

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233219240>

Opting into State Control? Headteachers and the Paradoxes of Grant-maintained Status

Article in *International Studies in Sociology of Education* · January 1993

DOI: 10.1080/0962021930030101

CITATIONS

20

READS

48

3 authors, including:



Sally Anne Power

Cardiff University

125 PUBLICATIONS 2,958 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE



John Fitz

Cardiff University

65 PUBLICATIONS 1,702 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



ESRC Skope and ESRC Civil Society [View project](#)



Educational policy [View project](#)

This article was downloaded by: [61.93.246.49]

On: 21 March 2014, At: 17:54

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



International Studies in Sociology of Education

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/riss20>

Opting into State Control? Headteachers and the Paradoxes of Grant-maintained Status

David Halpin^a, Sally Power^b & John Fitz^c

^a University of Warwick, United Kingdom

^b University of Warwick, United Kingdom

^c University of Wales, United Kingdom

Published online: 09 Jul 2006.

To cite this article: David Halpin, Sally Power & John Fitz (1993) Opting into State Control? Headteachers and the Paradoxes of Grant-maintained Status, *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 3:1, 3-23, DOI: [10.1080/0962021930030101](https://doi.org/10.1080/0962021930030101)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0962021930030101>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

Opting into State Control? Headteachers and the Paradoxes of Grant-maintained Status

DAVID HALPIN, *University of Warwick, United Kingdom*

SALLY POWER, *University of Warwick, United Kingdom*

JOHN FITZ, *University of Wales, United Kingdom*

ABSTRACT This paper reflects on the significance of two paradoxes of opting out within which grant-maintained (GM) school headteachers are entangled, and to which they contribute. Discussion of the first paradox focusses on the way GM status, rather than eliminating 'producer interests', creates a new one in the form of headteacher control which assists the policy's implementation and the realisation of other educational reforms. Examination of the second addresses the government's willingness to offer an expensive financial subsidy to GM schools when one of its aims is to demonstrate that the administrative and managerial efficiencies that accrue from opting out can improve the quality of education provision in ways that do not entail any increase in public expenditure on schools. The paper suggests that the government is happy to give preferential financial treatment to GM schools because it regards opting out as a necessary condition for increasing its control of state education. It also argues that, while GM schools are 'self-governing' institutions, their autonomy is strictly 'regulated', and to such an extent that their headteachers are under heavy and increasing pressure to do the work of the state. The paper concludes with an exploration of the extent to which the paradoxes of the GM schools policy can be usefully interpreted through a neo-Marxist analysis of the role of the state in education policy-making.

Introduction

The 1988 Education Reform Act established a framework which makes it possible for schools in England and Wales to leave or 'opt out' of local education authority (LEA) control and become grant-maintained (GM). Operating as free-standing, self-governing institutions, these schools receive

their funds direct from central government. The importance of the GM schools policy, and the means by which it is to be further developed, were reinforced through the 1993 Education Act. Prior to 1988, all state-maintained schools operated within the jurisdiction of LEAs. In England, there are 108 such democratically elected authorities which use a combination of local taxation and central government grants to maintain, plan and develop education provision within their administrative boundaries.

Although the precise origins of the GM schools policy are complex and obscure (see Fitz et al, 1993b, Ch. 1), there seems little doubt that its architects drew some of their inspiration from abroad, in particular from the USA and Canada where initiatives aimed at decentralising control through school-site budgeting had been underway for some time (Caldwell, 1990). Like the GM schools policy, these other initiatives stress the benefits of local accountability, increased flexibility and enhanced parental participation.

In Britain, however, the desire to increase the local accountability of schools is articulated with a broader political project to undermine local government and restructure public sector provision generally. In the case of education, successive Conservative governments since 1979 have held a deficit view of the work of LEAs, particularly Labour-controlled ones, many of the schools of which have been variously described by ministers as inefficient, ineffective and insufficiently accountable. The government argues that opted-out schools will have the effect of promoting the power of the 'consumers' of education (i.e. parents) in place of the supposed self-serving vested interests of its 'producers' (i.e. LEAs, teachers and educationalists). It believes GM status will heighten schools' accountability and, simultaneously, encourage them to be both more efficient and effective. While these aims have always been writ-large in ministerial defences of the policy, opting out raises crucial questions about the future governance of state schooling in Britain and the principles by which education provision is distributed.

Our earlier publications have sought, on the one hand, to document the origins and implementation of the GM schools policy [1] and, on the other, to test empirically the claims made by its advocates and critics.[2] On this occasion, we want to identify, and reflect the significance of, two paradoxes of opting out within which we consider GM school headteachers are entangled, and to which we believe they contribute. Discussion of the first paradox focusses on the way GM status, rather than eliminating 'producer interests', creates a new one in the form of headteacher control which assists the policy's implementation and the realisation of other educational reforms. Examination of the second addresses the government's willingness to offer an expensive financial subsidy to GM schools (in other words, 'to throw public money at a problem') when one of its aims is to demonstrate that the administrative and managerial efficiencies which accrue from opting out can improve the quality of education provision in ways that do not entail any increase in public expenditure on schools.[3] We conclude that the government is happy to give preferential financial treatment to GM

schools because it regards opting out as a necessary condition for increasing its control of state education, including the capacity to distribute its opportunities and outcomes in a certain way.

In the course of this analysis, we argue (after Ball, 1992a, and Raab, 1991) that the GM schools policy not only affirms the role of the headteacher as manager, but also, more importantly, confirms her/his status as a crucial broker in the mediation of government education policy. We conclude from this that opting out should be interpreted as an example of the modern central state's capacity, in Kickert's (1991) terms, to "steer [public institutions] at a distance", rather than via intermediate agencies such as elected regional boards or local councils. We argue as well that, while GM schools are 'self-governing' institutions, their autonomy is strictly 'regulated', and to such an extent that their headteachers are under heavy and increasing pressure to do the work of the state. The paper concludes with an exploration of the extent to which the paradoxes of the GM schools policy can be usefully interpreted through a neo-Marxist analysis of the role of the state in education policy-making.

