up' activities, do not reflect the reality of the case study schools where there are simply not enough adults of quality to avoid 'tripping points' and meet the needs of so many children. Until these schools can get away from the 'quick fixes', of politicians little will change. This research suggests that schools struggling to achieve the mandated requirements will not be helped or

supported sufficiently to address socio-economic problems that are much larger than the narrow focus on under-performance in literacy and numeracy implies.

In the next chapter I reflect upon the contexts of the case study schools, before considering how the ‘what works’ approach to policy initiatives, dominated by the standards agenda, is causing considerable difficulties and is particularly affecting a silent minority of children. I suggest that the intransigence of central government is perpetuating these difficulties and in so doing is masking the commitment needed to bring about sustainable change in transforming the case study schools.

Chapter 10: Children and schools facing difficulties: government pressures increasing

Efforts at social control, it seems, always fail and failure is always the condition for further attempts at control (Power, 1997 p26).

10.1 Schools with common problems

This research focussed on the implementation of the Primary Strategy in schools in isolated areas of considerable social and economic deprivation. Despite similarities, there were significant differences identified in both the way the Strategy was implemented and in resources available for it. However what unified the schools was the pressure to perform, and recurrent, potential ‘tripping points’, in many cases frustrating progress. Other research has identified a close correlation between performance and social class (Lupton, 2005; Thrupp, 1999). Many ‘tripping points’ in this research were associated with children with social, emotional and learning difficulties.

The DCSF continues to believe that the constant pressure on schools to raise standards will bring about much wider societal change. This research suggests difficulties identified in the case study schools are not being addressed by government expectations and are instead becoming more deeply entrenched. The performativity of the system, driven by the choice agenda and the consumerism of the marketplace, alongside post industrial societal difficulties, has situated in these schools many ‘failed consumers’ (Bauman, 1998) unable or unwilling to take advantage of the ‘so called’ opportunities offered to them.

10.2 The number of disadvantaged children under estimated

The media promote aspirational consumerism, as a constant reminder to those struggling to achieve normality. 'Failed consumers' tend to accumulate in urban areas and on large estates that have become neglected and ignored (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000; Maguire et al., 2006; Thomson, 2002; Thrupp & Lupton, 2006). Occasionally they are unexpectedly highlighted, as in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. Such areas end up in a spiral of decline (Lister, 2004 p70). The case study schools served such communities. New Labour politicians and policy makers believed that, using Third Way policies (Giddens, 1998) such as the Primary Strategy, they could address such deeply entrenched difficulties.

In the case study schools there were many children from disadvantaged backgrounds. A major concern was that government IDACI information does not give an accurate indication of their numbers. ACORN data suggests almost twice as many children coming from poor backgrounds. This was backed up by interview evidence identifying drift away from the schools of more aspirational parents (Thrupp, 1999). Those families were being replaced by others unable to find accommodation elsewhere because of difficult circumstances, without the transport or financial ability to take advantage of the choice system. It is important to point out that, in all the schools, a lot of parents were supportive, concerned and conscientious and had chosen to keep their children there. However what the choice agenda has done is to encourage those parents willing and able to seek more successful schools to do just that. This has removed many children capable of achieving the performance levels which

government demands. Research evidence has found that such drift negatively affects the academic achievement of those remaining in so called ‘sink’ schools, dominated by pupils with a low socio-economic status (Thomson, 2002; Thrupp, 1999 p142).

The school communities did not reflect the diversity of their localities. Instead there was polarisation between schools. One supportive parent commented that she did not like waiting outside school for her children because of the bad language used by other people there. She felt that there was no consensus of disapproval. The alternative was to go elsewhere, thus further diminishing the number of conscientious parents. Given choice between schools, such experiences can be very damaging for headteachers struggling to retain parents. One headteacher did attempt to address this problem by going outside regularly at the end of school, but this was not easy to maintain with other pressures.

10.3 The social context

In all three schools aspirational parents have been influenced by publicity given to test results, Ofsted inspections (even of neighbouring secondary schools) and media comments about the localities. All combined to feed the appetite of successful consumers, causing drift away from the schools and also causing fragmentation of the localities in which they were set. Some families have physically moved to ‘better areas’, whilst others have chosen to move their children to ‘better’ local schools, but still live in the area. When council or housing association properties are vacated, because of the notoriety of the neighbourhood close to each school, only those desperate for housing and already in challenging circumstances are accepting this accommodation. These

are families that are not able or willing to exercise choice (Thrupp, 1999 p140).

As one headteacher explained;

Unfortunately I believe that sometimes local council housing policies are such that when people do aspire to get out of an area, those places that they leave are filled by further deprivation – so the aspiration that is around from within our families is being drained away
(Headteacher).

Headteachers in two of the schools identified families being re-housed from larger urban conurbations, to escape drug related problems or family difficulties, as particular concerns. The third school, close to a larger conurbation already had families with such difficulties. The time taken to deal with the problems associated with such families was observed to be almost overwhelming in the two less well staffed schools. Time available for the multifarious aspects of policy implementation and reform was negligible (Thomson, 2002).

All three headteachers were extremely proud of their schools but felt reputations had been tarnished by poor publicity relating to SATs results, Ofsted inspections and, as mentioned above, their physical locations within the communities that they serve.

10.4 Results matter, not contexts

In the case study schools those children already insecure are being further stigmatised by external judgements of academic failure and inconsistent support exacerbating difference, despite great efforts on the part of the schools to counteract such pressures. Of even more concern is that these difficulties do not seem to be recognised by the DCSF. It is unfortunate that, within this

highly structured system, some children achieve success in other less acceptable and more disruptive ways, 'tripping points', which have far reaching effects on school learning environments. There was little evidence of positive support for such children being made available to schools above and beyond normal budgetary provision, except in performance terms through 'booster groups' to get more children to reach level 4 in SATs. The problems that these schools are facing require much greater support than that. Barlingtown had been transformed over two years, with considerable extra funding and an influx of staff of exceptional quality, but that was now being undermined by budgetary reductions leading to systems being considered that had been observed to be of limited value for supporting teaching and learning in the other case study schools.

The ISP and Hard to Shift initiatives, aimed at meeting the *Excellence and Enjoyment* targets appear quite laudable when considered as a statistical exercise. What is not considered is the pressure that these schools are being put under, just to achieve these targets and the impact on the 35% of the children not likely to succeed. The vocabulary of failing schools and the threat of school closure appears to be doing little more than maintain the system of meritocracy so closely associated with high stakes testing. When schools manage to achieve the 65% target even this is not enough. The Ofsted inspection of Barlingtown virtually ignored all the creativity and resources needed to bring about its revival, instead concentrating on SATs data analysis to make recommendations to further drive up standards. Once more it is the belief that further pressure on raising standards will make even more difference which is of concern.

10.5 Does funding match ambition?

There has been a considerable impact on the case study schools from government expectations and demands (Webb & Vulliamy, 2006, 2007). Schools are expected to be more 'efficient' in order to absorb extra costs. Unfortunately the case study schools do not have the economy of scale to achieve such financial savings. This has resulted in difficult decisions being made. Other research has identified problems created by legislation involving workforce reform (Gunter, 2007). In the case study schools support for children has been reduced, either directly through reduced TA hours, or indirectly through larger class sizes, because of PPA cover costs. All the schools are working extremely hard and conscientiously, but a lack of staff, resources, time and opportunities for professional development suggest that they will never be able to achieve a 'tipping point' in meeting the Primary Strategy objectives of combining excellence in teaching and enjoyment in learning. Instead, the Strategy appears to be emphasising difficulties rather than transforming the achievement of these primary schools.

The problems which Barlingtown was dealing with had not diminished. When staffed according to the allocated per capita funding formula, as the community was going into economic decline, the old junior school had run into enormous problems. It is important to report that the ensuing drastic action taken, including closure, had succeeded in transforming the learning environment of the new school for both adults and children. This approach appears to fit in well with the DCSF proclaimed intention of closing failing schools. However what has been ignored is the large amount of investment used to bring about this transformation. Whereas previously only the head was expected to

‘troubleshoot’, during the research period 4 staff did this job. There were 2 adults in each class at all times. Most teacher cover was managed internally. For a brief period the new head was empowered to hire and fire staff without recourse to time consuming redundancy procedures, or disciplinary action. This raises the question of whether, if the previous head had been given the extra quality staff for support, as well as the authority to hire and fire without so much bureaucracy, along with extra funds to renovate classrooms, a similar transformation could have been achieved. Certainly the other two schools had the potential to transform their learning environments, given similar opportunities.

Budgets for primary schools are going to be severely limited for the foreseeable future (TES 30.11.07 p16). Currently the case study schools are receiving insufficient funds to achieve the sustainable improvement in standards and achievement which the government intended. Evidence from the Primary Review suggests that there has been little progress in reading in the last forty years, despite an enormous investment of £597.25 million for the Literacy Strategy from 1998-2005. An investment of £553.05 million in the same period for numeracy has produced a gradual improvement, but nowhere near the increases claimed using SATs results (Tymms & Merrell, 2007 p16). The strategies have increased centralised control and caused schools to conform. Added to this there has also been a prescriptive curriculum, national testing, non-constructive school inspection and market driven local management of schools, all introduced since 1988. The case study schools have managed these initiatives and, as other research has revealed, modified their approach accordingly (Webb & Vulliamy, 2006, 2007). However this research

suggests that these policies have done little to address the inherent problems these schools are facing.

To date government has believed that it could make a considerable difference to the 'new poor' (Bauman, 1998) by focussing on standards and achievement, using a big stick and throwing an enormous amount of money at the 'basics'. Whilst changing the structure of teaching and learning across the country (Webb & Vulliamy, 2007), it has made little difference to those most in need of support in the case study schools, the 'silent minority' who cause little disruption, but are desperate for attention. Certainly a 'tipping point' has not been reached.

