THE PRIMARY SECTOR IN ENGLAND (APRIL 2017)

77% of local authority schools

1% of free schools

4% of academies <u>not</u> in a multi academy trust

18% of academies in a multi academy trust
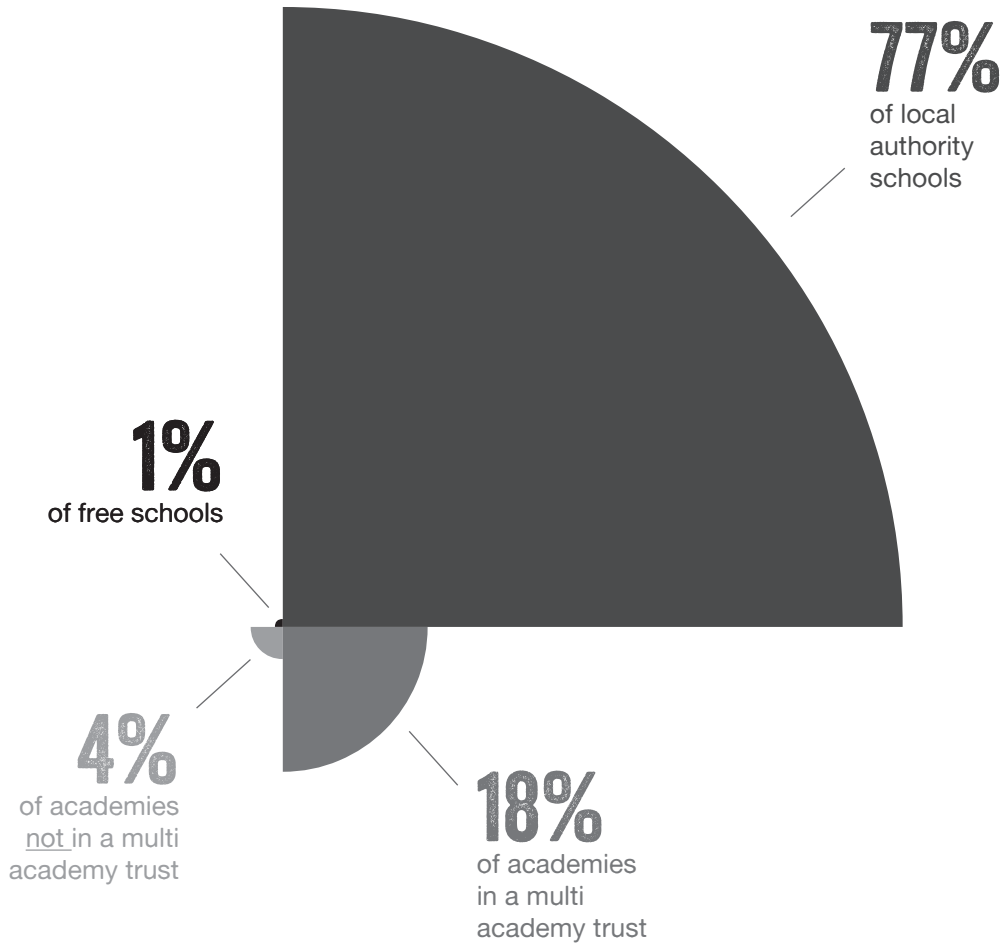
WHAT DRIVES PRIMARY SCHOOLS TODAY?