The Sources of our Data

The analysis proceeds by way of a review and interpretation of data obtained from a series of in-depth interviews conducted with 19 headteachers (comprising 17 men and 2 women) of the first group of schools to achieve GM status. While this paper draws on all 19 headteacher interviews, only nine of our respondents are directly quoted in the analysis which follows.[4] Their accounts, however, are typical of the sample as a whole.

In any event, the data elicited from the headteacher interviews do not stand alone. They are complemented in this paper by other material obtained subsequently from a questionnaire survey of 55 LEAs that have one or more GM schools operating within their administrative boundaries and a further set of interviews with parents from 106 households that send children to eight of the GM schools led by our headteacher respondents.

Type of GM school	Operating at 1 September 1990	Headteacher interviews
Comprehensive (mixed)	17 (39%)	7 (37%)
Comprehensive (single-sex)	8 (18%) 57%	4 (21%) 58%
Grammar (mixed)	6 (13%)	3 (16%)
Grammar (single-sex)	13 (30%) 43%	5 (26%) 42%
Totals	44 (100%)	19 (100%)

Table I. The interview sample.

The purpose of the headteacher interviews was to learn something about the background to schools seeking GM status, in particular the role headteachers play in the process. We were concerned to learn too what advantages headteachers felt accrued from their schools having opted out. We also wanted to gauge the impact of the policy on their work, including relations with parents, governors and other members of staff.

As Table I indicates, our interviewees make up an appropriate representative sample inasmuch as they include headteachers of all the different kinds of secondary school found in the GM sector at the beginning of the academic year 1990-91. While the headteachers we interviewed reflect accurately the sort of establishments which first achieved GM status, they clearly are not representative of the GM sector as it is now. At the time of the interviews, there were no headteachers of GM primary schools; today there are nearly one hundred. More critically, the actual number of schools that make up the sector has grown tenfold since we conducted the interviews. Despite these changes in the size and composition of the GM sector, the accounts obtained from our respondents have a special salience. For it is the widely and flatteringly reported experiences of many of them (see, for instance, Chubb & Moe 1992a,b) which have given the policy its public face and, in turn, legitimised a particular view of its merits.

It is also important to stress that some of the schools which feature strongly in government promotional literature about GM status (see DES, 1991, for example) are not only ones within which we conducted headteacher interviews, but also institutions whose headteachers have been in the vanguard of those assisting the policy's development. Three of our respondents, for example, are founder members of the Standing Advisory Committee for Grant-maintained Schools (SAC) which is "the formal channel of communication for GM schools, the Department for Education and Ministers" (GM Schools Centre, 1992).[5] These headteachers therefore act as spokespersons for the GM sector. Thus, while we do not want to elevate any of them to the status of policy-maker, we do want to say many are significant government 'sounding boards' who help to shape the conditions within which policy decisions are ultimately made. Thus interpreted, their perceptions and accounts are crucially important. Moreover, potential incomers to the GM schools sector often seek the advice of some of our respondents before proceeding with their own bids to opt out. Accordingly, many of the headteachers in our sample face two ways; that is, they look up to and co-operate with Ministers, and down at and assist prospective recruits to the GM sector. In this way they help to produce and reproduce the policy.

We now consider the two paradoxes of GM status which were identified earlier, beginning with that of 'producer interest', headteacher control and parent and governor empowerment.

Empowerment, 'Regulated Autonomy' and GM Schools

One of the more ironic aspects of opting out is the extent to which it is pursued initially for negative rather than positive reasons. That is to say, in the early stages of the process of seeking GM status, 'becoming grant-maintained' is frequently interpreted as a way of avoiding something considered threatening, such as an LEA proposal to close or reorganise a school, rather than a means of embracing something new, such as providing an opportunity to manage a school in a different and innovative way (Rogers, 1992, pp. 63-64). Many of the accounts offered by our sample of 19 GM headteachers bear out this point (see Table II). Seven of their schools were subject to a Section 12 or 13 proposal, that is, specific petitions by their LEAs to the Education Secretary to obtain approval to either close or redesignate them. Their wish to become GM was prompted by an uncomplicated desire to avoid closure or reorganisation.

Reason	Number
To challenge an existing Section 12 or 13 proposal	7
To frustrate discussion of a reorganisation plan	6
To obtain additional income	4
To manage their affairs independently of the LEA	2

Table II. Chief reason cited for schools seeking GM status.

Moreover, the remaining 12 schools also include six institutions that wanted, in four cases, to thwart an LEA reorganisation plan under early discussion and, in two others, to forestall one emerging. In other words, in these cases, the mere discussion of possible closure or change of character had been enough to trigger the GM process. Consider, for example, the following extracts from interviews with different headteachers:

The school had been the subject of several previous reorganisation schemes, none of which had come to anything. Although we were not, at the time of the ballot, part of a new reorganisation plan, least of all a Section 12 or 13 proposal, we felt threatened ... and so we thought of opting out ...
(Headteacher T1)

I can't prove it, but I would say that the LEA wanted to get rid of this school and that's why we wanted to go GM ... I mean they could have chosen other schools ... but they didn't. (Headteacher A4)

The second of these two comments not only illustrates the issue under discussion, it also points up the manner in which some GM school headteachers easily find themselves ensnared by those elements of the policy's individualist rhetoric which blend together the principles of

self-management with institutional self-interest. Specifically, by articulating personal wants and establishment near-sightedness with the philosophy and practice of site-based decision-making, opting out helps to consolidate an attitude of mind among some heads who tend towards seeing other schools, rather than their own, as always being more suitable cases for closure or change of status.