10.6 The inflexibility of LMS

For the case study schools the LMS structure appears to be one of the main stumbling blocks in school development. Although aspects of LMS have been welcomed, particularly the freedom to manage funds and direct spending, much of the structure, including per pupil funding, has caused concern. The small size of these primary schools restricts opportunities for alternative employment for staff facing redundancy, or for those reluctant to innovate or change. Other research has identified such staff as problematic in school development (Alexander, 1992, 2000; Earl et al., 2003; Ofsted, 2005e). Before LMS, Local Education Authorities (LEAs) hired, managed and, occasionally, fired staff. Now that each governing body is the nominal employer such responsibilities have come down to school level. However, the level of bureaucracy has not diminished. Redundancy and competency procedures are structured on negotiations between unions and local authorities that were previously managed by dedicated staff. This was a very time consuming

process for the case study heads and makes it difficult to bring about any quick change in staffing. The one mechanism that could help to speed up change without wrecking careers, the re-deployment of teachers, has all but disappeared as each school is now an individual employment unit. It is ironic that when there are forced school closures local authorities are obliged to seek re-deployment for staff. There had been successful re-deployments from Barlingtown, following the closure of the junior school, suggesting that it was not necessarily the inadequacy of the teachers, but the situation in which they found themselves, with an accumulation of ‘tripping points’, that was problematic.

Before LMS local authorities had much more scope for importing high quality staff into schools in difficulties on a temporary basis, without them being branded with the stigma of working in a ‘failing school’. In an attempt to create more staff flexibility and to address the shortage of headteachers, federations of schools are now being considered, with one executive head managing several schools through one governing body. Another approach is to create all age schools from 3 - 16 or 18 yrs with the promise of being housed in new premises. Both these solutions have the potential for more staff flexibility, but still do not have the economies of scale associated with local authorities, where staff could be moved a considerable distance to find more appropriate employment for their skills.

10.7 A brief respite when the Strategy was introduced

Evidence from headteachers showed that the introduction of *Excellence and Enjoyment* (DfES, 2003) brought a long needed respite from the relentless pressure being placed on primary schools in England. For almost two years it

seemed as if creativity would have the opportunity to flourish, both in classrooms and in school development. Outside observers noted that the emphasis appeared to have changed – ‘... after years of standardization, the United Kingdom and much of Australia are reducing rather than increasing the prevalence and impact of educational testing’ (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006 p51).

However, in September 2005, just as curriculum pressures seemed to be easing, other elements of the Strategy were introduced which have absorbed considerable financial resources and taken up much headteacher time. As a result curriculum development has been limited. Revised frameworks for literacy and mathematics from September 2006 once more narrowed the focus for school development (Boyle & Bragg, 2006). There is little funding to encourage teachers to develop the creative opportunities for learning suggested in parts of the revised frameworks. Furthermore a significant number of teachers do not welcome changes and are slow to implement them (Alexander, 1992; Earl et al., 2003; English et al., 2002).

At the same time a more insidious form of monitoring and control, emphasising standardization and conformity, has been firmly established by the government. The introduction of SIPs (School Improvement Partners), the on-line SEF, allied to the School Profile (available on-line for parents) and the CVA (Contextually Value Added) interpretation of SATs results have combined to ensure that for any school not continually improving results, the scrutiny of measurable performance data will be greater than ever³³. Ofsted

³³ School Report Cards which will give each school a simple grading ‘ to draw school performance data together into an overall score’ are to be introduced in 2011, further entrenching performativity.
http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/Report-Card_Prospectus.pdf

inspections are being reduced for 'successful' schools to save money. Data analysis is driving this process and there has been increasing pressure on schools to improve results. Ofsted clearly stated this;

Inspections from September 2005 place a strong emphasis on pupils' progress, which is informed by the new contextual value added presentations in the PANDA (performance and data analysis) report (Ofsted, 2006).

In a similar approach to that being used by New Labour, Michael Fullan describes the impact of the United States initiative *No Child Left Behind*, introduced by President George W. Bush;

Any minor gains are bound to be outweighed by a system that guarantees superficiality, temporary solutions, and cynicism in the face of impossible goals (Fullan, 2005 p11).

Despite the best of intentions, it seems as if the initiatives associated with the National Primary Strategy are creating a similar situation in the case study schools. Headteachers, who should be leading schools creatively, are being placed under increasing pressure to improve results whilst being overwhelmed by bureaucracy and financial limitations. This challenges the impression gained by Hargreaves and Fink of a more relaxed testing regime. The consequences of such bureaucratic activity are clearly explained by Iris Marion Young;

For each area of its activity bureaucracy develops formal, explicit rules, impersonal in the sense that they must be followed by whoever occupies the position or engages in the activities they describe. This bureaucracy introduces a universalization and standardization of social

and cooperative activity (Young, 1990 p77).

There seems to be little space or opportunity for schools to develop creatively if their leadership is to be so suppressed. Teachers will struggle in schools where children do not fit the standardized, universal model of success promoted by the government – achieving Level 4 in English and Maths by the end of Key Stage 2. They will be subjected to ‘the pathologicality of excessive checking’ (Power, 1997), whilst those schools that achieve positive, measurable results, in keeping with government expectations, will be allowed to continue to provide an elementary education with little inspection, justified by statistical analysis provided by Capita, a private company, managing the National Primary and Key Stage 3 Strategies for 5 years.

Such a profit making business must show measurable results. Capita has developed increasingly complicated statistical data that is being used to justify reducing inspector days spent in schools, thus achieving considerable manpower savings for the Treasury (DfES, 2005a). This data is the main indicator of whether a school should be put into special measures or receive a notice to improve, without the need for qualitative evidence from inspectors or the schools themselves. The following statement comes from the Ofsted training materials for interpreting the PANDA report – ‘The overall CVA graphs should be used as the main guides to the overall judgement on progress’ (Ofsted, 2005a). This seems to save inspectors a lot of time and takes much of the decision making out of their hands. It is of note that CVA data, not raw data, is used in this statement. However the conciliatory interpretation of *Excellence and Enjoyment*, welcomed by headteachers, seems to have been lost

to the standards agenda. At Barlingtown this data driven approach was clearly in evidence, with Ofsted failing to appreciate or understand the unique circumstances of the school.

10.8 What is being sustained?

Even though primary education has received considerable investment from New Labour, there is little independent evidence of any sustainable improvement in the overall quality of teaching and learning having taken place (Boyle & Bragg, 2006; Earl et al., 2003; Tymms, 2004; Tymms & Merrell, 2007). Ofsted highlighted the fact that the literacy and numeracy strategies were implemented in almost all primary schools (Ofsted, 1999). This merely confirmed that teachers had conformed and become better at mechanistic presentation and teaching to the tests (Brehony, 2005; Earl et al., 2003). Nevertheless, this was claimed to be an improvement by Ofsted, but literacy and numeracy results plateaued once teachers were able to work the system effectively (Fullan, 2005; Tymms, 2004). *Excellence and Enjoyment* appeared to offer an opportunity for change. Anecdotal evidence from the field suggests that it did provide an opportunity to innovate, to change, to reflect upon practice and to work collaboratively. However, in the case study schools, headteachers were concerned that much of the good work they had started was being frustrated as other, more influential elements of the Strategy were implemented.

In the interest of efficiency it seems as if the DfES/DCSF has no intention of investing sufficient funds into primary schools for their structure to change. More demands are to be made from within the same structure. Analytical data is being developed, far removed from classrooms and contexts, with a narrow

focus on targets and testing, which, it is claimed, will support personalised learning. The implication is that the structure does not need to change. Clearly in the case study schools the tripping points experienced cannot be addressed by the fine tuning of an inadequately funded system. At the same time quite how teachers can be expected to work more productively is not explained. School development has been frustrated by these persistent short term demands for raising standards and by a lack of money for effective workforce and structural reform.

10.9 A 'silent minority' missing out

The case study schools are struggling to cope with the incessant change associated with the Third Way policies and political rhetoric of New Labour. Treasury expectations to provide 'more for less (or the same)' in the implementation of PPA time and workforce reform are creating long term difficulties which are not always acknowledged, even by the schools. Because of further problems with insufficient staff, and with resources already stretched in dealing with the extremely challenging behaviour of a few, it is the 'silent minority' of children who are missing out on sustained intervention and support.

Uniform expectations have been imposed, on three case study schools, to reach 65% floor level SATs targets. Although the social contexts appear similar, the problems and difficulties of each school were unique. My research has identified huge differences in structure and funding. Such diversity of provision is not a good foundation for building sustainable change or for implementing the various elements of the Primary Strategy. It is ironic that in all three schools staff considered that social and emotional difficulties were

increasing. At the same time budget allocations, although increasing, were being spread ever more thinly as more initiatives were being implemented. This was causing reductions in the amount of time allocated to supporting the 'silent minority' of children.

Children in need

Many of the children in all three schools were desperate for adult attention but only at Barlingtown were there sufficient adults to address their needs, whilst maintaining a calm working atmosphere. Unusual circumstances had created this structure which has transformed behaviour. From being almost 'anarchic' three years earlier, it was described as a 'happy' school by Ofsted. Almost all of the staff interviewed described their circumstances as 'lucky' and seemed apologetic about the high level of adult support. However, observations clearly identified this as both effective and necessary for supporting children (and their families), capable of exhibiting very challenging behaviour, whilst maintaining a positive learning atmosphere in classrooms. From the moment children entered the building expectations were set for the day. In the two less well staffed schools 'tripping points' hindered such an approach.