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- **THE POLITICISATION OF EDUCATION**
- **WHAT IS IDEOLOGY?**
- **THE EFFECTS OF IDEOLOGY ON SCHOOL LEADERS AND TEACHERS**
- **THE EDUCATIONAL LANDSCAPE TODAY**
- **WHY YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT SCHOOL POLICIES**
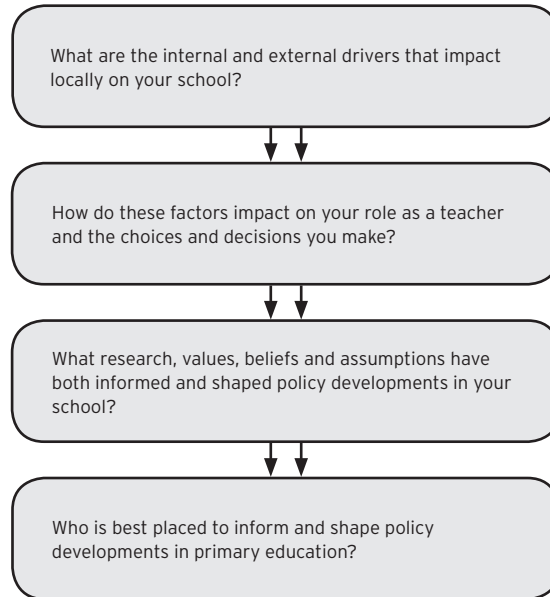- **STAKEHOLDERS – AND THEIR ROLE AS INFLUENCERS**
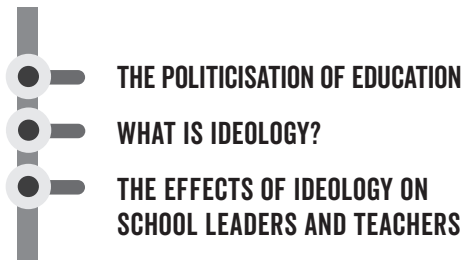
KEY WORDS

- Accountability
- Governance
- Ideology
- Policy
- Politicisation
- Schools-led
- Stakeholder
- Teacher voice

INTRODUCTION

What occurs within our primary schools does not (and has never) occurred within a vacuum. Education is not a neutral concept. Kelly (2009) suggests that it is not possible to discuss education without considering how it is influenced by other contexts. Within this chapter we will explore some of the drivers which impact on primary schools. As you read the chapter we'd like you to consider the following questions:

What are the internal and external drivers that impact locally on your school?

How do these factors impact on your role as a teacher and the choices and decisions you make?

What research, values, beliefs and assumptions have both informed and shaped policy developments in your school?

Who is best placed to inform and shape policy developments in primary education?

THE POLITICISATION OF EDUCATION

CRITICAL QUESTION

What aspects of your own education have been the result of political decisions?

Significant changes in the perceived purpose of education and the role of schools, both historically and within the present day, have fundamentally altered the pressures and responsibilities experienced by schools. Stoll (1999) suggests that the contextual picture within which schools operate consists of three interacting factors:

external contextual forces

the school learning context

the individual teacher

For schools to meet the challenge of a continually changing context and to develop their internal capacity to enhance pupil learning, there must be recognition and understanding of these three factors which act to influence their 'internal capacity' to meet the challenge of change (Stoll, 1999). In recognising the complexity of the interaction of these factors, we can begin to appreciate the unique and individualised nature of the challenges faced by schools and, therefore. what drives them in today's context. What follows is an exploration of the development of the external contextual forces (or context) within which all schools are situated today; this includes both political action and global change.

● ─ KEY INFORMATION ─

Stoll, L. (1999) Realising our potential: Understanding and developing capacity for lasting improvement. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 10 (4): 503–35.

This reading will develop your understanding of the context within which schools operate and how they are able to cope with and respond effectively to the changing school context. The three key contexts include the individual teacher, the school learning context and external contextual factors; it is these factors which influence a school's internal capacity to engage in school and teacher learning in order to enhance pupil learning.

POLITICISATION AND IDEOLOGY

The politicisation of education can be seen as one of the most important and influential developments of the external context. This development needs to be explored in light of the educational ideologies that have underpinned and driven this process. An educational ideology can be defined as a 'set of ideas and beliefs held by a group of people about the formal arrangements for education' (Meighan and Harber, 2007: 218). The process of politicisation is, therefore. inherently linked to the system of beliefs, or the ideology, held by those who are in power and are influential as policy decision-makers; 'Policy-making does not "happen: in a vacuum or bubble' (Forrester and Garratt, 2016: 1). Through an exploration of key moments and policies in the development of this process, we will see an evolving picture of tensions and change in the relationship between society, the state and schools.

THE 1944 EDUCATION ACT: EDUCATION AND THE ECONOMY

Although seen as a centralising measure, the 1944 Education Act established a balance of power between Local Education Authorities, schools and the government. Control over curriculum content and professional practice remained within the remit of schools and LEAs (Dale, 1989). The context of the education system was, therefore. a 'national system locally administered' (Barber, 1994: 119). The movement towards centralised control can be seen as resulting from the social and economic context of the time where post-war policies were that of the welfare state and equality of opportunity in order to tackle the extreme poverty of the 1930s. Perhaps, and most importantly, a strong link had been made between the quality of educational provision and the success of the economy; it can be argued that this is one of the most important ideological drivers behind the movement towards political and centralised control.