This variant of individualism is also reflected in the accounts offered by four of the six headteachers in our sample, to whom reference has not yet been made. None of the schools they manage was suffering from any form of 'planning blight'. Their long-term futures were assured. The wish to opt out was prompted instead by the feeling that they were being unfairly treated by their LEAs, particularly with regard to capital allocations, and that GM status would be to their financial advantage. The following comment of one of these headteachers could have been made by any of them:

I looked at the [Education Reform] Act and saw the possibilities GM status offered. I looked at what we had and what we could get ... From where else could we have got a grant for a quarter of a million? ... We have been pushing the LEA for years for that kind of money to improve this school ...
(Headteacher H4)

In considering his own school's financial needs in this way, this headteacher, like others in our sample, is "drawn unwittingly into offering tacit support to that aspect of opting out which is designed to reorientate producers from a service ethic towards a sense of competitive self-interest" (Ball, 1992b, p. 14). Thus, having helped to take their schools out of LEA control, headteachers' sense of being part of a larger public service appears to undergo a major shift in emphasis. What chiefly concerns most of them is to obtain the best possible deal for their own institutions irrespective of its consequences for the effective administration of the local education services they have left behind. This attitude contrasts very much with that found in a recent report of the perceptions of 32 headteachers from eight LEAs whose schools had resolved not to consider opting out. Specifically, Brown & Baker (1992) reveal that most of the heads in their sample think that GM status runs against the 'spirit of co-operation', and that their LEAs are doing the best they can given the financial limitations and other constraints within which they have to operate.

By contrast, GM school heads express extremely negative views about the practices of their former LEAs. Indeed, as was evident by the positive reception many gave to a former DES Minister of State's speech at the 1992 GM Schools Annual Conference, opted-out heads are happy to take on board the Government's 'discourses of derision' (Ball, 1990, p. 22) which include making extravagant attacks on the policies, motives and expenditure priorities of LEAs.[6] Of course, such attacks are not particular to the headteachers of GM schools. A lot of headteachers who run LEA-maintained schools presumably draw periodic attention to their

employers' incompetence and parsimony. But what we detect is something qualitatively different in the discourses of some of the GM headteachers we interviewed which amounts to a greater capacity, not only to use the rhetoric of looking chiefly to one's own institutional needs, but to make a virtue of this position. Consider the following extract:

The capital formula allocation used to go straight into the LEA's coffers, and they would probably have said somebody else's need is greater than ours. Maybe they're right. But it is, after all, only a relatively small amount of money which I have been able to do a lot with ... (Headteacher N9)

This extract illustrates neatly a contradiction that many GM headteachers struggle with, but which the GM policy helps to sanitise on their behalf. On the one hand, the respondent is able to acknowledge that other schools might have needs greater than his own; but, on the other hand, the policy of opting out provides a cover for him to be sanguine about depriving them of resources in order to make use of them in his own institution.

The Role of the Head in Seeking GM Status

Whatever the initial motivation to become GM, a significant number of the headteachers in our sample took the main part initially in pursuing the possibility of opting out (see Table III). Although large numbers of parents participate enthusiastically in ballots to determine whether schools can make applications to the Secretary of State to opt out, it appears their role in the whole process is largely a passive one by comparison with that played by headteachers. Rogers (1992, p. 133) goes further, claiming that in some cases parents are used as mere "ballot fodder". While our data confirm this, they also indicate that heads are often very much to the fore in initial discussions about GM status. If we exclude the three headteachers in our sample who took up their posts either shortly before or immediately after their schools became GM, the greater number of the rest ($N = 9/16$) acted as catalytic agents in the opting out process. That is to say, they first sought out information about the policy, subsequently persuaded governors of the merits of GM status, and then lobbied resolutely for a 'yes' vote during the run-up to the parental ballot. The following comments are typical of the ones we derived from these headteachers, all of whom declared their support for the policy at a very early stage:

I played a key role ... I felt very definitely that GM status would provide the opportunity to continue doing what we wanted to do as a grammar school, and the chair of governors felt the same. So, it would be fair to say that we spearheaded the attack. We conducted the public meetings and we did most of the public speaking. (Headteacher M5)

It all began with a report from me to the governors in which I summarised the main provisions of the Reform Act including GM status ... I laid before them

what I felt were the advantages and disadvantages of opting out ... They saw that I had very positive feelings towards it ... that it was a road I was prepared to tread and take responsibility for. (Headteacher L6-7)

Group	Number
Headteacher in association with the chair of governors	9
Parent action groups	3
Groups of governors with only the tacit support of the head	7

Table III. Prime movers in the opting out process ($N = 19$).

Parent action groups in support of, and taking the chief responsibility for initiating, the opting-out process were in evidence in only three of the schools where we conducted headteachers interviews. More commonly, groups of governors worked alongside headteachers, a few of whom were agnostic about the merits of opting out. Their role in this connection was mentioned by seven of the headteachers we interviewed, as, for example, in the following typical extract:

The prime movers, initially, were one or two governors ... I sat on the fence and it was damned painful ... I strove to be neutral and accurate ... (Headteacher Q5).

The 'fence-sitters' excepted, the chief impression gained is that many headteachers are very happy to play a leading role in pursuing the GM option on behalf of their schools. Moreover, among this group are a few who do not, in any event, view the GM schools policy as being one that should concern parents to any great degree. On the contrary, the policy, as they see it, is about 'better' management, not enhanced opportunities for parental involvement, least of all greater parental control:

GM is a management tool. As far as parents are concerned, it doesn't and shouldn't affect them ... (Headteacher A24)

GM is really about management and finance and, as far as possible, I would rather parents were not troubled too much by either ... (Headteacher Q4)

These last observations complement other data obtained from interviews we conducted with over 100 parents whose children attend GM schools managed by eight of the headteachers included in our sample. While the overwhelming majority of these parents spoke favourably of their children's schools, often claiming they were the "best around", less than one-third (i.e. 29%) reported a greater sense of control. In fact, only a minority (i.e. 35%) claimed they were even familiar with the names and identities of *any* of the governors of their children's schools, a proportion slightly *less* than we found

in our interviews with parents of neighbouring LEA-maintained secondary schools.