Interview analysis revealed concerns about addressing negative behaviour from all interviewees in the two less well staffed schools. In Barlingtown there was evidence that, "*We've still got a long way to go with behaviour*", but it was not an over-riding problem and was being successfully addressed. It is ironic that this school is being forced into losing staff because additional funding is being withdrawn. Already strategies are being considered involving a smaller senior management team, less TA support, larger classes, less qualified cover for PPA time and fewer resources. Evidence from the other two schools has shown that

every one of these reductions will impact directly on disadvantaged children. The more able will make do or move. It seems that the school is being driven slowly back into survival mode, with severe implications for the recently improved behaviour and success of this 'happy school'.

10.10 What makes a 'happy school' work?

The recent Barlingtown 'happy school' Ofsted report identified the effectiveness of the support the children receive. This is very encouraging for all concerned. But it fails to mention the structure and cost of this being achieved, as highlighted in this research. The Ofsted report gives the impression that it is simply through the efficient and effective hard work of the staff. This raised concerns that it could be held up as an example of a successful school coping with challenging children in difficult circumstances, without any acknowledgement of the unique funding and enhanced staffing that has been the foundation of this success. Ofsted has, in its effort to meet its business targets with a one size fits all approach to school inspection, ignored factors that have enabled this school to optimize its opportunities.

- **Is it support for children?**

All three schools have, at various times, successfully implemented a number of strategies to support their underprivileged children, such as nurture groups, breakfast clubs, full time TA support in every class, booster groups etc. The additional funding from central government which has helped develop some of these initiatives has been beneficial. Unfortunately there has not been sufficient funding for these initiatives to be sustained over time. As one headteacher explained about TAs;

...our teaching assistant force is not large enough to fully and properly support the children we have within our school (Headteacher).

In all three schools staff expressed frustration that, if there was any chance of consistently meeting government targets, all of the strategies that they have experienced needed to be in place at the same time, and over time, rather than just those that could be afforded because of numbers on roll in any particular financial year.

- **Is it support for teachers?**

One piece of evidence causing concern about provision for children is how enthusiastic teachers have been in welcoming PPA (Planning, Preparation and Assessment) time. Whilst not questioning the value of PPA time, the fact that it is a statutory weekly requirement has ensured that it is implemented, whereas special needs provision is seldom statutory (unless a child is statemented) and therefore more expendable (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Teachers know their rights but children do not have a voice. In every school, support for children has been reduced to ensure that PPA time is provided.

10.11 Driving teachers away from difficult schools

Recruiting and retaining high quality staff at the case study schools is problematic. A number of teachers and all three heads expressed concerns about working in similar schools again because of the performative pressure. Only Barlingtown had been able to appoint high quality, experienced staff recently. In this school all three members of the senior leadership team interviewed, as well as several other teachers, described how it was the unique,

exciting circumstances which had attracted them. They felt that there was the potential to really make a difference. However by the end of the research period two of what the head called the ‘best’ had found jobs elsewhere as redundancy threats loomed. They were not replaced. Other staff were becoming concerned about the sustainability of what they were doing with fewer adults to support them. Staffing cost savings, problematic in the other case study schools, were being considered. The head remained very positive about their impact, but resources were beginning to diminish. With insufficient staff available to cope with the inherent difficulties of the community, previously managed problems could once again become ‘tripping points’.³⁴

10.12 A work/life balance for school leaders?

Contradictions within the Strategy contributed to on-going concerns about work/life balance for school leaders, struggling to cope with so many different expectations. Only the heads at Barlingtown and Waddingworth appeared to have sufficient time available to fulfil their leadership roles in school time, but both severely criticised the external pressure they were under. In the other two schools much of the day to day work of the heads was crisis management. Their leadership and other management roles took place out of school hours. There was little time to influence teaching, learning or curriculum development. The DCSF claims that such roles have been supported through detailed planning frameworks available for literacy and mathematics, and the introduction of personalised learning based on performance data. This research suggests that in such circumstances it was very difficult to develop a

³⁴ A year later the headteacher of Barlingtown took early retirement, exhausted through fighting to maintain extra funding and frustrated that it was being withdrawn. The option to stay on as resources were reduced was not attractive.

professional learning community where innovation and creativity could flourish. Bowring-Carr and West-Burnham describe a learning institution as being

...above all else, one in which there is a continuous questioning to find out how things can be improved; it is a place in which uncertainty is an essential because only where there is uncertainty can there be change (Bowring-Carr & West-Burnham, 1999 p14).

This was not evident at Lillywhites and Tillbridge, where delegated time available for management and curriculum responsibilities was observed to be spent dealing with data driven bureaucracy. There was no one able to consider the bigger picture or to influence classroom practice. Once more this evidence suggests that an overloaded system is inhibiting progress towards the Strategy goal of achieving excellence in teaching and enjoyment in learning.

10.13 The intransigence of some teachers remains a problem

Research into primary schooling since the middle of the 20th Century reveals evidence of a profession slow to change and innovate (Alexander, 1992, 2000; Cunningham, 1988; Galton et al., 1999; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Most primary schools were, and still are, being run using a relatively traditional approach, with classes dominated by the teacher. The structure and systems remain the same. The 'progressive' revolution never really happened, but the term continues to be used as a form of derision by those promoting the standards agenda. The identified intransigence to change in some teachers has also subsequently been associated with the introduction of the National Curriculum (Alexander, 1992; Alexander, Willcocks, & Nelson, 1996; Osborn et al., 2000; Webb & Vulliamy, 1996), the literacy and numeracy strategies (Earl et al.,

2003; Ofsted, 1999) and the Primary Strategy (Brehony, 2005; Ofsted, 2005b) . A lack of knowledge and understanding of innovative and creative teaching strategies was a concern for some staff in the case study schools. This was compounded by the imposed external methodology of the ISP and the detailed planning entrenched in the revised frameworks for literacy and mathematics. Both were claimed by staff to limit opportunities for more a creative approach. Some teachers appeared afraid to take risks, whilst others felt time restrictions meant that they wouldn't be able to 'get things done' (Robinson & Fielding, 2007). Whether it was a lack of confidence, understanding, insufficient support to be more adventurous, or even just an excuse, such difficulties were identified across the case study schools. They are not only expensive to address (English et al., 2002) but also bring into question the viability of the standardised structure being imposed in these schools.

10.14 Disadvantaged children need security

A recurrent theme from staff in all of the schools was that the children do not welcome change, which is why they prefer to cover classes internally rather than bringing in outsiders. The current level of expenditure to ensure this security is not sustainable in any of the schools, and there is already evidence that special needs provision is suffering.

Further initiatives such as modern foreign languages, music, gifted and talented provision, personalised learning and extended schooling are being developed in a piecemeal fashion in these schools. Some children will benefit, but it is not clear how many will and for how long. All three headteachers were much more concerned with the basic staffing of their schools and for how much longer they could sustain what they were currently doing.

Despite these worries, the positive approach of the headteachers was clearly apparent in the way they justified workforce reforms to keep within budgets. They used such phrases as;

I'm using a superb teaching assistant force and outside coaches to do it.

We will aim for some extra creative experience in that session.

It will give the enrichment; it will give every pupil in the school a full hour of intensive sports with a sports coach.

It will be highly adult intensive but cheaper (Headteachers).

Such commitment is to be applauded, but it is again children needing help who will be the first to suffer. One headteacher revealed how support was being reduced;

Well the PPA time, literally, to some extent, takes all of the support out of the afternoons. We've recognised that the afternoon structure of learning is that the levels of support needed are not as high as in the mornings (Headteacher).

From lesson observations I found little evidence to justify this statement. Children with social, behavioural and learning difficulties continued to need much support in the afternoons, but staff expectations were not as high when support was low. In one school afternoon activities managed by TAs and a sports coach were not particularly exciting or stimulating. Those children with the most problematic behaviour were removed to other classes. The rest conformed passively, but there was little evidence of enjoyment or learning in the coaching observed; a long time was taken in changing into sports kit, both before and after the session; children sat down in team rows on the field in cold

conditions; 30 children chasing one football. Other sports coaches observed created more enthusiasm. However interview evidence from teachers across the schools suggested that these sessions were subsidiary to other learning experiences. There was little feedback between them and coaches. Achievements of the 'silent minority' did not seem to be acknowledged. Class teachers were not involved in identifying the successes of their own children. TAs were not as actively involved in these sessions as they were in classroom learning.

The research findings did not match up to the more generalised positive claims of the headteachers given above. The nature of the system means that heads have to be positive, giving the impression that they are able to make things work, despite the financial difficulties.

10.15 More than money is needed

What is of particular concern is that spending large amounts of money on imposed strategies to raise standards has not had the expected impact on these primary schools in the way that government intended (Tymms, 2004; Tymms & Merrell, 2007). This research suggests that demands for further significant increases in funding without changes to the system and structure, will only further entrench the positions of both government and teachers. Evidence from the case study schools reveals that although extra staff and resources have made a difference to some children in certain circumstances, this is not consistent or sustainable. It was only where there was sufficient investment to change the structure, systems and the approach of teachers that all the elements needed to ensure the highest quality of provision were brought together. At Barlingtown this enabled staff to flourish and encouraged them to think

creatively, with enough support available to cope positively with problems of behaviour management and children with learning difficulties.