● ──── **CRITICAL QUESTION** ────

Is the strength and success of a country's economy linked to the strength and success of its education provision?

This link is still asserted today, where the new Secretary of State for Education, Damien Hinds stated:

> *'it is through education, skills and training from the early years into adulthood that we will make sure no one is left behind – delivering a modern country that is globally competitive and fit for the future'.*
>
> (Hinds, 2018)

The establishment of the relationship between the purpose of education, the development of a suitable work-force and a successful economy acts as a continuing and strong ideological driver behind the external context within which schools are situated today.

1988 EDUCATION REFORM ACT AND THE MARKETISATION OF EDUCATION

The 1988 Education Reform Act introduced coherency of content of curricula and new levels of visibility and accountability of schools in relation to educational attainment through league tables, Ofsted inspections and data reporting methods. This was seen to be a fully centralising measure, which placed education fully within political control (Abbott et al., 2013); the legacy of which remains embedded in current educational policy and practice.

Additionally, the 1988 Education Reform Act instigated the beginnings of the marketisation of education, where Margaret Thatcher's 'free-market' philosophy, which guided conservative thinking of the time, was intended to improve institutional efficiency and allow market forces to take the place of government inter-vention in public services in order to raise standards (Abbott et al., 2013; Ball, 2008; Thatcher, 1993). Such a shift in philosophy had significant impact, not just on schools, but also parents, as they became 'educational consumers' (Brooker, 2002). Their role became one of exercising market forces through choice, with the expec-tation that standards would be raised through the process of competition. This philosophy remains today and acts as a significant driver on school policy and practice.

SCHOOL-LED SYSTEM OF DEVELOPMENT

The concern over standards has prompted, and continues to prompt, the instigation of mechanisms to raise accountability and visibility of schools through marketisation and placing power in the hands of parents as educational consumers. These are aspects that still influence the external educational context within which schools operate today.

A recent mechanism to raise standards can be seen in developments in education policy which advocate an increasingly schools-led system of development and improvement. The Academies Act (DfE, 2010b) enacted under the coalition government (2010–2015) established free schools and extended the academy programme enabling Ofsted rated outstanding schools to convert to academy status. This gives greater control to schools through removing them from Local Education Authority control and gives them greater control over staffing, curriculum and funding. Current political rhetoric indicates a commitment to a schools-led system of development; the White Paper *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE, 2010a) recognised and reaffirmed that schools were and continue to be best placed to develop communities of best practice and, in doing so, are better able to exercise market forces, increasing parental choice and therefore raising standards.

GLOBALISATION

An additional layer of complexity is also in need of consideration when exploring the changing landscape of education; that of globalisation. With education being intrinsically linked to economic success, the global context has become increasingly influential as:

'*National governments around the world have been guided by the perceptions of a global economy and post industrialism where knowledge, information and creativity are vital for economic success*'.

(Forrester and Garratt, 2016: 176)

The movement towards 'educational multilateralism' (Mundy, 1998), where the setting of 'standards' has moved beyond the national to the global level, further changes the expectations placed upon schools; education being linked to the development of 'human capital' and the knowledge economy. Thus, representing a further ideological shift in defining the purpose of education, the role of schools and economic wellbeing.

What is evident when exploring the developments of the external context as outlined by Stoll (1999) is that the politicisation of education has fundamentally altered the role and responsibilities of schools within society; they are viewed and used as a means of bringing about social change and this very purpose is evident in policy, both historically and today. The current external context is formed of factors that include accountability, visibility, marketisation, partocracy, globalisation and a schools-led system of improvement and development. If we begin to understand the complexity of the interaction of these factors and their ideological underpinning it is possible to explore what motivates and drives schools today. Decisions schools make about any aspect of their practice can, in some way, be linked to the influences and pressures exerted by the external context within which they operate.

● CRITICAL QUESTION

How should we educate children? How should children be assessed? What is knowledge?

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WHAT IS IDEOLOGY?

