University of Leicester

Thesis

Stratford GM School: A Policy and its Impact

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ABSTRACT

The process of decentralization and moves to greater self-management in schools have been part of an international trend for some years. In England and Wales, the most extreme form of self-management was introduced by the Conservative Government which established grant-maintained schools in the 1988 Education Reform Act. It was, arguably, the most controversial development in education policy in this country.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the GM policy, its implementation and impact on practice, through the study of a single grant-maintained school, its struggle for incorporation and its operation during a turbulent period. The subject of the case study is Stratford School in East London, one of the earliest schools to opt out. The research, which draws upon documentary evidence and interviews with governors, staff and pupils, has five areas of focus: the opting-out process, the role of head and governors, relationships with the local education authority, school improvement and parental involvement - choice and diversity.

In many respects, the Stratford experience supports the outcomes of other research and mirrors what happened in other GM schools. There are findings from this research, however, which run counter to what took place in most GM schools. The story vividly illustrates how a GM school could go wrong and slide out of control. Yet, despite its many difficulties, the school not only survived to prove its opponents wrong, it flourished, gaining public recognition for its progress and the substantial improvement in pupil achievement.

The researcher presents Stratford School as a unique case which throws light on both the GM policy during its ten year life span and the concept of self-management which is still very much on the agenda of both major political parties. It, therefore, is of historical interest and contemporary significance to those interested in self-management in schools.
Acknowledgements

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Chapter One

Background to the research

Introduction

Whatever one’s views of opting out, some schools are certainly better suited to it than others and Stratford looks a bit like the experiment that could blow up the laboratory.

(Rogers, 1990)

The 1998 School Standards and Framework Act brought to an end the ten year experiment with grant-maintained (GM) schools, which was introduced by the Conservative Government. It was, arguably, the most controversial development in education policy in this country and it is now timely to look back at and consider that experiment and its impact.

By the late 1980s, education was catapulted to the top of the political agenda. The country, led by the Conservative Party for nearly a decade, was battling against inflation. There was an acute awareness that Britain needed to be able to compete with the successful economies of the Pacific Rim. The argument seemed to be that if the country was not competing successfully, then the education system must be to blame. Whitty et al. (1998, pp. 17-18) make the point that during the 1970s, media attention had become focused on the supposed failings and ‘excesses’ of state schools and teachers, particularly in inner-city local education authorities (LEAs) controlled by left-wing Labour administrations committed to fostering equal opportunities.

There was a view associated with the Conservative Party that if the system was not delivering, then it must change. If the educationalists were not willing or were unable to bring about the necessary change, then the government must take action. As Bullock and Thomas (1997, p. 52) indicate:

The reforms in England and Wales may be characterised by deprofessionalisation and loss of trust in the profession.

Similarly, local education authorities were being heavily criticised by both the government and schools. Halpin et al. (1993, p. 4) maintained that since 1979, Conservative governments had held
a deficit view of the work of LEAs, particularly those which were Labour-controlled, many of whose schools have been variously described by ministers as inefficient, ineffective and insufficiently accountable.

After the Conservative general election victory of 1979, the Thatcher and Major governments set about trying to break the LEA monopoly of public schooling through the provisions of a series of Education Acts passed in the 1980s and early 1990s.

(Whitty et al., 1998, p. 18)

Moreover, there was a growing belief that the government should dictate what must be taught in our schools. This became evidenced in the Education Acts of 1988 and 1992 which introduced the National Curriculum, complex assessment and reporting procedures and inspection of all state schools. Certainly, as Whitty et al. (1998, op. cit. p. 21) state, it constitutes 'an astonishing degree of state surveillance of the English education system'.

At the same time, there was discussion about creating a new type of enterprising school to spearhead the changes and improve the system through diversity.

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.

(Halpin et al., 1993 op. cit., p. 4)

There was a developing view that decisions are made more effectively by those in schools rather than through the unwieldy bureaucracy of the LEAs. The process of delegating funding to schools for certain areas of expenditure through LMS (local management of schools) had proved successful in pilot areas, such as Cambridgeshire and Solihull, and was being adopted nationally. 'But GM schools took it a giant step further' (Thatcher, 1993, p. 592). Interestingly, while wanting to exert centralised control over the curriculum, at the same time the government was extolling the virtues of self-governing schools offering choice and freedom. As Pierson (1998, p. 131) states:

There was always a conflict between the (decentralising) logic of introducing markets and the (centralising) logic of increasing governmental prescription.

GM headteacher, Brian Sherratt (1994, p. 10) maintained:
The problem is that from the start the Government was never clear on what they wanted and this equivocation might in some part explain the reluctance of schools to take the GM option.

Hence, the Government’s attitude towards grant-maintained schools was seen in an evolving policy through the nineties moving from initial legislation, whereby clearly not all schools could opt-out, to a position where schools were being encouraged to do just that. Increased governor and parent power, resulting from legislation in the 1980s, provided other vital aspects to the educational scene during the GM era.

International perspective

These developments were not occurring in isolation and need to be set in context with what was happening in other countries. As Anderson (1999, p. 201) indicates, the international context of autonomous schools is also relevant and Bottery (1999, p. 299) points out that any discussion about the changing nature of educational management at the end of the twentieth century is incomplete without locating it within a global context. The move to greater school autonomy did not originate in England and Wales. As Whitty et al. (1998) indicate:

The past decade has seen an increasing number of attempts in various parts of the world to restructure and deregulate state schooling. Central to these initiatives are moves to dismantle centralized educational bureaucracies and to create in their place devolved systems of education entailing significant degrees of institutional autonomy and a variety of forms of school-based management and administration. In many cases, these changes have been linked to enhanced parental choice or an increased emphasis on community involvement in schools.