However, even this was not straightforward. A number of observed incidents, which would have become 'tripping points' elsewhere, stretched this school to its limits. But what was significant was the way in which staff could re-group and consider difficulties very quickly, as and when crises arose. Action would then be taken to address them. It was of note that difficulties were not always directly associated with the socio-economic problems of the community. Despite the drastic action which had been taken to create the new school there were still staff that caused concern to the headteacher. These were not necessarily remaining staff from the old school, but newer appointments whose practice did not match interview potential. As with any group, negativity could easily start to influence others. The difference was that here there were enough enthusiastic staff to pick up negativity and deal with it before it spread to influence others. In the other two schools, as was shown with the number of interview concerns about behaviour, difficulties were much more likely to become problematic.

10.16 The frustrations of curriculum development

Workforce reform and extended schools are just two of the examples, in the case study schools, of the requirements for headteachers that are moving them further and further away from creative curriculum leadership (Daniels & French, 2006). In larger primary schools (400+), a deputy head without class teaching responsibilities may be able to manage curriculum development, but most primary schools do not have sufficient staff. As the priorities of one headteacher revealed;

Every week, every weekend, I make a list in my diary of the things that I've got to do. And every week at the top, the first four are; the SEF, the school improvement update, other monitoring things are going on, like scrutinies or whatever and I can't think of what was the fourth one was at the moment. Every week, you put the same things down, and you get to the end of the week and you think I've done nothing towards that this week, because other things have come in (Headteacher).

Curriculum initiatives continue to arrive. It is claimed that a more creative approach to teaching and learning is embedded within the revised frameworks for literacy and mathematics (DfES, 2006b). However without time for the headteachers to reflect on this with staff, it is likely that more creative aspects of curriculum development will be left to chance or to the already established skills of experienced teachers. The positive role of LA consultants for literacy, mathematics and ICT was appreciated in helping staff understand the new frameworks at staff meetings in case study schools, but, even so, less experienced teachers were observed to be spending a long time on lap tops, during PPA time, trying to come to terms with the new on-line materials. Some established teachers had a different attitude towards planning; “...*because we plan on line, it's really quick anyway. And we store last year's and modernise it each year.*” This comment came from a Y6 teacher coping with SATs. Preparation for testing was being refined annually rather than innovation and creativity being developed. Exactly the same process was used in preparation for 11+ testing in the post World War 2 era.

Because of the amount of detailed planning now available on-line, headteachers were concerned that teachers felt it necessary to follow

prescriptive guidelines for lessons and that their success criteria could well thus be ‘to value what they measure, not measuring what they value’ (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006 p31). There appears to be little new funding to address these concerns. In 2003 similar problems were identified by the government commissioned review of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies;

The data indicate that for many teachers, gaps or weaknesses in subject knowledge or pedagogical understanding limit the extent to which they can make full use of the frameworks and resources of the strategies (Earl et al., 2003 p6)

The implications of this are considerable. A longitudinal study of time allocated to various subjects between 1997 and 2004 indicated that the primary curriculum was dominated by teaching time allocated to English and mathematics caused by a range of central policy requirements (Boyle & Bragg, 2006 p579). Their research found that even financial support for science had suffered. The standards agenda dominated. Other foundation subjects had not flourished. *Excellence and Enjoyment* (DfES, 2003a) appeared to offer some freedom for schools to work creatively in curriculum development, but excellence remained much more important than enjoyment. The revised frameworks for literacy and mathematics (Sept 2006) absorbed time and resources available. Staff meetings observed in two case study schools, introducing the new frameworks, were very subdued, with a passive acceptance of everything put forward by external consultants and co-ordinators. Headteachers said very little.

10.17 Standardised personalised learning

The pressures of school self evaluation (SEF), Contextual Value Added test results and school profiles published on line are reinforcing the standards agenda. For schools in challenging circumstances financial support is being targeted towards raising test results. Interestingly, funding for personalised learning is also being channelled into supporting this pressure (DfES 2006c).

One of the three main uses for the fund is;

to support intervention and catch-up provision for children who have fallen behind in English and maths (DfES, 2006d).

Personalised learning has become ‘standardised’. This seems contradictory. The other two strands of the funding are for gifted and talented children and to develop extended schools in areas of social deprivation. If your child is achieving well in standardised tests, isn’t ‘gifted and talented’ or living in an area of social deprivation, it seems that the money for personalised learning must already be ‘in the budget’ somewhere else! The hidden costs of the heads’ time and energy (Daniels & French, 2006) in managing these developments have not been considered in government efficiency savings.

More than personalised data is needed

In a recent Joseph Rowntree Foundation research summary, considering poverty and educational disadvantage, Hirsch questions whether the personalised learning approach as set out by government will make a difference on its own;

A key message of the evidence ... is that equality of educational opportunity cannot rely solely on better delivery of the school

curriculum for disadvantaged groups, but must address multiple aspects of disadvantaged children's lives (Hirsch, 2007 p2).

Hirsch also notes the measurable difference of just 14% of variation between individual's performance being accounted for by school quality. The original research by Cassen and Kingdon goes further in considering variation between schools;

We are only able to account for a share of what it is about schools that makes for reductions in low achievement; the rest is due to things we are unable to measure in our data. These could be factors such as school ethos and leadership, or the effectiveness of teaching. But expenditure on students and, to a lesser extent, the number of teachers per pupil do play a positive part. Resources matter particularly for low-achieving students (Cassen & Kingdon, 2007 pxii).

The case study schools had a considerable population of low achievers. In other schools, in less difficult circumstances, many of these children would have received extra support, but in the case studies they were frequently overshadowed by children with more challenging behaviour and more extreme learning difficulties. During the research period they were identified as the 'silent minority'. In earlier research Reay and Wiliam described a child struggling with SATS performance perceiving herself to be a 'nothing' (Reay & Wiliam, 1999). The 'silent minority' although 'not a problem' were, similarly, unlikely to achieve expected government targets, resulting in available resources being focussed elsewhere. It was not clear, in these circumstances, with resources already overstretched, how data driven personalised learning could address this problem.

10.18 What has changed?

As with the Webb and Vulliamy research (2006), evidence from the case study schools identified a considerable list of perceived changes to both the structure of the schools and the associated pedagogy. On the one hand it is possible to believe that almost everything has changed in the last 10 years, from the introduction of the literacy and numeracy strategies, through to the Primary Strategy encouraging creativity and introducing workforce reform, personalised learning, school self evaluation, new Ofsted, extended schools and considerably increased funding for primary schools. Changes continue to be introduced, with further developments such as the teaching of a modern foreign language in all primary schools, expected to be in place by 2010.

However, re-visiting the themes identified in Chapter 4 reveals many similarities today with elementary education of the early 20th Century;

- The class teacher structure is still in place.
- Children are expected to perform in tests, regardless of circumstances.
- For schools not meeting targets the curriculum is still expected to be ‘delivered’ in a uniform, standardised way.
- Schools inspection judgements are based on test results.
- Children are categorised and selected; some failing tests; others labelled as gifted and talented.
- Some teachers and schools do flourish, given opportunities to think creatively, as has always been the case, even in the most difficult times (Jeffrey & Woods, 2003).
- The struggle for money continues

This 'elementary' structure is a major concern for the case study schools, underpinning superimposed changes and not acknowledging the socio-economic difficulties of their communities. On top of this a quasi-market (Whitty, 1997) now exists, with a drift away of children from such schools (Thrupp, 1999). Society has changed, moving from having a work ethic towards the consumerism of today (Bauman, 1998), causing problems in these areas where employment opportunities are limited. Performance expectations of the schools have been raised without considering their contexts.

It is this combination of difficulties, associated with the earlier themes and current circumstances, which seems problematic³⁵. Although it is not for this research to judge the quality of teachers and teaching, it has raised concerns about the ability of some teachers to be able to think creatively, or to be opportunistic, particularly when faced with so many potential 'tripping points'. These are not new concerns. The debate about teachers as technicians has been on going since the introduction of the National Curriculum (Alexander, 2000; Ball, 1994; Maguire et al., 2006). Ofsted claims that there have been considerable improvements over time, but early judgements were based on observations of the delivery of one off lessons and more recently on data driven assumptions of school and teacher quality. This research suggests that delivering a prescribed curriculum may well mask the deeper intransigence of many teachers not prepared to question their own practice. Other policies, contained within *Excellence and Enjoyment*, appear to be entrenching these difficulties and affecting children most in need of support.

³⁵ The 'elephant in the room', a comment by Sir Jim Rose about not being allowed to consider testing and assessment in his government commissioned curriculum review.
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2008/dec/08/sats-under-review> (DCSF, 2008a)

10.19 Government not prepared to change direction

The intransigence of centralised government controls, and mechanisms used to maintain them, clearly identifiable within the Primary Strategy, are perpetuating difference and frustrating the case study schools in their attempts to enrich the teaching and learning experiences of their pupils. Other research suggests that those children already secure in performance terms have such feelings re-enforced by the structured system of teaching being imposed by the national strategies and national curriculum expectations (Cassen & Kingden, 2007 p29; Griffiths et al., 2006 p55; Kyriacou, 2005; Reay & Wiliam, 1999). Despite government claims that personalised learning and creativity will allow innovation to flourish for all children, opportunities for less secure children to be challenged to think creatively and independently are being limited by a lack of resources and staffing, by the lack of confidence, or ability of, some teachers to think creatively, and a system suffering from almost 20 years of centralised control focussed on a narrow set of targets.

New Labour claims successful schools have the freedom to innovate, and there are some excellent examples of this, but only if SEF and performance data meet government expectations. Many schools are still demonstrating conformity and compliance, just as their Victorian forebears did. Other schools, unable to perform to government expectations, remain vulnerable through being subjected to intensifying pressure to perform. Their staff are anxious and will be blamed 'when policies to raise standards prove unsuccessful' (Riddell, 2005). The government believes that it has done enough to bring about change. What it has failed to appreciate is that both the system and structure of primary schooling are wrong for those children that are

in most need of support – the very same sort of children for which mass primary schooling was created in the 19th Century to prevent them from being forced into child labour.