What you believe about these aspects of education form a system of beliefs that comprise your educational ideology; in essence, an ideology is a 'system of broad belief' (Bartlett and Burton, 2016: 22).

● THEORY FOCUS

A useful tool to help us understand differences in educational ideologies is the typology outlined by Morrison and Ridley (1988) where ideologies are grouped into five main themes:

(Progressivism) — (Classical humanism) — (Liberal humanism) — (Instrumentalism) — (Reconstructionism)

Each of these ideological labels are 'made up' or consist of beliefs relating to their emphasis (is it about knowledge? Society? The child?); what is believed about knowledge, the theory of learning, teaching, resources, organisation, assessment alongside a theory of aims and objectives, form the ideology.

Let us explore classical humanism as an example. Within this ideological framework there is an emphasis on unequal access to knowledge where that knowledge is academic and high culture in nature, there is a belief that learning is passive and children are, therefore, recipients of this knowledge, which is 'transmitted' by the teacher. There is also a belief that assessment should be written and formal and the curriculum is elitist and non-vocational.

● CRITICAL QUESTION

What might an education system based on classical humanism look like? Would the curriculum be different? Would we assess children differently? What would the school classroom look like? What would be the role of the teacher?

It would be quite different to what is in place today! The key point here is that ideology underpins and sits beneath every education system; those who are in positions of power hold their own educational ideology and this informs and drives political decisions and policy reforms which in turn have implications for schools and teachers.

To add additional but necessary complexity to this picture, Lawton (1992) argues that ideologies are evident at different levels of generality. They exist at the broadest level which relates to the nature and purpose of education; the interest group level which relates to how the system should be organised; and the teaching or pedagogic level which relates to the curriculum and how it should be organised and delivered within the classroom. In any one setting, therefore, there will be a range of ideologies at play.

● CLASSROOM LINK

Let us consider a school classroom; what the teacher believes about learning and their role will influence how learning is approached and facilitated in that context but that teacher also operates within the wider school context; this wider school context will also have an ideological underpinning and can be seen through the school's ethos, procedures and practices. At a broader level still, the school operates within the wider education system, which will also be underpinned by ideologies that relate to what education is for and the purposes it serves. The picture becomes a complex one, but it goes some way to explain and help us explore the differences between school settings and even between one classroom and the next.

Ideology sits at the root of any education system; we frequently experience political change and this change may also change *who* has control or influence in policy and political decisions in relation to education. As educators and mediators of these policy decisions, it is necessary to understand and be able to explore *why* changes occur, enabling us to appreciate how this may influence and impact upon practice in all school contexts.
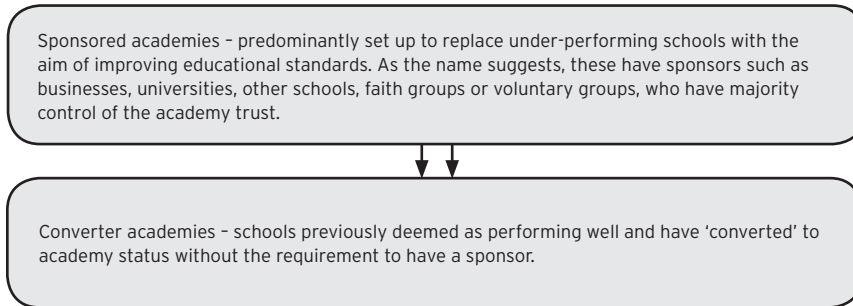
THE EDUCATIONAL LANDSCAPE TODAY

Over the last decade or so we have seen a seismic change in the primary school landscape. A key piece of recent legislation which paved the way for this was the Academies Act 2010; introduced by the then Education Secretary, Michael Gove. Free Schools were first approved as part of the Academies Act 2010. These schools receive their funding directly from government rather than through local authorities like other state-funded schools. They are often set up groups of parents, teachers, charities, businesses, universities and religious groups. The first free school opened in September 2011.