(Whitty et al., 1998, p. 3)

Many countries have experienced a shift in varying degrees along the centralisation-decentralisation continuum referred to by Caldwell and Spinks (1988) with regard to the management of education. Australia, New Zealand, Canada and parts of the USA have seen these changes, as have other European countries, including Sweden, The Netherlands and Belgium.
New Zealand

Novlan (1998) states that educational reform in New Zealand did not happen in isolation:

*It was included as part of an overall restructuring process of the entire social, economic and political system.*

(Novlan, 1998, p. 11)

The Labour government set up 17 task forces based, in Novlan’s opinion, on the need for economic stability and the ideology of the ‘New Right’. One of these task forces was to review Educational Administration. The government accepted most of the recommendations of the resulting Picot report (1988) which advocated radical devolution of power, resources and responsibilities to schools and their communities. Picot concludes this report by stating:

*The time has come for quite radical change, particularly to reduce the number of decision points between the central provision of policy, funding, and service and the education delivered by the schools or institutions.*

(Picot, 1988, p. 36)

Responsibility for curriculum and assessment lies with the centre and the school. The centre is responsible for setting the framework, approving school charters, monitoring performance and providing specialist support services. Trustees at the school level are responsible for performance and establishing the school charter (Bullock and Thomas, 1997 op. cit.). They maintain that the direction of change in New Zealand resembles that which was occurring in England and Wales: movement towards the ‘market’ is indicated by open enrolment and towards ‘command’ by a national curriculum and examinations framework (Bullock and Thomas, 1997, p. 53).

Australia

Devolution has been a feature of Australian government reform since the 1970s, when many powers were delegated to individual states (Whitty et al., 1998, op. cit.). Since the mid 1980s, there has been a new state-initiated wave of decentralizing reforms, albeit developing at different rates within the individual states. Caldwell and Spinks (1988), following their work in Tasmania in the early eighties, became involved in the developments in Victoria, at a time when the most far-reaching powers were being introduced at school level.
Sharpe (1995, p. 12) identifies some of the key characteristics of the Australian system as of June 1994:

- The prime focus for change is in the area of utilities, buildings, flexible staff establishment, local selection of executive and teaching staff, the development and strengthening of school councils and the establishment of school charters.
- Control over curriculum has tended to become more centralised in most systems.

Nevertheless, he maintains that the apparent increase in control by governments, systems and curriculum authorities over policies, culture, outcomes, performance, curriculum design, assessment and reporting, has the power to modify the benefits many schools are sensing from greater freedom in other aspects of management.

**Canada and The United States of America**

In Canada, in a lighthouse scheme in Edmonton, Alberta, the practice was known as school-based budgeting. This evolved into school-site decision-making with the introduction of teacher effectiveness programmes and school-by-school approaches to programme evaluation (Caldwell and Spinks, 1988).

Davies and Anderson (1992) indicate that the situation is much more complex in the USA:

> The separation of powers between the federal government and individual states means that national reorganisation is impossible. Early attempts at greater school-based reforms in several states have had varying degrees of success. Influenced by the reforms in Edmonton, Canada, the 1990s are seeing a second wave of the decentralisation movement in the USA.

(Davies and Anderson, 1992, p. 4)

They note the way in which decentralisation has been linked to the pressures on the education system for reform and restructuring to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and identify Kentucky, Florida and California as examples. Newmann (1993) includes parental choice, greater school autonomy and shared decision-making as among the eleven most popular restructuring reforms. Ogawa and White (1994) outline one account which claims that approximately one third of America's school districts have introduced school self-management and the number of districts which have adopted school based management programmes has mushroomed since 1986 (Ogawa, 1993). One of the first big city school districts to introduce systematic reform of this kind
was Chicago. The US charter school initiative, which enjoys cross-party support and is financially supported by federal grants, is being adopted by an increasing number of states.

Charter schools are given decision-making authority in such areas as the budget, staffing and the curriculum, in exchange for which they are held accountable for agreed standards of performance. The initial granting and renewal of autonomous status is made conditional upon educational professionals successfully meeting previously agreed targets. By 1996, twenty five states had authorized charter school programmes (Whitty et al., 1998, op. cit.).

Sweden

In Sweden, Chapman et al. (1996) maintain that the goal of equality has been fundamental, in this instance, to the maintenance of a highly centralized national system of education.

*In the last decade, however, responding to broader political and economic influences which have been impacting on the entire public sector, the education system has been undergoing a process of decentralization to municipal authorities and schools.*

(Chapman et al., 1996, p. 2)

They identify three stages in the reform efforts to decentralize. From the late 1970s, efforts were made to restructure the local school as a more efficient organization; in 1991, the municipalities were given back many, or most, control measures for their own school system from the state, with an emphasis on evaluation of goals; and since 1991, state and municipal reforms have started trying out competition as a decentralization measure.

Chapman et al. (1996) report that schemes similar to that of LMS in the UK, where the money follows the pupil, are now being introduced. The municipality of Nacka, for instance, allocates 85 per cent of its education budget directly to schools on the basis of pupil numbers.

**Recent educational reforms world-wide: similarities and differences**

The similarities in the themes running through these education reforms on different continents are discussed by some in terms of a global phenomenon, part of a broader process involving economic, political and cultural changes in which national differences are eroded. Policy borrowing would seem to be a factor in this process. Understandably, it must be very tempting for policy makers to look to other countries for solutions to problems at home. Whitty et al. (1998) urge caution in comparing across countries, however, without recognizing the distinctive historical
and cultural dimensions of policies. Indeed, the degree and extent of the devolution downwards vary greatly between and within countries. Lawton (1992, p. 140) developed a three point scale in order to differentiate policies according to the degree of devolution entailed. He found wide variation, with the New Zealand reforms scoring the most points; while measures in Rochester, New York, devolved the least.