Government policy of using the standards agenda as a lever to drive societal change, has not had the expected impact. The case study schools have struggled, with a lack of resources and insufficient staff of quality, to meet government targets. Very little has been done to address underlying social issues or to meet the needs of a ‘silent minority’ of children. Exceptional circumstances transformed Barlingtown, indicating that much can be achieved, but rather than being ‘lucky’ in temporarily having such a positive and supportive structure, the research suggests this structure is essential to bring about sustainable change. Further research is needed to investigate how such systems and structures, which challenge the basic funding format of one teacher per class in primary schools, can be developed within the overall current education budget, where many resources are absorbed by the regime of performativity. The sophisticated demographic tools used to challenge DCSF statistics need to be evaluated to see if they would be effective at targeting funding in more complicated urban settings. At the same time budgetary differences between metropolitan and more rural authorities, which result in very different funding allocations, are in urgent need of review as are the effects of funding differentiation between primary and secondary schools. Only when such financial concerns and constraints are addressed will it be possible for the combination of excellence and enjoyment to have true validity, far removed from the mixed and misguided messages inherent in, and sustained by, the Primary Strategy.

In the final chapter the contribution of this research to the field is considered. The various elements identified combine to create a problematic situation suffused with ‘tripping points’. This evidence suggests a significant change to the structure and funding of the system is needed if the ambitions of government and the transformation of primary schooling are ever to be achieved.

Chapter 11 Conclusions

The sky which is the limit of consumer dreams rises ever higher while the publicly managed magnificent flying machines once designed to lift those low down to heaven, first run out of petrol and then are dumped in the scrap yards of 'phased out' policies or recycled into police cars (Bauman, 1998 p41).

This research, conducted over the period of the academic year 2006/07, provided a large amount of rich data recording the everyday reality of the case study schools. In a period of rapid change, associated with initiatives originally brought together in *Excellence and Enjoyment* (DfES, 2003a), it has produced some fascinating evidence of the interaction between various policy developments and practice. It suggests that government has established an immensely complicated and inter-dependent data driven bureaucracy, despite claiming to give successful schools more freedom to be innovative and creative in curriculum development. The comments by headteachers that “*First you’ve got to have the excellence*” have resonance.

There was clear evidence of government pre-occupation with raw SATs data in the case study schools. Yet despite being under pressure to perform, much practice was significantly influenced by other factors, particularly the ‘tripping points’ described in Chapter 7. It is the notion of ‘tripping points’ and an understanding of the way they could be avoided or become highly problematic which helps this research contribute to the body of knowledge associated with policy implementation. It also adds to international evidence about how hard it is to change disadvantaged schools (Thomson, 2002; Thrupp, 1999).

Although ‘tripping points’ may seem subsidiary to policy implementation, or even as an excuse for poor performance, on many occasions they appeared to dominate, frustrating both teachers and heads. In one school drastic action transformed the learning environment and sufficient ‘extra’ staff of the highest quality had been employed to cope with the large number of potential ‘tripping points’ which this school experienced on a daily basis. Here creativity flourished, but Ofsted did not recognise this. The other two schools in areas of deprivation were observed regularly going into ‘survival mode’ with staff and resources spread far too thinly to consistently provide the stability needed for so many of their children. In the leafy suburbs few difficulties were observed. Children conformed to whatever was expected of them in ways that would have been difficult to achieve in the other schools. Most children were capable of performing academically, coming from stimulating home environments, yet concerns about ever higher SATs performance remained pernicious, limiting creativity for some teachers and frustrating others (Ball, 2003; Woods & Jeffrey, 1998).

Huge amounts of money have been invested in education under New Labour (Ball, 2001; Tymms & Merrell, 2007), which should be applauded, but this research suggests that in these sites much of the spending may be inappropriate, doing little for those children most in need of support or in addressing wider socio-economic issues. Government and local authorities have instead established tight steerage through practices of audit and performativity. This approach has, quite rightly, raised expectations, but the combination of factors, the ‘tripping points’ identified in this research, are frustrating these schools and probably others like them, and therefore,

unintentionally, consolidating differences between and within schools. The problems and successes identified in the case study schools appear far removed from the performance related views of primary education that the most influential politicians and policy makers continue to promote within their change agenda.

11.1 What should change? Targeted funding and local support

Since 1997 New Labour has attempted to bring about education reform and to raise school performance, as described in the first chapter, using its 'high challenge, high support' approach (Barber, 2001). The problem facing these four schools, in attempting to implement changes, identified in *Excellence and Enjoyment*, is that they are being subjected to intense outside pressure to conform and perform. At the same time schools are being encouraged to innovate and change. The case study head teachers remain committed to those parts of the Strategy which promote innovation and change. However such innovations are not empowered by law and there is historic evidence that it is the easily monitored statutory elements of reform which persist, once initial enthusiasm has dimmed and funding diminished (Tyack & Cuban, 1995 p57).

Some government ministers and advisers appear to be in denial, clinging desperately to discredited claims of improved standards (Tymms, 2004; Tymms & Merrell, 2007). Others are more optimistic that the system can be further improved and reform benefits sustained (Fullan, 2005; Hopkins, 2007). Evidence from this research, in a climate of budgetary reductions for the foreseeable future, adds to that of Conroy, Hulme and Menter suggesting the need for more emphasis on curriculum development at a local and regional

level (2008 p12); Hall and Ozerk warning of high stakes testing compromising assessment for learning (2008 p19); Gunter identifying problems with workforce reform (2007); earlier works on the negative impact of Ofsted (Ball, 2003; Jeffrey & Woods, 1996; Troman, 2000; Woods & Jeffrey, 1998); developing opportunities for creativity (Craft, 2005; Jeffrey & Woods, 2003); the impact of context (Thomson, 2002; Thrupp, 1999; Thrupp & Lupton, 2006); the impact of accountability and the national strategies (Tymms & Merrell, 2007; Wyse et al., 2008). Common themes across these studies question the value of over zealous centralised government control, highlighting a number of hidden influences, and identifying children, schools and communities, such as those in the case studies, with insufficient funding and resources to address problems of disadvantage.

This study suggests that using ACORN data, resources and support could be targeted more accurately. Schools and local communities, supported by local authorities, could be given the responsibility to manage funding to ensure sufficient staff of high quality to raise achievement and for creative initiatives such as TASC to flourish. Extra support would also help address the stigma of failure currently associated with the standards agenda. PPA time could be managed more flexibly from within this enlarged staff, ensuring both the security and quality of learning needed to break the cycle of deprivation for those children most in need. Schools in less challenging circumstances and in similar circumstances to the four studies here would also be freed to work creatively rather than being restricted by targets.

11.2 Quality matters

The laudable government aim of all teachers having, or working towards, a Masters degree in teaching and learning may well become a reality and could, in appropriate circumstances, be important to the four case study schools. Better intellectually resourced teachers would be more able to manage change, and should have an increased awareness of opportunities for creative teaching and learning. But even this qualification appears problematic, being described in an article in the TES (27.06.08) as potentially an MA Lite, and quoting concerns from the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET),

A centrally prescribed qualification lacking in depth and academic rigour would have little if any credibility and only a marginal impact on classroom performance (Milne, 2008).

Current Secretary of State, Ed Balls, wants this initiative to focus initially on secondary schools found on a government list of those not meeting GCSE results targets. It seems that this could be a further case of teaching teachers to teach to the test. This approach seems very similar to the mixed messages found in the Primary Strategy. Interestingly all three leadership staff recently appointed to Barlingtown had obtained Masters degrees, subsidised by their previous schools and the awarding institutions. One felt that this had raised her awareness and enthusiasm about the potential for change when applying for the post. Such excellent opportunities, tailored to individual need, should be celebrated and extended, rather than being subsumed into a standardised degree.

11.3 What would make a difference to these four schools?

Funding and resources focussed on enriching the lives of those least fortunate in society and policies which do not have a single and punitive focus on;

- summative testing and assessment
- data driven inspection
- the micro management of the 'basic' curriculum.

The money and resources saved in removing these external pressures could then be invested directly into the schools. One case study head would like the whole school to start with a breakfast club, as happens where extra funding for social disadvantage is already available through such schemes as Excellence in Cities (DCSF, 2007b). This could be a 'tipping point' through changing the atmosphere at the start of the day, but only if there are the resources and sufficient staff, with the ability and understanding, to ensure the positive atmosphere created continues into the learning environment of classrooms for the rest of the school day. From this research it is clear that in three of the schools it is extra bodies that are needed to give the children the support and security lacking in so much of the rest of their lives. This is a finding that supports other research in areas of disadvantage (Lupton, 2005; Maguire et al., 2006; Osborn et al., 2000). This is a long term need, not something that can be addressed for a year or two and then withdrawn. Freed from data driven competition and the associated pressures of performativity and inspection, schools could be encouraged to work together to more effectively develop the learning of teachers and support staff (Daniels & Porter, 2007; Gunter, 2007; Webb & Vulliamy, 2006) in order to ensure sustainable support of the highest quality for all children and particularly those with learning, emotional and

behavioural difficulties, so that they are able to achieve beyond the ‘tipping point’.

11.4 Using freedom: supporting teachers to think independently

Very substantial claims have been made that the education system in England has been transformed because of the changes introduced by New Labour (Barber, 2001; Hopkins, 2007). Others have acknowledged the impact of the large scale reforms associated with literacy and numeracy, but have raised concerns about the plateauing of results and the sustainability of such an approach (Fullan, 2005; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006).