ACADEMIES

The Academies Act 2010 also made it possible for all maintained schools, primary, secondary and special, to apply to become academies, with schools rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted being pre-approved. Similarly to free schools, academy schools also receive their funding directly from government and are independent of local authority control. To complicate things further, there are two types of academy:

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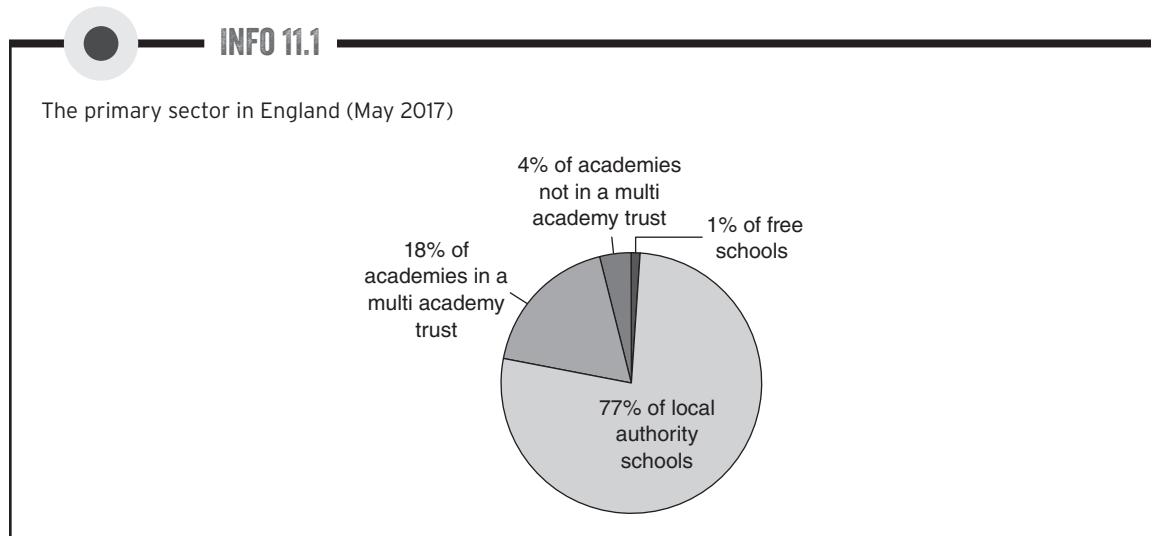Sponsored academies – predominantly set up to replace under-performing schools with the aim of improving educational standards. As the name suggests, these have sponsors such as businesses, universities, other schools, faith groups or voluntary groups, who have majority control of the academy trust.

Converter academies – schools previously deemed as performing well and have 'converted' to academy status without the requirement to have a sponsor.

A common misconception is that Michael Gove was the brainchild behind the academies programme. In fact, they were initially launched by the Blair government in 2000 with a focus on improving social mobility and social justice in disadvantaged areas. The first three academies opened in 2002, rising to 46 in 2006 and 203 by 2010. This paved the way for Michael Gove and his desire to accelerate the expansion of academies and open the academies programme to all schools, with schools rated as 'outstanding' allowed to fast-track to academy status. By January 2011, 407 academies were open in England. This rapid expansion has not been without significant controversy. Chris Keates, General Secretary of the NASUWT said at the time:

'The Education Secretary is arrogantly taking to himself, without a mandate from the people of this country, the freedom to give away 150 years of state school history to his few friends, to enable them to turn a profit at the expense of our children and young people. It is the teachers and support staff who raise standards; academies and free schools are about lining the pockets of business.

(Keates, 2011)

In forwarding the clock to the latest statistics (May 2017):

INFO 11.1

The primary sector in England (May 2017)

4% of academies not in a multi academy trust

1% of free schools

18% of academies in a multi academy trust

77% of local authority schools

ACCOUNTABILITY AS A DRIVER

'Accountability is needed in order to reassure the public that the system is in good hands and progressing well; it is also needed to help implementers know how well they are doing while providing the feedback and help to do even better.'

(Fullan, 2010: 66)

School leaders and teachers are not against the idea of accountability. It is generally agreed that, as a public service, schools should be held to account for the way in which public money is spent. Dunford (2016) argues that the contentious issue concerns not whether there should be accountability but more about how much accountability there is and how it is enacted.

● **CRITICAL QUESTION**

Why is accountability important in schools?