Largely unknown outside their own immediate circles, governors of GM schools also occupy an ambiguous position as managers. While their legal and formal duties are clearly spelled out both in law and government regulation, their managerial responsibilities *vis à vis* the headteacher are less explicitly formulated. Our data in fact offer hints that some of our headteacher respondents were struggling to come to grips with the new form of governor accountability which their school's change in status had brought about.[7] For example:

I think there is a distinction between governing and managing, and managing is a pretty difficult job ... Within the committees of the governing body things began to be polarised. I felt that they were trying to do my job ...
(Headteacher A15)

Certain decisions are clearly the responsibility of the whole governing body. It can't delegate decisions relating to either the curriculum or finance. But in practice that can be ponderous, and we've got to find a way of getting over it ... (Headteacher N25)

"To find a way of getting over it" seems to amount to the need to look for ways in which the essential tasks of school management can be facilitated without undue governor involvement. Although there is no suggestion that this should entail a diminishment in headteacher accountability, there is an intimation that the role of governors in school decision-making should be clarified and ultimately restricted. To that extent, and conjoined with the ambivalence shown towards greater parental involvement reflected in earlier extracts, what we have here are indications that, at the point of implementation, the GM schools policy does not carry with it any overriding commitment to either greater openness or new forms of democratic control of education. We go further to suggest that, rather than provide a new parents' or governors' charter, GM status encourages a new kind of 'producer interest' in the form of headteacher control which the present government is pleased to endorse because, as we shall argue shortly, it helps to implement the policy and other associated educational reforms.

This new form of headteacher control, however, is likely to be experienced differently by the teaching staff of different GM schools. Much will depend on the extent to which teachers feel they are implicated in policy-making decisions and the concerns of management. But, as with the involvement of parents and governors, nothing necessarily follows for teachers' sense of professional empowerment once GM status is achieved. If anything, as Thompson's (1992) survey of the experience of 'going grant-maintained' indicates, the existing management style of headteachers is as likely to be consolidated as radically altered once their schools have opted out. Thus headteachers who previously eschewed delegation, and who ordinarily prefer to make the important decisions without consultation, are

unlikely to feel compelled to operate in more collegial ways once their schools become GM. In fact, GM status may strengthen rather than dilute their existing executive control:

My power has considerably increased and improved. I say 'improved'; my colleagues might say 'worsened'! (Headteacher A9).

Either way, running a GM school can result in an increase in the distance of some headteachers from the mainstream concerns of classroom teachers. This form of isolation, which is partly reflected also in the early reported experience of headteachers of LEA-LMS schools (see Arnott et al, 1992, and Bowe & Ball, 1992, pp. 147-148, for example), is very evident in our data. Some respondents, for example, find the burden of their managerial and administrative work so great that they feel compelled to give up classroom teaching:

My job has changed enormously ... I'm not teaching this year for the first time ... I'm glad I made that decision, though. Something would have suffered if I hadn't, either the quality of my teaching or something else ... (Headteacher G9)

The decision of some headteachers to remove themselves from the timetable, of course, carries with it the risk that they may become cut off from the very activity with which most staff are routinely concerned and partly in terms of which their legitimacy as the school's 'leading professional' is measured. It also increases the likelihood of creating in schools a sharper division of labour than has existed hitherto between those who chiefly manage (i.e. engage mainly in handling personnel matters, financial planning, income generation and marketing) and those who mostly teach. Ball (1992a, pp. 8-10) argues that this new form of boundary maintenance and intensification assists headteachers to regulate better and scrutinise further the working practices of teacher subordinates. He also thinks that it helps generally to obscure potential conflicts between the drive for productivity and the needs of pupils as identified by their teachers, thus constituting "the basis for a classic polarization between the values of professional responsibility and those of efficient management" (Ball, 1992c, p. 15). While our respondents never explicitly acknowledge this distinction, their observations about the changing nature of their work seem to imply it:

The pattern of my working life has changed. It is proving to be quite a problem because of the number of meetings I now have to attend ... I'm far more concerned with financial aspects which have brought me for the first time into the realm of negotiating contracts ... I'm also more involved in personnel work and employee relations such as grievance procedures ... That's all very different from the work I did before ... (Headteacher G13)

I might describe this place as a 'state school', but it's more like a limited company. I have a 'board of directors' and I am a kind of 'managing

director'. I am now less concerned with specific problems and much more involved with financial and personnel management ... (Headteacher C13)

The 'Regulated' Autonomy of GM Schools

But there is a further related aspect to consider which focusses on the relationship which GM schools and their headteachers have with the government and its education policies. Unlike LEA-maintained schools, GM establishments are directly linked to a department of state, the Department of Education (DFE). Thus, in contrast to their counterparts employed in the LEA sector, GM school heads are positioned in such a way that they mediate government policy roughly undiluted:

I am the only professional advisor to the governors on educational matters. Previously, a document would come from the LEA saying we ought to be doing this or that. Now the documentation comes direct to me and I have to make sure we implement it. When I was with the LEA it was very easy to be lazy, though I never was. But some lazy heads were dragged along because the LEA was always there to pick up the pieces and offer security ... There's no more of that. You're on your own ... (Headteacher G23)

In effect, the headteachers of GM schools can be said to be doing the work of the state in so far as they are personal conduits for the literal receipt and 'delivery' of government education policy, rather than persons who act in concert, say, with a supportive LEA and/or colleagues in neighbouring schools, to protect staff, pupils and parents from its alleged worst excesses. As one GM headteacher observed:

My job used to include overseeing the curriculum. Now that function has been taken away from me by the National Curriculum legislation. I'm not overseeing so much as managing an imposed curriculum. That still requires a tremendous amount of work, but it doesn't require an executive function. It's much more managerial and clerical. At the end of the day, all I am doing is making sure the requirements are being met. (Headteacher C12)

The GM schools policy therefore helps to fragment professional solidarities and, consequently, has the potential to sidestep opposition and resistance. Moreover, while GM school headteachers undoubtedly experience a different sense of freedom as a consequence of running 'self-governing' institutions, it is a freedom to deploy additional income largely to expedite the smooth implementation of government policy. GM school headteachers are thus progressively co-opted by the central state and their establishments turned into 'state' schools in a quite genuine sense. The discursive trick played on them entails the proposition that educational reform is being done by their schools when, in reality, it is mostly being done *to* them (Ball, 1992c, p. 22).