It is argued that teachers need to become more like the children they are working with (Alexander & Hargreaves, 2007). They should be eager to learn. They should be inquisitive, optimistic, and responsive to the needs of the children and most of all enthusiastic (Jeffrey & Woods, 2009). In all of the case study schools such teachers could be identified, with lessons observed and projects developed being both inspirational and innovative. But these were the very same teachers who were most frustrated and at times inhibited by the current system and seemed convinced that it was not working. However they continued to work, against the odds, to create very positive learning atmospheres in their classrooms. Their influence did not necessarily spread to other staff.

11.5 Learning communities

Staff development through the creation of professional learning communities in the case study schools was variable. At Barlingtown staff throughout the school brought creative activities into teaching and learning on a daily basis,

involving children in decision making about their learning, developed from the TASC activities originally used as a catalyst for change. The non-class based leadership team had the time to support this and to ensure consistency in the approach. Local authority support was able to build on this strong foundation. Clearly this school was a learning community, similar to those identified in other research (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006) .

At Lillywhites and Tillbridge external expectations and support focussed the schools on ISP and Hard to Shift initiatives, bringing staff together, but with little latitude for professional development or thought. This matches the fixation ‘on achievement scores in narrowly defined curriculum areas like literacy and mathematics’ as identified by Hargreaves and Fink (2006 p128) in explaining what professional learning communities are not. Catalysts for change in these schools were suppressed, although the desire to be more creative was still evident in both. Hopefully, if targets are met, further consideration will be given to curriculum development, but considerable support is still needed to address identified ‘tripping points’.

Waddingworth, in the more affluent area, had some inconsistency in classroom practice and received little external support. At the time the head did not consider this problematic, encouraging most teachers to think creatively and to challenge their children to think, but not questioning the more didactic approach of some staff. Here the learning community was only partial because of such intransigence. This was a personnel ‘tripping point’ rather than a policy problem for this school.

This research raises further questions about not only creating but sustaining learning communities in these schools. The drastic action taken at Barlingtown

had created a learning community through the vision and determination of the head and senior staff, supported by the LEA. Would it be sustainable when staffing and resources were reduced, lessening their ability to cope with potential ‘tripping points’ and continuing external pressures? Given their circumstances, could the other schools generate enough momentum to become professional learning communities, and what resources or actions would be needed for this to happen? More needs to be known to answer these questions and should be the subject of further research

11.6 Can schools really change?

In the case study schools there was evidence of the negative impact of external expectations at all levels within the system. Some children were worried about achieving their ISP targets. Parents were pressurised to push their children towards the targets. TA support was channelled to monitoring targets. Teachers had little choice in conforming to this time consuming process. ISP co-ordinators and Y6 teachers were spending a great deal of time managing performance data or coaching for SATs. Head’s SEF reports were dominated by targets, with evidence of optional SATs, or something similar, being expected. LAs set targets for the school based on the data. SIPs were expected to use the data, provided by the LA, to support the school and to drive the performance management of the headteacher. Ofsted inspectors use the data as the foundation for their school judgements. In the same region the DCSF removed a headteacher and closed a school because of poor SATs performance (Milne, 2008). Earlier research identified similar unremitting pressure and uniform condemnation of it from headteachers (Webb & Vulliamy, 2006 p39). What has changed, even in the short period since then, is the increased

sophistication of the data and the way it has percolated through to drive every part of the system. Other new research also reports this; on Individual Learning Plans (Hamilton, 2009); on the increasing use of results for accountability and monitoring (Harlen, 2007); on compromising assessment for learning (Hall & Ozerk, 2008).

During the research period the only external support observed was focussed on the new frameworks for literacy and mathematics and the use of ICT. A large scale longitudinal study from 1997 -2004 raised concerns about such a narrow focus (Boyle & Bragg, 2006). Case study teachers were not given the opportunity to develop their own thinking skills or to question the suitability of what was being imposed upon, or expected of them. Even at Barlingtown, where so much had been achieved in such a short period, external pressures to conform to the revised frameworks was proving difficult to manage alongside their more creative activities. Having survived a recent Ofsted inspection, which had been influenced by a good set of SATs results, the head was worried that the subsequent cohort was much more difficult and unlikely to reach the 65% target. The Ofsted inspection had been categorised as only ‘satisfactory’ meaning that within the report a sentence threatened that a small proportion of such schools would receive a monitoring visit before the next full inspection if areas of underperformance were identified. The DCSF expects school performance to increase annually. This pressure, along with prescriptive frameworks for literacy and mathematics, has done little to encourage some teachers to think ‘outside the box’.

However for those more confident and willing to question the value of learning experiences and to be innovative there are opportunities which *Excellence and*

Enjoyment encouraged, and which have developed significantly in recent years. There are policies such as Creative Partnerships which do this, as do the Forest and Farm Schools initiatives, the QCA futures curriculum, the DCSF Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto³⁶ and BECTA supporting technology innovation. Other independent initiatives such as TASC and the drama based Mantle of the Expert also encourage creativity and innovation. In the research schools it was of note that only staff at Barlingtown, with its established learning community, and some at Waddingworth, that had the capacity and opportunity to take on board such innovative ideas in their everyday practice, whilst coping with SATs pressures.

Although *Excellence and Enjoyment* offered opportunities for teachers to think creatively, across the research schools, SATs results and performance targets dominated the external self evaluation process. Recent research in Queensland, Australia has identified one successful structure which enables teachers to think for themselves within a culture of *generative professional accountability* (Gilbert, Keddie, & Mills, 2008) as opposed to the system of externally driven performative accountability in England.

This example shows that it is possible to for schools manage their own self evaluation with local support. A recent research survey for the Primary Review also suggested that in England Local Authorities have the local knowledge and understanding to support more ‘mature self evaluation’ involving groups of schools in neighbourhoods and larger communities (Cunningham & Raymont, 2008) .

³⁶ <http://www.lotc.org.uk/>

11.7 A system not working for many children

Central government has produced data showing considerable improvement in school performance and has used this information to justify continuing with the same agenda. It seems that those children with the life skills and experience to succeed have adapted to the regime and teachers have perfected ‘teaching to the test’ (Tymms, 2004; Tymms & Merrell, 2007). Unfortunately in the case study schools those children less likely to succeed remain vulnerable to ‘tripping points’. It is now being claimed in the *2020 Vision: Report on teaching and learning* that personalised learning will ensure that such children will no longer miss out (DCSF, 2007e). However the same data, although further refined, is still being used. This study suggests that the needs of these children are far greater than can be quantified or met by such narrow statistics. A difference can be made, but it is through extended human interaction and sustainable relationships that these children can be encouraged to develop as all round individuals.

In one school I was almost overwhelmed, walking from the car park to the playground, as I arrived for my first session with the class. “You’re the new mister aren’t you?” These children were desperate to meet someone new who was going to do something exciting with them. When treated as statistical units the focus with these children was on measurable improvements. Their needs were much greater than that.

While areas of deprivation, underperforming children, schools failing to reach targets, or exceeding them, and results influenced by patterns of socio-economic deprivation can easily be identified through centralised data collection systems, PIRLS data also identifies the unusually long tail of so

called ‘underperformance’ associated with England (Twist et al., 2003). This has been used to justify the setting of ambitious targets and prescriptive interventions for schools performing at lower levels of attainment (DfES, 2003a, 2004f).

What this analytical approach fails to appreciate is the every day reality of the case study schools and their communities struggling to deal with the ‘tripping points’ that this research has identified. To manage them successfully involves a considerable investment of time and resources. Both teachers and TAs often tried to make a further difference in their own time, despite pressures to get the children to perform, and efforts to improve their lot were frequently noted. For a minority fresh clothing was provided (often not seen again); personal hygiene was discussed; breakfasts were made available; conversations were held; children were made to feel welcome and responsible. Such commitment was observed in all three struggling schools but was barely acknowledged by external agencies more concerned with performative data.

11.8 A meritocracy maintained: a system masking inadequacies

In discussing secondary schools making a difference Thrupp concludes: *let’s be realistic* (Thrupp, 1999). His work went well beyond the simple classification of schools by performative data to identify the impact of school mix and context. I have similarly sought to bring realism to the understanding of the current situation of the case studies, primary schools seen to be struggling in isolated pockets of deprivation. All too frequently the circumstances of such schools seem to be overlooked. Research evidence already suggests that policy makers and politicians have little appreciation, experience or understanding of the ‘every day realities’(Thomson, 2002;

Thrupp, 1999) of such schools, or of the negative impact of their policies. This study adds to this body of work. It suggests that in these four schools and others like them imposed solutions, formulaic teaching strategies, ever higher targets, more time for planning, data driven inspection, less qualified people taking classes, even threats of school closure, all encased in a veneer of creativity and innovation, are merely maintaining the meritocracy which helped create the socio-economic difficulties they claim to be addressing. Further to this, the commodification of children masks inadequacies of those teaching staff, able to deliver as technicians but unable to think 'outside the box'. Significantly improving the quality of teaching and learning is both labour intensive and expensive (English et al., 2002). The lack of resources needed to support the vast range of difficulties these schools are facing, and the disillusionment of so many highly experienced and committed teachers, who feel their work has become dehumanised, is problematic. The long term prognosis is not good.

For the case study schools in challenging circumstances the current structure and system of primary schooling was inappropriate to meet their needs. However the experience of Barlingtown suggests that with considerable extra high quality staff and resourcing a transformation can be achieved. There is a consensus of research opinion identifying improvement when schools are placed into special measures by Ofsted (Cunningham & Rayment, 2008). This was also instrumental in starting the drastic actions taken by the Local Authority and the new headteacher. Local knowledge proved invaluable, and the extra support made an enormous difference. However funding for sustaining this approach is problematic, and the causes of the 'tripping points'

experienced at the old junior school remain, currently hidden just below the surface.