We are also urged to consider the differences in the political background of the reforms, even though the reforms in themselves appear similar. While in England and Wales, New Zealand, Sweden and states within Australia and the USA, devolution, school autonomy and choice have been promoted by conservatives, this has not always been the case. Indeed, some of the earliest moves to devolution in Victoria, Australia, in the early 1980s, were discussed in terms of professional and community empowerment, even though more recent policies have been associated with the New Right (Whitty et al, 1998). They argue that, in both Australia and New Zealand, governments of different political persuasion have supported reform; and even in England and Wales, where changes have been brought about by the Conservative New Right, the landslide election of a Labour government, while signalling the end of grant-maintained schools, has kept the key elements of the reforms in place.

Nevertheless, despite the differences and variations, as Fowler (1994, pp. 89-90) comments, 'important variations among institutions and cultures do not erase deeper similarities'.

One such similarity is that while there has been a process of devolution of decision-making and redistribution of functions between centre and periphery, 'the centre maintains overall strategic control through fewer, but more precise, policy levers, contained in overall “mission statements”, the setting of system goals and the operationalization of criteria relating to “output quality”' (Neave, 1988, p. 11).

As Boyd (1993) points out in relation to the USA and UK:

[They are simultaneously] increasing both the degree of centralisation and the degree of decentralisation of school governance. Thus, on both sides of the Atlantic more decision-making authority is being shifted to the school level [School-Based Management and Charter Schools in the US; Local Management of Schools and Opting Out in Britain]...At the same time there are new centralising forces; the National Curriculum in Britain and the Goals 2000 Educate America Act in the US.... (p. 120)
Many countries have seen varying degrees of devolution of power to schools, often not in isolation, but as part of a restructuring process affecting the social, economic and political system. While schools may have been given decision-making powers for institutional finance and administration, they have lost control over the curriculum to the state which has tightened its grip through increased institutional accountability. While this phenomenon of a strengthened state alongside policies of devolution and choice is particularly evident in the UK, similar trends can be identified in many countries. As Caldwell and Hayward (1997, p. 1) write, there has been 'significant decentralisation of responsibility and authority within a centrally-determined framework of goals, policies, priorities, standards and accountabilities'.

In 1992, Davies and Anderson stated that, while these national and international changes reflect pressure to increase both educational and financial decision-making at the school level, nothing was so radical as the grant-maintained movement in the UK.

The national context

Rogers (1992) makes the point that many identify the 1976 speech at Ruskin College by the then Prime Minister, James Callaghan, as the initial catalyst for educational change in England and Wales. He encapsulated the growing concerns about standards in education which found formal expression in a Consultative Paper, Education in Schools. From this point on, education came increasingly to the fore as people of all political and ideological persuasions entered the debate and documents such as the 'Black Papers' were produced, purporting to show a decline in standards. By the latter part of the 1980s, the Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher was ready to push for much bolder, more fundamental reforms. The Conservative Manifesto for the 1987 general election contained proposals for four major reforms, each of which has implications for the management of schools and a shift in the centralisation-decentralisation continuum toward self-management:

- A national core curriculum.
- Control over school budgets to be given to governing bodies and head teachers of all secondary schools and many primary schools within five years.
- Increasing parental choice by fostering diversity and increasing access.
- Allowing state schools to opt out of LEA (local education authority) control, with grants from the national government being made directly to the school.

(Conservative Manifesto, 1987, pp. 18-20)
The result was the landmark Education Reform Act of 1988 which in one stroke imposed a radically new institutional framework on British education (Chubb and Moe, 1992).

**The 1988 Education Reform Act**

The 1988 Education Reform Act, which heralded the introduction of the national curriculum and grant-maintained schools, is probably the most significant piece of educational legislation since the Act of 1944. As Bush et al. (1993, p. 1) state:

*It changed the pattern of relationships within education in a dramatic way, increasing the power of the Secretary of State, reducing the influence of the local education authorities (LEAs) and allocating additional responsibilities to the schools. Probably the most radical element of the Act was the provision for a new category of schools, independent of LEA control, to be known as grant-maintained (GM) schools.*

Maclure (1988, p. 56) points out:

*No provision in the Act aroused stronger feelings than those on grant-maintained schools. The aim was to break the local authorities' monopoly of 'maintained' schooling.*

While the Department for Education and Science (DES) (1988, p. 1) stated:

*The Secretary of State believes that the establishment of grant-maintained schools will prove to be a stimulus for higher standards at all schools.*

Civil servants interviewed by Fitz and Halpin (1991) claim that the policy was devised by politicians and their advisers and then passed to the DES for implementation. The process was described by one of the respondents:

*There are two policy routes essentially. Sometimes, policies are developed in the Department and ministers decide whether they want to run with them, and then ministers themselves have policies. This was a political one.......*  
  
  *(Fitz and Halpin, 1991, p. 134)*

This view is given credence by Sheila Lawlor of the Conservative 'think tank', the Centre for Policy Studies, who set out the political principles underpinning the GM proposal in 1988:
Grant-maintained schools will break the LEA monopoly of state schools. Freed from the frustrations of local authority interference, heads and governors will be able to shape their schools as they see fit.....grant-maintained schools will make for better quality and greater choice within the state system.

(Lawlor, 1988, p. 5)

As Bush et al. (1993) show, the GM proposal aroused fierce opposition from local authorities, professional organizations, church groups and political parties. The National Union of Teachers (NUT) was strongly opposed to the concept:

Proposals to allow schools to opt out of LEA control will not increase choice for the majority of parents and children, but are intended to cater for an articulate, privileged elite.....The process would reduce local democratic accountability.... The proposals would damage the long term rational and cost-effective management of local education services by enabling schools threatened with reorganisation to opt out.