The associated rhetorics of institutional autonomy and site-based management play a crucial role in creating the impression that GM status confers greater independence on state schools than that enjoyed by schools which operate under the control of a local authority. The Conservative Party's 1992 General Election (Education) manifesto, for example, refers to GM schools as institutions that have "broken free of the local authority ... to have full control of their own destinies" (Conservative Party, 1992, p. 10). In reality, the autonomy of GM schools (as of LEA establishments) is enormously constrained. The government does not extend to either kind of school decisions about their ultimate goals, who they can admit, what they can teach, and how they want to be governed. This 'regulated autonomy' (Dale, 1989a, p. 39) conveniently helps the government to 'steer' state schools 'at a distance' (Kickert, 1991), and in directions of its choosing. These directions include not only mainstream policies such as those affecting the National Curriculum, pupil assessment and teacher appraisal, but also 'pet' initiatives like the enhancement of technological education in schools, for which the GM sector is in receipt of special extra funding [8], and the diversification of school provision along 'magnet' lines through DFE approval of the right of GM schools to select on aptitude a minority of their pupils to study certain specialist subjects (Blackburne, 1992). 'Steering at a distance' has the additional advantage for the government of enabling it to avoid responsibility for anything that goes wrong as these policies are implemented while taking most of the credit when they 'succeed'.

'Throwing Money' at GM Schools: a worthwhile investment?

The headteachers of GM schools, however, appear not to have any great sense of being central to the government's broad strategy for reforming education. If they do have such feelings, they are mostly obscured by the realisation that opting out has secured for them considerable financial advantage. Certainly this is the benefit of opting out to which all of them give chief priority (see Table IV).

Named advantage	Number of mentions
Additional income	19
Increased freedom to deploy income	19
Increased capacity to make decisions	5
Independence from LEA control/policies	3
Increased job satisfaction	2
Greater sense of mission	1

Table IV. Advantages in opting out (number of correspondents = 19).

The following extract is typical of the sort of claims made on behalf of opting out by our respondents:

There are a great many benefits. For a start we have more money as well as the freedom to actually spend it in the way we see fit ... You can get on with things. Decisions about maintenance can be instant. I don't have to wait for the roof to fall in ... (Headteacher K6)

With additional funding, comes more staff, better pay, improved levels of resourcing and higher standards of decor:

... the total teaching staff has risen by three full-time equivalents ... We have twice as many modern language assistants; twice as much peripatetic music ... We have introduced a teachers' support service ... We have increased the number of responsibility allowances by a third ... We have introduced bonus payments ... At least 50 per cent of the staff are financially quite considerably better off We spend twice as much on books and equipment than we used to ... If you look around, you'll find areas of the school that have got paint on them for the first time in years. If you ... talk to staff, they'll say they are better paid, work in a much more attractive environment and that their jobs are easier ... (Headteacher C8) [9]

The implications of extra income, however, are never discussed in ways that articulate with specific projects to increase educational opportunity and improve levels of pupil achievement, though both are assumed to follow naturally from the preferential financial treatment associated with GM status.[10] Thus, while the headteachers we interviewed were able to repeat the government's egalitarian claims for the National Curriculum policy, they were not able to provide evidence that their schools' new status had given or would give rise to significant curriculum innovation. On the contrary, in the course of our visits to the schools they run, we were often struck by their ordinariness and reinvigorated traditionalism, and not just of the eight grammars within which we interviewed, which one might expect, but of many of the comprehensives as well. Several had strengthened their dress codes and reintroduced school uniform; others since incorporation were giving increased emphasis to customary standards of pupil behaviour, including ways of approaching and addressing teachers; while at least one had banned the use of 'biros' in favour of fountain pens. No doubt this government would applaud such moves, though it might be less pleased by the schools' insistence that extra public money is the key to meeting their educational targets if it were not for the fact that the latter coincide with its own implicit views about quality schooling. To that extent, the government could be said to be happy to invest heavily in GM schools because, unlike LEA-maintained institutions, they work directly to its agenda and echo its priorities.

Summary

The opting out process is often initiated by headteachers anxious about the long-term security of their institutions, rather than by groups of parents or

governors which have an increased sense of their own empowerment as 'consumers' of education. As a result, the GM schools policy in practice is sometimes more of a headteachers', than a parents' or governors', charter. Certainly, there are few signs that it increases either group's democratic control of schools. Indeed, once parents have taken part in the ballot, and approval for GM status is forthcoming, their involvement in their children's schools frequently exhibits no remarkable difference of emphasis from what they were used to previously. On the contrary, in some cases, headteachers of GM schools find they are able to exercise greater executive control without an equivalent increase in their sense of liability to either parents or governors. To that extent, the GM schools policy is capable of consolidating rather than undermining a specific 'producer' self-interest, although one that helps, rather than hinders, the implementation of the government's education reforms. The policy's heavy stress on the merits of *self-governance* encourages the headteachers of opted-out schools to celebrate a form of educational individualism. In practice, however, GM heads have limited room for manoeuvre because their activities are severely constrained by the central state, a chief concern of which is to affirm their role as key actors in the process of restructuring educational provision.

Financial advantage, rather than specifically managerial or educational considerations, weigh most heavily on headteachers' judgements of the merits of GM status. Headteachers, however, are rarely able to conceptualise more than a crude cause and effect relationship between extra funding, the quality of pupil learning and the raising of educational standards. At the point of implementation, the GM schools policy confirms, rather than challenges, the assumption that extra resources are a necessary condition for school improvement, but in a way that articulates with traditional conceptions of schooling which mimic the government's implicit view of what counts as a 'good' education.