New Labour has made some significant financial commitments including the refurbishment and rebuilding of many primary schools and funding the literacy and numeracy strategies (Tymms & Merrell, 2007). It has also attempted to address social deprivation, through initiatives such as Excellence in Cities and SureStart with significant extra funding being channelled into certain areas. Unfortunately much funding has been time limited. Many initiatives have been introduced through expensive pilot programmes. However the effects are distorted when all schools are expected to implement them without similar funding. Schools in less difficult situations may succeed, but those already struggling, such as the case studies, lack the financial resources to sustain many activities without affecting learning opportunities for children.

There are schools that succeed in disadvantaged communities, bringing about significant change over time (Thomson, Day, Beales, & Curtis, 2009). The fact that these schools have been able to achieve excellent reputations within the current system should be celebrated. Although these schools share concerns about centralised control, they have been able to avoid the ‘tripping points’ identified in this research. This research suggests that such highly successful schools, when in close proximity to the case studies and similar schools may, unintentionally, contribute to the difficulties the less successful schools are experiencing (Thrupp, 1999). The choice agenda and the financial consequences of pupil drift remain a difficulty. Local Authority support for groups of schools across wider communities could help address these difficulties (Thomson, 2002 p186-7). This should be pro-active, rather than the

post Ofsted re-active model currently in place. Local knowledge should be used to recognize the difficulties of these isolated pockets of deprivation and to provide support, before individual schools experience difficulties and become categorised as ‘failing’.

Only when government and its advisers are challenged to relinquish control to more regional and local authorities and communities, stop their ‘consumer dreaming’(Bauman, 1998), looking for quick fixes and ‘what works’ policies, stop believing that primary education is just about ‘the basics’ and claiming that social deprivation is just an excuse for poor standards, will these three schools struggling within the present system begin to receive the sustained support they deserve.

11.9 A story not concluded

I did not come to this research from a position of neutrality. As mentioned at the start my experience of primary education in the latter part of the 20th Century, allied to my role as a researcher in the early years of this century, has helped tell a story of success and failure, set within primary schools in difficult circumstances. I did not expect the excitement of finding a school achieving as much as Barlingtown, or to witness the devastation of the head at Tillbridge holding the ‘Hard to Shift’ letter. Such experiences proved instrumental in framing the research findings, in identifying and considering the ‘tripping points’ and in helping to emphasise the significance of evidence collected over an extended period, not only for schools but also for politicians and policy makers, who at times seemed blissfully unaware of the impact of their actions and policies. This story is, of course, unfinished. The current performative expectations placed upon primary headteachers are making the job almost

unrecognisable to that which I left almost 10 years ago. Even Waddingworth, in the leafy suburbs, under a new leadership team, was ‘performing less well than in all the circumstances it could be reasonably expected to perform’ according to an Ofsted inspection in 2008, despite being popular and enriching the lives of children in its care.

This research suggests that the plight of children and schools situated in relatively isolated pockets of deprivation has been overlooked in the drive for ever higher standards. The ‘tripping points’ identified here, as well as others not apparent in these schools, will continue to impact negatively until both the structure and system are changed to take account of local contexts and knowledge. Only when these schools are encouraged and supported to work collaboratively with others, as envisioned in *Excellence and Enjoyment* (2003 p61-3), with sufficient resources and staff to raise achievement and expectations across whole communities, will it become possible to move towards a ‘tipping point’. Whilst individual pressures on schools to perform remain, this will be very difficult, as some succeed and some ‘fail’. Given current economic circumstances and the performative discourse of influential policy makers and certain politicians such changes could take a long time. Hopefully the importance of the story so far has made it worth telling and it will help contribute to the eventual demise of inequitable current government policy.

Primary education should be about far more than the elementary schooling currently dominating the system (Alexander, 2000; Ball, 2008a; Galton & Macbeath, 2002; Maguire et al., 2006). The final words about this I leave to Lady Plowden, writing 20 years after the publication of the CACE Report

when just the name ‘Plowden’ was a derisive term for influential policy makers and politicians. These comments were ignored at the time, but they are probably even more important today. Until action is taken to address such concerns the ‘tripping points’ identified in this research will remain;

I think that there is still a lack of understanding of the special characteristics of primary teaching: the closure of many colleges specialising in primary teaching increases this. Primary teaching, although it must deal with matters which are important and necessary for a child to master, still must first of all deal with the child as a person and give each child a basic confidence in learning, in seeking excellence, in courage to move into new and unknown fields, ranging from all forms of art to computers. Primary teaching is as intellectually demanding as secondary teaching, and in wider fields (Plowden, 1987).

11.10 A final reflection

So what have I learnt from this process?

In considering policy implementation, my one regret, as a practitioner and former headteacher, is that I missed seeing our learning community benefit from the lifeline that *Excellence and Enjoyment* offered. Many schools have seized such creative opportunities (Jeffrey & Woods, 2009). In this respect, New Labour should be applauded. However, as a researcher, using the notion of ‘tripping points’ I have been able to develop an understanding of why conditions still remain so difficult for some schools. I believe that this will be a significant contribution for future research.

Finally, I hope that I have at last learnt to ameliorate my tone. This has not been easy. My emotional involvement in primary education is deeply embedded. I must acknowledge the unending patience of my supervisor, Professor Pat Thomson, in both challenging and encouraging me in developing as a reflexive researcher. I have been very fortunate to experience the inspiration of an excellent teacher. I am sure that this is what will remain with me, influencing my future direction and involvement with students, teachers, children and the research community.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Range of observations undertaken

To give an indication of the variety of activities and experiences observed this is a distillation of a typical week in one school. In this case all class observations and my input were with a Y4 class. I used the staffroom in each school as my base. I was in each school for 6/7 weeks.

Monday	8.20 -8.40	Attended staff briefing
	8.40 -9.05	Observation of children arriving and start up activities
	9.05 – 10.15	Literacy hour and subsequent group phonics Noted how TA managed extremely difficult behaviour of one child throughout the lesson
	10.20 – 10.40	Assembly & followed children out to play
	10.45 – 11.00	Discussion with TA on playground over break
	11.45 -12.00	After writing up notes discussion with midday staff
	12.00 – 12.30	Lunch with children
	1.15 – 1.45	Talked to 2 parent helpers in staffroom
	2.00 – 3.15	Worked with children on class project
	3.45 – 4.45	Attended staff meeting on new literacy framework
Tuesday	8.20 – 9.15	Observed breakfast club & talked to parent organisers
	11 - 12.00	Joined in drama workshop with class (sec. sch. liaison)
	1.15 - 2.30	Observed PPA cover arrangements in 2 classes
	2.30 – 3.00	Talked with 2 teachers taking PPA time
	3.00 – 4.00	Talked to Headteacher & D/H about CVA data analysis
Wednesday	8.30-8.40	Attended staff briefing
	8.45 -9.05	Observed classroom start up activities
	9.05 – 12.00	Led creative morning for class using RHS materials (daily group activities still done)
	12.00 -12.30	Discussed my input with class teacher & TA
	12.30 – 1.00	Talked with visiting LA IT consultant over lunch
	1.00 – 3.00	Formally interviewed Headteacher
Thursday	1.15 – 3.30	Walked with class to visit local church. Observed management of visit and behaviour. Discussed the school with a TA during the walk

Friday	8.30 -8.40	Staff briefing
	9.15 - 10.00	Observed awards assembly & talked with parents afterwards
	11.00 -12.00	Numeracy hour in class, worked supporting one group
	12.15 -12. 45	Walked around school with Special Needs Coordinator who was supervising lunchtime. Observed interactions with midday staff & children.
	12.45 -1.15	Over lunch observed meeting between Deputy head and four TAs

Appendix 2: List of formal interviewees

(All interviews transcribed and approved by interviewees before use)

Lillywhites (NOR 240)

Headteacher	Male	age 52	Second headship (in post 7 years)	1hr 35min & 20 mins
Deputy Head	Female	age 42	15 years experience	35 mins
Asst Head Y6	Female	age 39	12 years experience	34 mins
Y4 teacher	Female	age 33	6 years experience	31 mins
Y5 teacher	Female	age 23	NQT	29 mins
HLTA	Female	age 45		25 mins
Y3 teacher	Female	age 40	8 years experience	36 mins
Office manager	Female	age 42		25 mins
TA	Female	age 36		26 mins

Barlingtown (NOR 340)

Headteacher	Female	age 56	In post 2 years (+ 7yrs at infants)	1hr 22mins & 25 mins
Deputy Head	Female	age 36	13 years experience	45 mins
Senior teacher	Male	age 42	12 years experience	40 mins
Y6 teacher	Male	age 37	15 years experience	32 mins
Y5 teacher	Female	age 28	3 years experience	27 mins
Y4 teacher	Female	age 26	4 years experience	32 mins
Y4 teacher	Male	age 38	15 years experience	31 mins
Y3 teacher	Female	age 32	6 years experience	26 mins
Y2 teacher	Female	age 34	10 years experience	29 mins

Tillbridge (NOR 127)

Headteacher	Female	age 50	In post 5 years	1hr 10mins & 24 mins
Deputy Head	Female	age 52	23 years experience	43 mins

Y5 teacher	Female age 41	12 years experience	20 mins
Y4 teacher	Female age 43	15 years experience	27 mins
Y3 teacher	Female age 37	12 years experience	26 mins
Senior TA	Female age 54		25 mins

Waddingworth (NOR 240)

Headteacher	Male	age 59	In post 20 years	1hr 5 mins & 30 mins
Acting Dep Y3	Female	age 57	33 years experience	30 mins
Y6 teacher	Female	age 30	6 years experience	31 mins
Y5 teacher	Male	age 30	7 years experience	37 mins
Y5 teacher	Female	age 26	2 years experience	28 mins
Y3 teacher	Male	age 34	10 years experience	26 mins

Most information from TAs came from informal discussions as time for formal interviews was very limited.