(CLEA, 1987, p. 47)

The National Association of School Masters/Union of Women Teachers (NAS/UWT) expressed concern about fragmentation, selection and the role of lay governors in professional matters (CLEA, 1987), while the National Association of Governors and Managers were concerned:

*It is not clear to whom (GM) governing bodies will be accountable, or by whom they will be appointed.....*

(CLEA, 1987, p. 30)

The context for the emergence of the GM schools policy was political, not simply a straightforward educational one. As Fitz, Halpin and Power indicate (1993, p. 19):

*The government was anxious to remedy alleged deficiencies in the educational service through the establishment of new kinds of schools....education was also the focus of successive attempts by central government to develop policies linking expanded parental choice with the creation of new and highly diversified local education markets.*

Advocates of the GM policy referred to ‘raising standards’ in education and to creating ‘model’ schools as ‘beacons of excellence’, while many opponents like LEAs remained entrenched antagonists, and both questions and concerns were raised which were to be of real significance as time went on.
...the government's support for, and encouragement of, GM status for schools has been full-blooded from start to finish. But, then, so too has the opposition which it has stirred up......the GM schools policy has provoked fierce discussion and aroused strong passions between, and even among, supporters and critics alike.

(Fitz, Halpin and Power, 1993, p. 11)

Neither stance proved useful for GM schools. Expectations were unrealistically high, enemies became intransigent and, as with all new policies/movements, there were unforeseen outcomes and consequences, which inevitably emerged and had to be addressed. This was illustrated in the research conducted by Deem and Davies (1991) and supported by Power, Halpin and Fitz (1996, p. 105):

In some cases the effects would seem to run counter to the intentions of the policy makers.

If this was a political policy handed down to civil servants in the DES for shaping and implementation, one can imagine that their role was to satisfy the differing ambitions of the politicians and advocates of the opted out schools, while ensuring the smooth running of the existing system. Fitz, Halpin and Power (1993) define the outcome:

What emerged was a policy framework which enabled, rather than encouraged, schools to opt out of LEA control.

(Fitz, Halpin and Power (1993, p. 26)

After all, the Secretary of State, Kenneth Baker, claimed during the second reading of the Great Education Reform Bill that the effect of opting out should be broadly neutral for both school and LEA:

[These schools] will be funded at the same level as they would have been had they remained under their local authority. There will be an equality of public resourcing.

(Baker, 1987 in Hansard, 1 December)

This, however, is not what transpired.
An evolving policy

Since the first schools opted out in September 1989, the GM policy has seen many changes as the Conservative leadership advocated its support more forcefully and the flow of schools slowed rather than reached flood proportions. Hence, one witnessed a move away from the minimizing of the differences between GM and LEA maintained schools as funding was found for capital and transitional grants. Other modifications followed regarding change of character allowing schools to become selective and establish sixth forms, admissions policies and balloting arrangements. Fitz, Halpin and Power (1993, op. cit.) demonstrate how the GM policy evolved into the major vehicle for the Conservative government's education policy. Amendments were seen as incentives to boost the numbers of schools seeking GM status, because these were a palpable sign of the government's success, an effective way of reducing LEA power and a means of introducing new reforms, such as specialisation. For these reasons, GM schools became heralded as flagships by advocates, which would 'provide a standard of excellence and will be beacons' (Baker, Parliamentary Debates, 1989), and derided by opponents. It was politically expedient for these schools to succeed. The Grant-Maintained Schools Trust (which became The Grant-Maintained Schools Centre) was established and funded by the government to promote and to advise about the opting out process. The failure of these schools was political embarrassment for the government and political gain for the opposition. Every opportunity was exploited to the full. It was inevitable that their progress or downfall would be a public affair. This was the highly charged and volatile background against which schools opted out.

Now, twelve years later, the self-managing school is an accepted and desirable feature of the educational scene in Britain to the point that none of the major political parties intends to retreat from it. In fact, two of them seem intent on extending the concept. The Conservative Party (1999) made clear its intention in 'The Common Sense Revolution' to 'make every school a Free School' (p. 9) and give heads and governors 'complete responsibility for managing their schools' (p. 9) and 'complete control over their budgets' (p. 10). Since it came to power in 1997, the Labour government has 'given schools much greater control over their spending than ever before', transferring some £1 billion from Local Education Authorities into schools through the Fair Funding reforms (DfEE, 2000) and, in a recent speech at the National Association of Head Teachers' Annual Conference, the Secretary of State, David Blunkett, promised 'more money would be passed directly to schools, so they would be less subject to the whim of local authorities' (Sutcliffe, 2000). This was confirmed in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's announcement on 18 July 2000, which indicated that direct grants of up to £70,000 a year would be made to schools over the next three years (Daily Mail, 19 July, 2000).
The purpose of this research

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the GM movement through the study of a single grant-maintained school, its struggle for incorporation and its operation during a turbulent period. The subject of the case study is Stratford School in East London, one of the earliest schools to opt out. The research, which draws upon documentary evidence and interviews with those working at, or associated with, the school, including governors, staff and pupils, seeks to provide additional insight into the GM policy, its implementation and impact on practice.

Background to the case study

Stratford School is an 11-18, inner London, multi-cultural Comprehensive of over 800 pupils. It first hit the headlines in 1990, during a bitter two year struggle to opt out of the control of the local education authority; a struggle which the London Borough of Newham lost, despite taking its case to the High Court. The school became grant-maintained in April 1991 amid considerable controversy, which had left the school with no management team, only eleven transferring members of the teaching staff, just 190 pupils and a new, inexperienced board of governors. Difficulties within the governing body maintained media interest in the school and created a further two years of turmoil. GCSE results in the Summer of 1993 reflected the upheaval and proved to be amongst the lowest in the country. In November 1993, Stratford found itself in the first cohort of schools to be inspected under the OFSTED Framework (1) and, subsequently, the second secondary school (and first GM school) in the country deemed to be in need of special measures. There followed two intensive, much publicised years of action planning, monitoring and systematic review, at the end of which Her Majesty's Inspectorate declared that the school was no longer in need of special measures i.e. no longer considered to be failing.