'Going Behind' and Exploiting Opting Out

We have argued that the headteachers of GM schools play a crucial role in helping the government to implement, not only its policy for opting out, but other educational reforms that address the work of teachers and schools. We have indicated too that, while GM heads are key actors in this wider drama, they are insulated from its full implications through their enthusiastic endorsement and often uncritical embracement of the values and routines of site-based management. By thinking and acting in this way, some of them even get close to conflating educational principle with management technique.

However, in saying this we do not want to suggest that GM school heads should be viewed as straightforward casualties of Government manipulation. To suggest this would be to regard them as mere cultural dopes and to derogate their capacity to 'get behind' and exploit opting out

for their own ends. We prefer to argue along lines which emphasise the manner in which opting out both constrains *and* enables GM headteachers and their schools; that is to say, we want to propose that heads and schools are the policy's beneficiaries as well as its victims. While their autonomy is severely regulated, heads still retain a degree of freedom to interpret the implications of opting out in ways which suit their own estimates of the needs of their schools. Thus, tight control of what they can do fails to remove entirely the discretion to act in their own self-interests. On the contrary, as Giddens (1979, p. 147) forcibly reminds us, "the more tightly knit and inflexible [are] the formal relations of authority ... the more the possible openings for circumventing them ...".

In the case of opting out, most GM heads successfully exploit the policy's financial arrangements to secure funding for capital projects which, in earlier times, they could never have looked forward to receiving from their LEAs. Some even use the policy to protect their schools' non-selective status against an LEA-inspired threat to make them more academically selective (see Deem & Davies, 1991, for example). As a career shift, which presently implicates only a very small minority of headteachers, running a GM school may even articulate with a specific personality type and career biography. Thought of in this way, opting out could be as much a route taken by some heads to enhance their own job satisfaction and professional development as a means to preserve a school under threat of closure or reorganisation.

However, this capacity 'to go behind' the policy by no means implies that GM heads "knowledgeably penetrate" (Giddens, 1979, pp. 147-148) the official view of its significance. Certainly they do not 'distance' themselves from the tasks entailed in opting out. Nor do many of them acknowledge fully the 'regulated' nature of their autonomy from external bureaucratic control. Accordingly, their capacity to exert power over those individuals within the government and the DFE responsible for opting out is a very minimal one. Indeed, by exploiting the policy in certain ways, they more often than not help to reproduce it. This is well illustrated by the benefit they most often refer to when talking about the advantages of GM status. For the consequence of their much publicised successful exploitation of the arrangements for funding GM schools is to encourage other establishments to consider opting out in the hope that they too might accrue similar amounts of additional income.

GM Schools Policy and the 'Bigger Picture'

But why should the British central state be so anxious to constrain the activities of GM schools, while at the same time encourage them to compete with and against one another and other schools in the public and private sectors? Is there a "bigger picture" (Ozga, 1990) involving, say, the theorisation of the role of the state in education to which analyses like ours should be linked?

An interpretation of opting out from within a loosely defined neo-Marxist perspective would suggest there is. Such a perspective might want to say that the heads' desire to protect their institutions from closure or change of character, to improve their schools' positions financially, and to organise and manage them as self-governing establishments converge with the central state's concern to enlist all state apparatuses, of which schools are but one, in support of its concern to secure the optimum conditions for the existence, continuation and expansion of the capitalist mode of reproduction. Such a convergence would be argued for, as likely as not, in one or more of three ways in particular.

Firstly, the GM schools policy performs an ideological service to the capital accumulation process by helping to legitimate the leitmotif of capitalist economics which says that collective goods flow from allowing individuals freely to pursue their private ends. This individualist emphasis is manifest in government thinking about the role of the market in school provision and its capacity to increase parental choice and raise educational standards. A neo-Marxist position, however, would argue that local education markets cannot raise standards across the board because their actual operation reinforces differential educational opportunity and enhances structural inequalities, with working class families and their schools mostly coming off worst. While education markets are formally neutral, they are always substantively interested (Ranson, 1990, p. 15). As Ball (1992b, pp. 10, 16) states:

[T]he operation and effects of an education market benefit certain class groups and fractions to the detriment and disadvantage of others ... [The market] presumes certain skills, competences and material possibilities (access to time, transport, childcare facilities, etc.) which are unevenly distributed across the population.

On this understanding, education markets reproduce the very inequalities that consumers bring to them and, in doing so, are subtle mechanisms of social selection.

Secondly, by acting as personal conduits for government education policy, particularly reforms that place limits on what can be taught, it could be said that the headteachers of GM schools help the state to protect the market from social dislocation and unrest. Through the prominence opting out gives to the practices of self-governance, which stress management technique rather than educational principle, the policy is able to bypass professional concerns about the imposition of a prescribed National Curriculum, key elements of which encourage forms of economic awareness and citizenship which link sympathetically with some of the organising principles of capitalism. In other words, tight central control of subject matter favourable to the capitalist mode of production and consumption is obscured by a plethora of rhetoric about the merits of decentralised forms of educational management. At the same time that GM school heads enthuse

about their new freedoms, they fail to recognise that parts of their significance resides in the way they facilitate their increased incorporation into the state. Moreover, by urging the headteachers of GM schools to think of themselves as 'managers', rather than leading pedagogues, the central state is able to 'divide and rule' the teaching workforce and thus frustrate the emergence of new forms of teacher militancy.

Thirdly, by diminishing the powers and duties of LEAs, and thus facilitating the removal of an intermediate layer between the central state and the citizen, the GM schools policy could be interpreted as one that consolidates the power of the government to act on behalf of the market and thus the interests of capital. At first reading, that might seem a contradiction in terms. The point is that a small, strong state is one more likely successfully to "defend and legitimate the market that funds it, and channel and control the individualism it releases" (Dale, 1989c, p. 10).