Appendix 3: Semi structured interview schedule

Initially these questions were designed around themes found in Excellence and Enjoyment. See Chapter 5. However not all questions were needed with some staff covering most areas through talking of strengths and weaknesses. Questions were adapted for the role of each interviewee.

1. Tell me about your time in the school.
2. How do you think the school is developing – such things as strengths and weaknesses ?
3. What impact do you think Excellence and Enjoyment has had?
4. How do you find the ISP (ISI) work?
5. How much TA support do you get?
6. How do you find PPA time?
7. How is it planned?
8. What sort of a deal do you think children are getting from PPA time?
9. How is creativity being developed?
10. What do you make of the SEF?
11. Given a magic wand what would you change?

Each question was used as a starting point for further discussion. The initial headteacher interview at Lillywhites was conducted during a guided tour of the school with a digital recorder attached to the interviewee. This highlighted areas that would not otherwise have been discussed if we had remained in the office. This approach was not practical at Barlingtown and subsequently not used again. However the points raised were applied to the other schools. A number of areas were identified which were introduced into interview conversations if not mentioned or covered at other times;

ISP – SATs	Foreign languages
Buildings	IT
Learning expectations	Staff
Behaviour	Lunchtimes
Special needs	Support groups
CVA Deprivation/ Aspiration competition	Schools structure expansion &
Initiatives – extended schools	School environment & community
Finance	Every Child Matters
Music	Ofsted

Appendix 4: NVivo node coding for case study interviews and field notes

Below is a breakdown of the full node coding used in analysing data from the case studies

- (1) /Standards
 - 2 (1 1) /Standards/SEF
 - 3 (1 2) /Standards/Ofsted
 - 4 (1 3) /Standards/Literacy
 - 5 (1 4) /Standards/Numeracy
 - 6 (1 5) /Standards/SATs
 - 7 (1 6) /Standards/ISI,ISP, Hard to Shift
 - 8 (1 7) /Standards/monitoring
 - 9 (1 8) /Standards/support
 - 10 (1 9) /Standards/Targets
- 11(2) /Staffing
 - 12 (2 1) /Staffing/Teachers
 - 13 (2 2) /Staffing/TAs
 - 14 (2 3) /Staffing/Quality
 - 15 (2 4) /Staffing/Teamwork
 - 16 (2 5) /Staffing/Redundancy~Morale
- 17(3) /Budget
 - 18 (3 1) /Budget/PPA
 - 19 (3 2) /Budget/Class size
 - 20 (3 3) /Budget/Buildings
 - 21 (3 4) /Budget/Extended Schools

22	(3 5) /Budget/Fund chasing
23	(3 6) /Budget/Resources
24	(3 7) /Budget/TA support
25(4) /Context	
26	(4 1) /Context/Deprivation
27	(4 2) /Context/Parental cultivation
28	(4 3) /Context/Community
29	(4 4) /Context/Reputation
30	(4 5) /Context/Housing
31	(4 6) /Context/School Mix
32(5) /Children	
33	(5 1) /Children/Behaviour
34	(5 2) /Children/Discipline
35	(5 3) /Children/Expectations
36	(5 4) /Children/Nurture Groups
37	(5 5) /Children/Special Needs
38	(5 6) /Children/TA Support
39(6) /Curriculum~Creativity	
40	(6 1) /Curriculum~Creativity/School Ethos
41	(6 2) /Curriculum~Creativity/Planning
42	(6 3) /Curriculum~Creativity/Creative Days,Weeks
43	(6 4) /Curriculum~Creativity/Cultural Change
44	(6 5) /Curriculum~Creativity/TASC
45	(6 6) /Curriculum~Creativity/Mantle of the Expert
46(7) /Language of Conformity	
47(8) /Reflectiveness	
48(9) /Tipping Points	
49(10) /Justifications	
50(11) /Positives~Negatives	
51	(11 1) /Positives~Negatives/Positives
52	(11 2) /Positives~Negatives/Negatives
53	(12) /Time

Appendix 5: NVivo analysis of Excellence and Enjoyment

This analysis simply coded the document into two – ‘excellence’ and ‘enjoyment’. The numbers give an indication of my interpretation of emphasis.

The passages could be anything from a few words to a whole paragraph. This could be misleading. The character count gives a better indication of the balance between the two.

EXCELLENCE

128 passages, 112218 characters.

ENJOYMENT

71 passages, 15932 characters.

Appendix 6: Vocabulary analysis of Excellence and Enjoyment

There are more than six times as many words used that exercise control over schools (such as improvement, standards and targets) than those that encourage freedom of thought (such as creativity, innovation and excitement). The word 'quality' in the 'freedom' section is not easily defined and accounts for almost a third of the words. It could also be linked to control.

Frequency of words

Control		Freedom	
Literacy	59	Creativity	11
Improving	56	Innovation	13
Standards	53	Enjoy(ment)	10
Performance	34	Exciting	8
Achievement	21	Free	5
Assessment	32	Freedom	5
Excellen(ce)t	29	Quality	28
Targets	25	Fun	2
Better	24	Joy	4
Challenge	16	Love	1
OFSTED	28	Vivid	2
Effective	33	Pleasure	1
Tests	23	Creative	8
Tables	13	Independence	0
Success	39	Thinking	2
Numeracy	41	Drama	4
Subjects	17		

Appendix 7: Extracts from DfES School Standards Group, letter to Local Authorities January 2007

Funding for an Intensive Support Strategy - Hard to Shift Primary Schools

I am writing to you to let you know that the Department will make available to local authority an additional £ in the current financial year to support the authority's primary schools that have been consistently below the KS2 floor targets in English and Mathematics over several years – Hard to Shift floor target primary schools. We expect to make a similar sum available to the authority in the next financial year (2007-08). This is part of a new initiative to establish an intensive support strategy for these schools, in order to reduce their number significantly by 2008. Funding will be allocated for schools which, as agreed with National Strategies regional teams, can be demonstrated to be likely to achieve the 2008 targets. For your authority, funding will be allocated to support the following schools:

An essential requirement for the success of this initiative is your commitment to ensure that the appropriate combination of challenge and support is given to each school. This includes a commitment to making available HR support and using statutory intervention powers promptly and robustly where appropriate. The actions funded in each school should be targeted at those priorities which will have greatest impact on standards. The actions should be based on the principles of building internal capacity and sustainability of the improvements, so that these initiatives deliver real value for money in the future.

We expect authorities seriously to consider closure or other radical solutions for other schools stuck below the KS2 floor targets which are ineligible for funding under this initiative because they are judged unlikely to meet the 2008 target.

Appendix 8: IDACI compared with ACORN data

ACORN is a geodemographic tool which is used to identify and understand the UK population and the demand for products and services (ACORN, 2007). It uses individual postcodes to classify households, narrowing the focus down to on average 15 households. It uses 57 categories of classification which are grouped into 5 population categories as follows;

1. Wealthy Achievers 25.1%
2. Urban Prosperity 10.7%
3. Comfortably Off 26.6%
4. Moderate Means 14.5%
5. Hard Pressed 22.4%

Within the hard pressed category it is the struggling families group (14.2% nationally) which is most frequently identified in the case study schools. The ACORN description clearly sums up their situation;

These are low income families living on traditional low rise estates. Some have bought their council houses but most continue to rent.

Estates will usually be either terraced or semi-detached. Two bedroom properties are more typical but the larger families may be housed in three bedroom properties. Either way there may be an element of overcrowding. On some estates there are high numbers of single parents while on others there are more elderly people, some with long term illness.

Incomes are low and unemployment relatively high. Jobs reflect the general lack of educational qualifications and are in factories, shops and other manual occupations.

There are fewer cars than most other areas. Money is tight and shopping tends to focus on cheaper stores and catalogues.

Visiting the pub, betting, football pools, bingo and the lottery are the principal leisure activities.

These families share the twin disadvantages of educational underachievement and consequent lack of opportunity. They are struggling to get by in an otherwise prosperous Britain

(ACORN, 2007).

IDACI, is too broad, looking at over 600 household postcodes together in lower level super output areas (ONS, 2007). It does not focus on individual postcodes and takes no account of ambitious families moving their children away from the school. In ACORN nationally 14.2% of families are struggling (situated within the hard pressed category). An IDACI figure for the worst 14% of areas of deprivation equates to 40% unemployment.

In the three case study schools shown below, ACORN indicated between 80 and 90 % of children from struggling families, almost twice the IDACI figures.

Lillywhites Junior School

IDACI Income deprivation (unemployment) Y4

No of children	% unemployed	Worst nationally
1	54	4.86%
4	50	7%
3	45	10.2%
6	40	14%
4	38	16.3%
1	24	
4	22	
1	17	
1	12	

ACORN (post codes) Family status

20 hard pressed 80%

3 moderate means

2 comfortably off

Barlingtown Primary School

IDACI Income deprivation (unemployment) Y4

No of children	% unemployed	Worst nationally
9	49	7.6%
1	45	10.3%
4	28	27.5%
5	22	
1	17	
3	14	

ACORN (post codes) Family status

20 hard pressed 87%

1 moderate means

2 comfortably off

Tillbridge Primary School

IDACI Income deprivation (unemployment) Y3/4

No of children	% unemployed	Worst nationally
19	58	3.5%
11	44	11.4%

ACORN (post codes) Family status

26 hard pressed 90%

1 moderate means

3 comfortably off

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