Much has been written and said about the success, failure and progress of Stratford by politicians, civil servants, Her Majesty's Inspectorate, OFSTED inspectors, governors, staff and the media. This study attempts to examine what happened at the school as a microcosm of the grant-maintained schools' movement. It looks at the background to and reasons for the opting out and its progress since incorporation in April 1991. Particular emphasis is laid on the role of head and governors, relations with the local education authority, diversity and parental choice, and academic standards and school inspection. While the uniqueness and vulnerability of the school possibly accentuated the difficulties which arose, nevertheless, these same issues had to be faced by other GM schools as well. The implementation and evolving nature of the GM policy are seen through the experience of Stratford School.
Research questions

Bullock and Thomas (1997, p. 1) maintain that Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and decentralised school management have much in common. 'They each contain phenomena - real and imagined - which are new to conventional experience. These phenomena are not always what they appear to be and are sometimes the opposite of their appearance.' This thesis examines the impact of the GM policy on practice, as it follows the events which took place at Stratford, the first GM school in East London, between 1989 and 1997. It focuses on five key areas which have prompted much discussion and controversy:

- the opting out process
- the role of head and governors
- relationships with the LEA and admissions
- raising academic standards
- parental involvement - choice and diversity

Initially, finance was considered as a sixth major area of focus. The complexity of the subject, however, really warrants a thesis in its own right and yet its importance demands inclusion. Consequently, it was decided that the impact of the financial implications of the GM policy could be examined within the other identified areas, particularly in the opting out process and the role of heads and governors. Focusing on the above areas raises a number of questions. It is hoped that in seeking answers to the following research questions, some light may be shed on these real and imagined phenomena.

- What has been the impact of the GM policy and what, if any, are its achievements?
- How has school-based management affected the role of, and the relationship between, heads and governors?
- What has been the nature of the relationship between local education authorities and opted out schools?
- Has the GM movement raised academic standards?
- Have parent power and choice been enhanced by GM schools?

Summary

As Caldwell and Spinks (1998) point out, in 1988 it seemed that the idea of the self-managing school was radical, if not unrealistic, and it was certainly contentious since it was a key feature of
reforms under the 1988 Education Reform Act. Now, twelve years later, the self-managing school is an accepted and widely applauded feature of the educational scene in Britain.

Probably the most controversial aspect of this educational change has been the GM schools policy that legislated for self-governing schools, 'which they were, to the extent that ownership shifted from the authority to the board of governors. In general, however, they may be considered further along the continuum of self-managed schools' (Caldwell and Spinks, 1998, p. 7). Such was the controversy surrounding the policy, that the GM movement has not survived, but the principle of self-management has. Bush et al. (2000) argue that

'It increasingly appears that the return of GM schools to local-authority control by the newly-elected Labour Government was only a temporary set back for self-management.....self-management is very much back on the agenda.'

Anderson (1999, p. 202) suggests that the extreme form of autonomy as perceived in GM schools 'softened' the move to LMS that most other maintained schools experienced at this time:

'Thereby, it may be the case that the GM schools' policy contributed to the success of LMS.'
Chapter Two

Literature review

A casual observer could be forgiven for wondering just who really wanted Stratford School to opt out. (The Times Educational Supplement 3 May 1991)

Rationale

For the purpose of this thesis, the decision was made to focus on literature pertinent to the GM policy and its potential impact on schools. In particular, the review examines the theories of self-management, the case for and against GM schools and literature relevant to the five areas of focus chosen for this study.

The case for self-management

As Caldwell and Spinks (1988) suggest the case for self-management can be presented from several perspectives drawn from fields of inquiry such as economics, politics or organisation theory:

Advocates have traditionally argued on these grounds but, more recently, appeal has been made to findings from research on school effectiveness and to the need for increased professionalism among teachers.

Caldwell and Spinks (1988, P. 5)

What follows is a sample of these perspectives.

Political-economy

While there is a belief that equity or equality is achieved through the allocation of resources to schools which is relatively uniform and centralised, there is also a strong view that centralised budgeting, with generally uniform allocations to schools and minimal opportunity for re-allocation, impairs the achievement of equality and efficiency and, by implication, of choice (Garms et al.,
1978). These writers contend that a centralised budget makes it difficult for schools to match services to student needs, hence equality of opportunity is impaired. For this and additional reasons, efficiency is also impaired:

...... *Centralised budgeting seldom provides incentives for efficiency, frequently fails to foster diversity through which more efficient and effective approaches to teaching and learning may be identified, and invariably excludes key actors such as governing bodies, heads, teachers, parents and students who have perhaps the most powerful motivation to see that resources are used to best advantage.*

(Caldwell and Spinks, 1988, p.6)

School-site management is the answer, according to Garms et al. (1978, op. cit.), with lump-sum budget allocations to schools, a high degree of community involvement in school decision-making, and the fostering of diversity within and among schools to ensure choice.

Davies and Hentschke (1994) maintain that the arguments for increased autonomy in schools are echoes and modifications of similar arguments directed at all but the very smallest organisations in society.

*Get the decisions about how to run the firm down to the people who know best what needs to be done.*

(Davies and Hentschke (1994, p. 96)

It was in 1973 that Strembitsky, the pioneer of school-based management in Edmonton, Canada, used the concept of 'subsidiarity' to describe the underpinnings of the reform he has led over two decades. He advocated that whatever can best be done at the school level should be done at that level, as opposed to having those functions performed from a central location removed from the scene of action.

The political justification for decentralisation is, according to Davies and Hentschke (1994, op. cit.), the argument that the closer government is to 'the people' the more likely it is to be responsive to their demands and interests, while the economic arguments for decentralisation advocate that decentralised units foster necessary competition in sheltered monopolies and are more likely to produce offerings in line with the preferences of consumers. This, it may be argued, leads to increased efficiency and effectiveness. Thomas (1987, pp. 224-234) makes the case that decentralised unit managers are better able to make choices to maximise efficiency because they:
are closer to the clients;
are better able than more remotely sited managers to identify the needs of the clients;
will give primacy to satisfying these needs;
will also know the best i.e. most efficient way of combining available resources to meet as many of these needs as possible
in making decisions on resource combinations, will vary the proportion of different resources as production requirements and relative prices change.