Clearly this kind of neo-Marxist interpretation of opting out is unlikely to command much support among policy analysts who operate within a mainstream pluralist approach to the explanation of education, policy and the state. Moreover, we suspect that many students of education management would say it has no relevance at all to their more specific micro-concerns which tend to underplay analyses of policy in favour of prescriptive accounts of its implementation based on close observation of particular cases. Even so, we think there is merit in the neo-Marxist position, providing it is seen for what it is, rather than for what it is not. Two points, by way of qualification, will make clear what we mean.

First, despite superficial appearances, the neo-Marxist case we have outlined is not meant to grant privileged status to one particular form of explanation of the significance of opting out. Certainly it does not entail a full-blooded monocausal economic explanation of the GM schools policy. For while it might legitimately be argued that some of the features of opting out both resonate with aspects of the capitalist mode of production, and have the potential to help meet some of the identified needs of capital, it is quite another matter to seek to establish a functional or determining link between opting out and the reproduction of capitalist relations. The neo-Marxist interpretation we have outlined assumes neither. Rather (after Dale, 1989b, pp. 46-47), it would want to say that specific aspects of opting out (e.g. to constrain seriously GM schools' capacity to be innovative in certain ways) are capable of *excluding* elements considered to be potentially threatening to capitalism.

Second, even if it could be shown that a reform like opting out is designed to meet a particular need of capital, the neo-Marxist case we have discussed does not assume that it is capable of being implemented in the way its advocates intend. On the contrary, as we have stressed elsewhere in this paper, the GM schools policy has wrought a number of paradoxical effects. It has also given rise to some unintended and, from the point of view of its supporters, unwanted consequences. In the five years that have elapsed since

it was first introduced, not only has a relatively small proportion of secondary schools (just over 10%) been approved as GM institutions, but (according to Brown & Baker, 1992) large segments within the bulk that remain in council control indicate they are happy with the quality of service offered by their LEAs and hostile to the ideological impetus behind opting out. Parents are not universally in favour of the policy either. In well over 100 cases, large majorities of parents have declined to support the initiative by voting 'No' in parental ballots. A number of LEAs (e.g. Warwickshire, Lincolnshire, Shropshire, Gloucestershire, Northants) have also developed ways of working with schools that have opted out of their control which may allow for a degree of influence over their affairs. In addition, Conservative-controlled LEAs, to which the policy was not seen as very relevant by its originators, have been the ones worst hit by opting out, and often against the wishes of council leaders (Young, 1992).

Opting out, then, may well resonate with aspects of the needs of capital, but this is a long way from saying that it actually meets them, or is designed with them specifically in mind. Indeed, one would expect a government working exclusively on behalf of the interests of capital to come up with an educational reform to restructure the nation's schools which had fewer ambiguous outcomes than those which have so far been encouraged by opting out. For as Giddens (1984, p. 279) observes: "If education were deliberately organised by powerful decision-makers in order to perpetuate the class system, the process concerned would be substantially different".

This cautionary observation alone ought to be sufficient to deter anyone from making or accepting a strongly formulated economic determinist view of the role of the GM schools policy. But that does not mean we should eschew altogether the neo-Marxist perspective on opting out and thus deny ourselves the opportunity of finding a way of making sense of Ozga's "bigger picture". Rather, it highlights the importance of engaging in further empirical work, alongside comparative and theoretical analyses, that both flesh out its resonance with the needs of capital and attend to those aspects of its development that may be dysfunctional to, or dislocated from, capitalist economic necessity. The policy's paradoxes and unintended effects are not, then, just aspects of its enduringly controversial nature, they are also what make it a potentially important case study of the complexities surrounding the implementation of public policy in a modern, multi-faceted and dynamic capitalist state.

Acknowledgements

Barry Troyna, Department of Education, University of Warwick, read and commented on a number of earlier versions of this paper. We are grateful for his time and attention, including a number of suggestions for improving the presentation of our argument. The research upon which this paper is based

was supported by a grant from the Economic and Social Research Council (Award No. R000231899).

Correspondence

David Halpin, Department of Education, University of Warwick, Westwood, Coventry CV4 7AL, United Kingdom.

Notes

- [1] See Halpin & Fitz (1990), Fitz & Halpin (1991) and Fitz et al (1993b,c).
- [2] See Halpin et al (1991a,b, 1993), Power et al (1993) and Fitz et al (1993a).
- [3] The British government's November 1992 Autumn Financial Statement indicated that, of the £1.8 billion it expected to devote to school capital expenditure in the next three years, £501 million (27%) will be directed to the GM schools sector. This proposal demonstrates clearly the government's resolve to continue to give preferential financial treatment to schools that opt out, and at the expense of those that choose to remain under LEA control. For a study of the earlier reported financial advantages of opting out, see Bush & Coleman (1992).
- [4] In the interests of anonymity, the letters A-T are used instead of the real names of our headteacher respondents. Headteacher G is the only woman respondent we quote. The number after each letter (e.g. A24) refers to the page in the respondent's transcript from which we derive the quotation.
- [5] The Grant-maintained Schools Centre services the Standing Advisory Committee, the activities of which are currently supported by an annual government grant. The esteem with which the early GM school headteachers are held by the government can be gauged, not just by the frequent number of occasions some of them have had direct access to Ministers, but by the fact that many of them were invited to a special GM schools reception hosted by the Prime Minister, John Major, at Downing Street in May 1992. Also, one of them, in his capacity as a GM schools advocate, has had lunch with the Queen. Several others have attended Buckingham Palace garden parties, while another has recently been awarded the OBE for services to education.
- [6] Field Notes, GM Schools Annual Conference, London, 11 April 1992.
- [7] This was very apparent in the dispute that arose early in 1992 between the headteacher and chair of governors of Stratford GM School in the London Borough of Newham.
- [8] The Technology Schools Initiative announced in December 1991 by the former Minister of State for Education, Tim Eggar, singles out GM schools for special treatment.
- [9] Similar accounts are provided by the Grant-maintained Schools Centre in their 1991 and 1992 Annual Reports.
- [10] On this point, little can be gauged from the conclusion drawn by the Senior Chief Inspector of Schools in his 1990-91 annual report that standards of work in GM schools appear "rather higher than those in the maintained sector as a whole" (DES, 1992). Given that the GM schools sector at the time of his report was, and remains, disproportionately made up of schools with academically selective admissions policies (see chapter 2 of Fitz et al, 1993b), it would be surprising if standards were not better.