The current English accountability structures that we see in schools today were introduced following the Education Reform Action (DES, 1988) which led to the creation of Ofsted in 1993, national testing and league tables. The structures that were subsequently created also provided the mechanism for Government to hold schools to account and an obsession with measuring school performance. Many would argue that over time we have seen the accountability grip being tightened further and further; with the stakes also becoming higher and higher. Inglis (2000: 428) goes so far as to say that this culture of accountability within our schools is 'a pistol loaded with blame to be fired at the heads of those who cannot answer charges. The pistol is fired in public. Its lesson is that wounds shall be visibly inscribed on reputation'. Is it any wonder that, with such a burden of responsibility, schools are seeing a reluctance by teachers to apply for senior leadership roles? Howson (2015) draws upon an interesting analogy when describing how the accountability agenda impacts on the challenges faced by schools to find leaders:

'And the additional factor at the moment is the football manager syndrome. This is the fear that if you get sandbagged by Ofsted you will get sacked and unlike football managers, who get sacked by one club and then rehired by another, in education that second bit is missing.'

Not only does this accountability culture impact on recruitment, it also has the potential to impact on the way in which schools operate. Rob Carpenter, Executive Headteacher in South East London, argues that the tightening of accountability, is driven by data rather than 'trust-based accountability' and has the negative

impact of creating a 'fixed mind-set about what constitutes success' (2018). Inglis (2000) rightfully reminds us that teaching is more than a set of discrete competences. However, the temptation within such a surveillance culture is to use the accountability frameworks as a safety blanket and, therefore, the driver rather than our professional autonomy of what is right for our school, our pupils and the community it serves. In primary schools, due to the data-driven nature of the inspection framework, it has also influenced how teachers allocate their curriculum time – with most primary teachers focusing the majority of their teaching week on literacy and numeracy.

In summary, accountability, therefore, must be balanced against the need for professional autonomy. It has to be acknowledged that in recent times there have been considerable efforts by Ofsted to present themselves in a different light. In December 2017, Amanda Speilman highlighted the need for Ofsted to use their 'influence with care, not as a sledgehammer'. Despite these efforts, the inspection framework continues to be a powerful lever on a school's behaviour with schools tending to focus on what they think Ofsted will be looking for.

KEY INFORMATION

Fullan, M., Rincon-Gallardo, S. and Hargreaves, A. (2015) Professional capital as accountability. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 23(15).

This reading explores the conditions for an effective accountability system which not only leads to school improvement but also strengthens the teaching profession. Fullan et al. argue that policy makers need to shift from a heavy reliance on external accountability to investing in, what they refer to as the professional capital of all teachers and leaders. The article draws upon systems in both the USA and internationally to argue that policy makers should focus on creating the conditions needed for internal accountability, which they define as the collective responsibility within the teaching profession for the continuous improvement and success of pupils.

SCHOOLS AS POLICY GATEKEEPERS AND MAKERS

As educators it is important that we heed the warning by Alexander (2010: 496) when he said

'children will not learn to think for themselves if their teachers merely do as they are told.'

This though does present a challenge. For example: between 1996 and 2004 primary schools in England were the subject of what felt like a never-ceasing bombardment of government directives with no fewer than 459 official documents sent to schools regarding the teaching of literacy alone (Moss, 2009). While much of this was supposedly 'non-compulsory' guidance, the accountability agenda of the time (which still exists today) meant that it took a very brave school to decide to follow a different approach than that within the guidance.

What does this mean for classroom practice?

As a teacher, it is important for you to be aware of how policies within your school are developed and implemented. Some important considerations for you include the following:

- Who has ownership of policies?

- What are the key drivers behind the policy?

- How do policies within your school take account of evidence-informed research?

- How do you ensure that your voice and the voices of other stakeholders are heard in the policy development stages?

- How do policies within your school impact on the decisions you take and what occurs within your class?

- What is the process by which policies are reviewed?

STAKEHOLDERS AS POLICY MAKERS AND INFLUENCERS

As we have already established, schools do not operate in isolation; they are influenced by the unique and individualised context within which they operate and as a result there needs to be consideration of the community, parents and school 'status'.

The Academies Act (2010b), which established both free schools and academies, has acted to change the role of the school within its community and the stakeholders who hold them to account. The purpose of the schools-led system of development and improvement is to enable school freedom to develop their own ethos and culture. This being founded on the belief that the key to improving the quality of the education system is through greater school autonomy in the context of high levels of accountability with parents being placed at the heart of this process (Abbott et al., 2013; DfE, 2010a). Alexander (2014) takes a different view.