Other advantages attributed to decentralisation include the benefits of increased flexibility of response to changing circumstances, increased effectiveness, greater opportunities for innovation, higher morale, greater worker commitment and greater productivity (Davies and Hentschke, 1994, op. cit.).

In 1994, Barber examined the pressures which broke up the Butler settlement and created the conditions for what he calls 'the market revolution of 1988 to 1994'. While Ranson in the same year, identified three overlapping periods since 1945, the age of professionalism (1945-75), the period of corporatism (1970-81) and finally the period of consumerism (1979- the present), when education moved into the market place. The descriptions of the three ages provide a useful context for the forces shaping the education debate during these periods. Russell (1997, p. 5) suggests that the transition to Ranson's third period of 'consumerism' was signalled by the election in 1979 of a Conservative government with a manifesto declaring its commitment to the rights of the individual, a government led by those who espoused the philosophy that the institution as a 'social market' would more effectively restructure and improve the education system than any application of rational planning principles. The main features of the strategy were centralisation, devolution and marketisation.

Although driven by an ideology of marketisation the changes also evidence a high degree of central control; the government did not rely totally on a consumerist conviction that all that was needed was devolution and a free market for those using the services. Yet the changes were also based on a belief that greater self-government for schools, in financial terms, would secure greater value for money, at a time when it was intended to keep public spending under restraint, and that devolution of powers would secure an improved quality of education that would meet the needs of 'clients'.

(Russell, 1997, p. 6)

There are those who criticise the application of market theory to education. Ball (1992), for example, identifies an unresolved tension in market theory between institutional autonomy,
responsiveness to ‘consumer’ demands and the regulatory role of the state, as indeed did Skidelsky (1994). Just how autonomous can schools be, when subjected to increasing state control over central issues, such as curriculum and assessment, and faced with the need to be responsive to consumer demand in order to survive in the market place?

Organisation theory

It is, perhaps, the appropriate balance of centralisation and decentralisation which needs to be found and support for this may be drawn, according to Caldwell and Spinks (1988, op. cit.) from the field of organisation theory. Perrow (1970), for example, suggested that the pattern of centralisation and decentralisation in an organisation can be arrived at through analysis of the techniques or technology required to get the work done as well as the nature of the people with whom the organisation must deal. Hence, a relatively centralised structure is appropriate for techniques and technology where there are few exceptions and problems are fairly straightforward, thus allowing for the development of routines. Where routines will not work, however, because of the number of exceptions and complexity of problems, then a relatively decentralised structure is more appropriate. Caldwell and Spinks (1988, op. cit.) apply this perspective to the world of education and self-managing schools:

Many matters related to support services, such as pupil transportation or the distribution of instructional supplies, allow for the development of routines applicable to all schools, suggesting a relatively centralised structure for the delivery of such services. On the other hand, if pupils are seen as having diverse needs, with each school expected to provide programmes to meet these needs, and if the nature of teaching and learning for each child cannot be well understood from a central perspective, then a more decentralised structure is appropriate.

(Caldwell and Spinks, 1988, p. 7)

The establishment of an appropriate balance of centralisation and decentralisation, however, will be dependent on prevailing attitudes as to the purpose of schooling and the nature:

For example, if education is seen as being concerned with a relatively narrow range of cognitive skills with the expectation that all children should have the same learning experiences in pursuit of similar outcomes and, further, if children are seen as similar in nature with little account of individual differences necessary, than a relatively high degree of centralisation may be appropriate.

(Caldwell and Spinks, 1988, p. 7)
As Caldwell and Spinks suggest, these values may have prevailed in former times or may be
evident in other cultures, hence accounting for a different pattern of centralisation and
decentralisation.

Lawton (1992) maintains that the idea of effective organizations being 'loosely-coupled' (Weick,
1976) or using a combination of 'tight-loose' control - control that is tight on objectives but loose
on procedures - has redefined the notion of how organizations should be run. Peters and
Waterman (1982, p. 14) found in their studies of best-run companies that excellent companies are
both centralised and decentralised, 'fanatical centralists about the core values they hold dear', but
with autonomy experienced on the shop floor or by production teams. The parallel in education is
succinctly explained by Caldwell and Spinks (op. cit.):

\[
\text{......the centralised determination of broad goals and purposes of education}
\text{accompanied by decentralised decision-making about the means by which these goals}
\text{and purposes will be achieved, with those people who are decentralised being}
\text{accountable to those centralised for the achievement of outcomes.}
\]

(Caldwell and Spinks, 1988, p. 7)

**Professionalism**

Ransom's age of professionalism was heralded by the 1944 Education Act which created a new
system which rested on a triangle of power informally shared between central government,
represented by a Minister of Education, the local education authorities and the teaching
profession......and teachers were recognised as professionals with a responsibility to analyse a
child's needs and to choose the curriculum and methods to meet them (Russell, 1997, p. 4).

\[
The \text{professional perspective takes the view that schools will improve when educators}
\text{and their immediate leaders are given greater opportunity to develop skills, exercise}
\text{judgement and have greater control over their work.}
\]

(Macpherson, 1996, p. 141)

As Caldwell and Spinks (1988, op. cit.) maintain, increases in autonomy for teachers and fewer
bureaucratic controls have invariably been included as elements in the case for the enhancement
of teaching as a profession. In the USA, the Holmes Group (1986) advocated making schools
better places for teachers to work and to learn: 'This will require less bureaucracy, more
professional autonomy, and more leadership for teachers' (p. iv). Macpherson (1996, op. cit.),
however, points to recent international case studies of restructured education systems, (Beare and Boyd, 1993; Martin and Macpherson, 1993) which have shown that the decentralization of pedagogical, administrative and governance powers to locally managed schools, with a simultaneous recentralization of key curricular, assessment and budgetary (i.e. control) functions, has led to a consensus of cynicism among professionals. ‘This combination of strategies does not seem to work’ (Macpherson, 1996, p. 140). Perhaps, this is because of the unresolved tension between institutional autonomy, responsiveness to ‘consumer’ demands and the regulatory role of the state identified by Ball (1992, op. cit.).