References

- Arnot, M., Bullock, A. & Thomas, H. (1992) Consequences of local management: an assessment by headteachers, paper presented to the Eighth Education Reform Act Research Network Seminar, University of Warwick, February.

- Ball, S.J. (1990) *Politics and Policy Making in Education*. London: Routledge.
- Ball, S.J. (1992a) Changing management and the management of change: educational reform and school processes, paper presented at the Annual Conference of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, April.
- Ball, S.J. (1992b) Schooling, enterprise and the market, paper presented at the Annual Conference of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, April.
- Ball, S.J. (1992c) The worst of three possible worlds: policy, power relations and teachers' work, keynote address to the British Educational Management and Administration Society's Research Conference, University of Nottingham, April.
- Blackburne, L. (1992) Selection ruling opens back door, *The Times Educational Supplement*, 6 November, p. 3.
- Bowe, R. & Ball, S.J. (1992) *Reforming Education and Changing Schools: case studies in policy sociology*. London: Routledge.
- Brown, S. & Baker, L. (1992) *About Change: schools' and LEAs' perspectives on LEA reorganization*. Windsor: NFER.
- Bush, T. & Coleman, M. (1992) *The Financial Implications of Mass Opting Out*. Northampton: Educational Management Development Unit, University of Leicester.
- Caldwell, B. (1990) School-based decision-making and management: international developments, in J. Chapman (Ed.) *School-based Decision-making and Management*. Basingstoke: Falmer.
- Chubb, J.E. & Moe, T.M. (1992a) How to get the best from Britain's schools, *The Sunday Times Magazine*, 9 February, pp. 18-36.
- Chubb, J.E. & Moe, T.M. (1992b) *A Lesson in School Reform from Great Britain*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institute.
- Conservative Party (1992) *Better Schools, Better Standards*. London: Conservative and Unionist Central Office.
- Dale, R. (1989a) Education and the capitalist state: contributions and contradictions, in R. Dale (Ed.) *The State and Education Policy*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Dale, R. (1989b) Implications for education, in R. Dale (Ed.) *The State and Education Policy*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Dale, R. (1989c) The Thatcherite project in education: the case of the City Technology Colleges, *Critical Social Policy*, 9(3), pp. 4-14.
- Deem, R. & Davies, M. (1991) Opting out of local authority control: using the Education Reform Act to defend the comprehensive ideal, *International Studies in Sociology of Education* 1, pp. 153-172.
- Department of Education and Science (1991) *Grant-maintained Schools: experiences during the first year*. London: DES.
- Department of Education and Science (1992) *Education in England 1990-91: the annual report of HM inspector of schools*. London: HMSO.
- Fitz, J. & Halpin, D. (1991) From a sketchy policy to a workable scheme: grant-maintained schools and the Department of Education & Science, *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 1, pp. 129-152.
- Fitz, J., Power, S. & Halpin, D. (1993a) Opting into grant-maintained status: a study of policy-making in education, *Policy Studies*, 14, pp. 4-20.
- Fitz, J., Halpin, D. & Power, S. (1992b) *Grant Maintained Schools: education in the market place*. London: Kogan Page.
- Fitz, J., Halpin, D. & Power, S. (1993c) Implementation research and education policy: the case of GM schools, paper presented to the New Directions in Education Policy Sociology Conference, Southampton, 30-31 March.
- Giddens, A. (1979) *Central Problems in Social Theory*. London: Macmillan.

- Giddens, A. (1984) *The Constitution of Society*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Grant-maintained Schools Centre (1991, 1992) *Annual Report*. High Wycombe: Grant-maintained Schools Centre.
- Grant-maintained Schools Centre (1992) *The Standing Advisory Committee for Grant-maintained Schools*. High Wycombe: Grant-maintained Schools Centre.
- Halpin, D. & Fitz, J. (1990) Researching grant-maintained schools, *Journal of Education Policy*, 5, pp. 167-180.
- Halpin, D., Fitz, J. & Power, S (1991a) Local education authorities and the grant-maintained schools policy, *Educational Management and Administration*, 19, pp. 233-242.
- Halpin, D., Power, S. & Fitz, J. (1991b) Grant-maintained schools: making a difference without being different, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 39, pp. 409-424.
- Halpin, D., Fitz, J. & Power, S. (1993) *The Early Impact and Long-term Implications of the Grant-maintained Schools Policy* (Warwick Papers on Education Policy No. 3). Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.
- Kickert, W. (1991) Steering at a distance: a new paradigm of public governance in Dutch higher education, paper for the European Consortium of Political Research, University of Essex, March.
- Ozga, J. (1990) Policy research and policy theory: a comment on Halpin and Fitz, *Journal of Education Policy*, 5, pp. 359-362.
- Power, S., Halpin, D. & Fitz, J. (1993) Parents, pupils and grant-maintained schools, paper presented at the IPPR-Goldsmith's Seminar, Alternative Education Policies, London, 25 March.
- Raab, C. (1991) Education policy and management: contemporary changes in Britain, paper presented to the International Institute of Administrative Sciences, Copenhagen, July.
- Ranson, S. (1990) From 1944 to 1988: education, citizenship and democracy, in M. Flude & M. Hammer (Eds) *The Education Reform Act 1988: its origins and implications*. Basingstoke: Falmer Press.
- Rogers, M. (1992) *Opting Out: choice and the future of schools*. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Thompson, M. (1992) The experience of going grant-maintained: the perceptions of AMMA teacher representatives, *Journal of Teacher Development*, 1, pp. 133-140.
- Young, S. (1992) True blues refuse to toe the line, *Times Educational Supplement*, 6 November, p. 8.