─ ● ── ─ **KEY INFORMATION** ───────

In his article 'Evidence, policy and reform of primary education: A cautionary tale' Robin Alexander makes a convincing argument that the expansion of academies and free schools and the subsequent weakening of local authorities has 'removed the remaining checks and balances on absolute ministerial power, ensuring that nothing obstructs the line of command between ministers and the schools' (Alexander, 2014: 351).

www.robinalexander.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Forum-2014-Edinburgh-as-published.pdf

The influence of stakeholders is, therefore, context dependent, with individual schools being subject to parents, the community within which they operate (and may have been established to serve) and governing bodies.

PARENTS AS STAKEHOLDERS

As explored earlier in the chapter, the marketisation of education has transformed parents into 'educational consumers' (Brooker, 2002) and as such they are a significant driver and influencer of school policy and practice.

● CRITICAL QUESTION

Is it useful for parents to be 'consumers' in education? What influence has this had on schools in recent years?

The publication of league tables and Ofsted ratings form the basis of parental choice and schools run the risk of losing parental support if they are seen to be failing. Parents' needs and wants, therefore, become a significant influence on school policy and practice; indeed, it can even form the basis for the creation of a free school under the Academies Act (2010b). The role of parents as stakeholders has, therefore, become increasingly influential in terms of the free-market philosophies of Margaret Thatcher (1993) and the drive to raise standards.

However, a note of caution here, as it could be argued that this approach to drive up standards can be criticised and, therefore, the extent to which parents do influence schools as stakeholders can be questioned. Reay (2008) argues that 'free-market' policies are based on the assumption that all parents can exercise their rights equally but educational research suggests that such educational markets are class and race biased as not all parents are able to exercise their rights equally within such a system (Reay, 2008); the 'rules' are not easily understood by all and thus favouring the middle classes which raises questions regarding which parents within a community become the influencers of school policy and practice.

DIVERSITY OF PROVISION AND STAKEHOLDER INFLUENCE

According to the DfE (2017) the academies and free school programme has 'transformed the education system, raising standards and unleashing innovation' (DfE, 2017: 16). By developing the schools-led system of improvement, 'good' and 'outstanding' schools have been able to develop communities of best practice, thus raising standards. The implication of such a system is that schools become accountable to and influenced by those within the academy chain or their academy sponsor. If the purpose of academy status is to develop and disseminate best practice, then the method by which this occurs is through the external influence of the relevant stakeholders. For example, within any multi-academy trust, schools within the academy chain are influenced by policies relating to the ethos and ideologies that underpin it. The same could be said for free schools, which can be established by a range of educational providers, such as charities, communities, faith groups or businesses. Stakeholders, therefore, become an important external influence on school professional practice as drivers of school policy.

● ─── CHAPTER SUMMARY ───

In this chapter we have touched on some of the key drivers that influence both primary schools in general and factors that impact the decisions and choices of primary leaders and teachers. We have established that there must be an understanding and recognition of the unique nature of each individual school context to begin to understand how they are influenced and what drives them; by engaging in this analysis you, as a teacher, will be better placed to understand school culture, policy and practice and your role within this. With greater insight into these issues your role in the development of policy, practice and culture within a setting can be a more influential one; remember, as a professional, it is important to have your voice heard as you are as much a stakeholder in the education of the children whom you teach as all the other factors we have explored.

● ─── ASSIGNMENTS ───

If you are writing an ITT assignment on educational ideologies, the politics of education it will be useful for you to think through the following:

- What is your ideological position and how did this impact on the choices and decisions you make as a teacher? What has influenced your position?

- What aspects of current educational practice within schools can you attribute to political policy makers and ministers? How have these impacted? Are their differing perspectives that you can find? Can you find examples to support your discussion?

The following texts would support you if writing an assignment on policy / politics of education / ideology:

- Alexander, R. (2008) *Essays on Pedagogy* Abingdon: Routledge

- Ball, S.J. (2017) *The Education Debate* Bristol: Policy Press

- Bartless, S. & Burton, D. (2016) Introduction to Education Studies London: Sage

Forrester, G. & Garrett. D. (2016) Education Policy Unravelled London: Bloomsbury

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