School-effectiveness

Increasingly, the case for self-management is being argued on the basis of findings from studies of school effectiveness. A form of self-government has been perceived by some writers as providing the best framework within which the identified characteristics of effective schools may be fostered. Purkey and Smith (1985, p. 358) put forward a model ‘for creating an effective school’ which contained thirteen characteristics. In the first group of nine, they include school-site management and democratic decision-making wherein ‘the staff of each school is given a considerable amount of responsibility and authority in determining the exact means by which they address the problem of increasing academic performance. This includes giving staffs more authority over curricular and instructional decisions and allocation of building resources’. Caldwell and Spinks (1988, op. cit.) make the point that each of the four policy recommendations offered by Purkey and Smith has implications for self-management.

Finn (1984, p. 518) noted that ‘the central problem faced by policy makers who attempt to transform the findings of “effective schools” research into improved educational practice at state or local level is the tension between school-level autonomy and systemwide uniformity. He calls for ‘strategic independence’ for schools, urging recognition of the school as ‘the key organisational unit in the public school system’ (p. 320); the setting of ‘rigorous educational standards for entire states and communities but [emphasising] broad goals and essential outcomes, not specific procedures, curricula, or timetables’ (p. 521); and devolving ‘more budgetary authority…to the school level’ (p. 523). Finn’s recommendations are consistent with the view that an appropriate balance of centralisation and decentralisation needs to be found.
The case for GM schools

The arguments used by those advocating the GM schools policy often stem from the perspectives discussed in the previous section.

The expectation was that a new system could be created with schools, liberated from the shackles of local authority control, competing to attract pupils among a population of parents who were now 'free to choose'.

(Pierson, 1998, p. 132.)

Campbell et al. (1996, p. 247) put forward the view that the policy's advocates have consistently claimed that opting out has three related benefits:

First, it will help to diversify local school provision and thus increase parental choice; second, it will encourage competition between schools, including those in the private sector, and therefore help to raise standards; and third, it will locate key decision-making at the level of the school rather than the LEA and consequently foster greater managerial efficiency and an increased capacity on the part of individual grant-maintained schools to recognise and respond to local needs.

Fitz, Halpin and Power (1993, p. 25) maintain that 'the support that opting out received from diverse groups with overlapping membership within the Conservative Party mitigates against any simple interpretation that it had a single author......the key point, however, is that the idea enjoyed Prime Ministerial support'. The groups proposing radical policy reform included the Centre for Policy Studies, the Adam Smith Institute, the Institute of Economic Affairs and the Hillgate Group:

If the system itself were changed to one of self-governing, self-managing, budget centres, which were obliged, for their survival, to respond to the 'market', then there would be an in-built mechanism to raise standards and change forms and types of education in accordance with the market demand.

(Sexton, Institute of Economic Affairs, 1987, p. 8-9)

When moving the second reading of the Great Education Reform Bill, The Secretary of State for Education, Kenneth Baker, explained the Government's thinking behind the reforms:
Our proposals will allow schools to opt out of local authority control and to apply for direct funding. This will widen choice for many parents in the state-maintained sector for whom all too often the only choice is to take it or leave it. This wider choice will help improve standards in all schools, not just those which opt out.

(Hansard, 1 December, 1987)

In October 1990, the then Secretary of State, John MacGregor, told the Conservative Party conference that GM schools were 'the "Jewel in the Crown" of parent power.

In the words of Sherratt, headteacher of one of the first cohort of schools to opt out:

This new freedom helps heads, their senior management teams and governors to create a new culture in schools, a culture of self-determination in which teachers can take initiatives that reflect the needs and planned direction of their particular school.

(Sherratt, 1994, p. 1)

The case for self-management prevails today as local management of schools continues to be extended even under the new Labour government, as LEAs are forced to delegate more and more of the budget to schools. It was, however, the GM schools policy which roused significant opposition.

The case against.....

The GM proposal aroused fierce opposition from local authorities, professional organizations, church groups, educational pressure groups and political parties.

(Bush et al., 1993, p. 4)

Flude and Hammer (1990) maintain that with the exception of the Professional Association of Teachers which remained uncommitted, all of the major educational groups declared their opposition to the Government's proposals. Bush (1990, p. 11) made the point that LEAs of all political persuasions opposed the GM policy, 'fearful that the loss of schools would make it more difficult to plan educational provision in their areas, and almost impossible to close schools except by agreement', after the Secretary of State's decision to consider GM applications alongside any relevant reorganisation proposals from LEAs. The Association of Metropolitan Authorities (1988) argued that locally elected councils have a legitimate role within the education system, and stressed that schools are community assets, belonging not just to those who happen to be at the
school at any given time. Church groups also expressed disquiet about the GM plans. The Church of England Board of Education, for example, stated that:

The introduction of grant-maintained schools on anything other than a very limited basis will constitute such a departure from both the letter and the spirit of the 1944 Education Act that the whole partnership between Church and state in the provision of education would be thrown into question.

(Haviland, 1988, p. 126)

Indeed, Margaret Thatcher (1993, p.592) observes that 'The vested interests working against GM schools were strong. The DES, reluctant to endorse a reform that did not extend central control, would have liked to impose all manner of checks and controls on their operation'. While Jack Straw, responding for Labour during the Bill's second reading, expresses concern about the degree of centralisation:

.....it should be called the "Education (State Control) Bill". Under the disguise of fine phrases like "parental choice" and "decentralisation" the Bill will deny choice and instead centralise power and control over schools....in the hands of the Secretary of State in a manner without parallel in the western world.

(Hansard, 1 December, 1987)

Decentralization was seen by some as a complete abdication of responsibility by the state:

...a deliberate process of subterfuge, distortion, concealment and wilful neglect as the state seeks to retreat in a rather undignified fashion from its historical responsibility for providing quality public education.

(Smyth 1993, p. 3)

Others saw it as a selective withdrawal from areas in which it has difficulty succeeding, such as equality of opportunity (Nash, 1989). While Power et al. (1997, p. 358) indicate that it is 'persuasive to suggest that making educational decision-making the responsibility of individual institutions is an effective strategy for "shifting the blame". The failure of individual schools to flourish as "stand alone" institutions can then be attributed to poor leadership or teaching quality'.

Davies and Anderson (1992) summarise the disadvantages of opting out from two perspectives - that of the effect on the education system as a whole and that of the effect on the management at the individual school level:
The Education System Perspective

- diseconomies of scale
- inappropriateness of market forces in education
- difficulties in coherent planning
- reducing equality of opportunity
- a covert move back to selection
- lack of accountability and monitoring
- reduced funding as more schools opt out
- political uncertainty

The School Level Perspective

- schools becoming insular
- increased applications for the wrong reasons
- grant-maintained schools as private monopolies
- autocratic management styles
- governors becoming managers instead of governing
- erosion of staff rights
- maintaining rather than developing standards

(Davies and Anderson, 1992, pp. 115, 118)

The case has been argued for and against, but it is perhaps useful to be reminded by Chubb and Moe (1992, p. 14), that educational reform arises out of politics, and politics is driven by power:

It is serious business, the stakes are high, and the most powerful players - public officials, party leaders, leaders of organized interests - tend to have very diverse views of what ought to be done. These views are only partly based on ideas about cause and effect. More often, and more fundamentally, they are anchored in vested interests and ideology. The battle is waged under the banner of school improvement, but for many players there is much more involved than that.

Legislating for opting out.....a policy in motion

The background to the 1988 Education Reform Act and the origins of the GM policy have already been outlined in chapter one. Maclure (1988, p. 166) maintains that the various elements of the Act were assembled in secret in the nine months before the 1987 general election....there was a
determined effort not to consult either the DES or the civil servants or the chief education officers or local politicians'. Fitz and Halpin (1991) feel that Maclure's claims identify the GM policy as an essentially political initiative that originated outside the DES, and they imply that education policy was being developed without the participation of the 'educational establishment', and possibly in opposition to it. Evidence that civil servants had nothing to do with generating the GM schools policy is supported by parts of Ball's (1990) study of micro-politics of policy making in connection with the 1988 Education Reform Act. Nevertheless, while Fitz and Halpin agree that DES officials had no part in originating GM schools, it is clear from their own data that it was the officials 'who provided the administrative detail to make them possible, and in doing so, developed the policy in ways unforeseen by its early advocates' (Fitz and Halpin, 1991, p. 134).

The point has already been made in chapter one that the policy regarding GM schools was an evolving one and, hence, as Barber (1994, p. 356) writes, in practice, the 1988 Act was not the end of a legislative process, but the beginning. Fitz, Halpin and Power (1993, pp. 26-27) maintain, it was at this point in the history of opting out that the considerable influence exerted by DES officials on the education policy-making process was most in evidence:

DES civil servants had to reconcile the philosophy and differing ambitions of the advocates of opted-out schools, while securing the smooth running of the existing system. What emerged was a policy framework which enabled, rather than encouraged, schools to opt out of LEA control......In effect, these administrative details both determined the pace at which the policy would eventually be taken up and spelt out the nature of the limited autonomy opted-out schools would enjoy.

(Fitz, Halpin and Power, 1993, pp. 26)

Consequently, the measures were rather more conservative than the New Right's preferred proposals insofar as the size restriction limited the number of schools which could consider opting out, while the curriculum constraints meant that individual GM schools could not devise innovative programmes of study. Certainly, both the restrictions on the number of schools entitled to opt out, and the funding arrangements based on the principle of parity of resourcing for GM and LEA schools, were drafted with a view to avoiding any sudden increase in education expenditure (Fitz, Halpin and Power, 1993). Following the opening of the first GM school in September 1989, however, the GM schools policy underwent a number of modifications, many of which relate to government concerns about the pace of the policy's take up, as measured by the number of schools opting out. Fitz, Halpin and Power (1993) state that, in general, there had been a gradual drawing back from the principle of minimizing the differences between GM and LEA maintained
schools, despite the claim of the then Secretary of State, Kenneth Baker (1987) that the 'effect of opting out should be broadly neutral for both school and LEA':

*The first clear indication of this trend came in January 1990 with the preferential funding made available to GM schools for capital projects.*

(Fitz, Halpin and Power, 1993, p. 29)

In 1990, at the Conservative Party Conference, John MacGregor, Baker's successor, announced that he intended to lift the size limit on schools which were able to opt out, thus providing the opportunity for all primary schools to seek GM status:

*At the same time, he announced a 50 per cent increase in both the transitional and annual specific grants payable to GM schools.... These measures were interpreted by critics as a blatant financial bribe aimed at bolstering the policy's flagging fortunes.*

(Fitz, Halpin and Power, 1993, op. cit. p. 30)

The shift in emphasis from enabling to actively encouraging schools to opt out was confirmed by Prime Minister John Major in a letter to the National Union of Teachers in August 1991:

*We have made no secret of the fact that grant-maintained schools get preferential treatment in allocating grants to capital expenditure. We look favourably at GM schools to encourage the growth of that sector.....*

(Bates, 1991)

The provision of extra resources to GM schools was defended by reference to the extra burden of responsibilities they had to take on once they left LEA control.

While the original restrictions prevented GM schools from changing their character, there were increasing signs that the government was encouraging specialization, for example, the 'favourable treatment received by GM schools under the Technology Schools Initiative (TSI) (Fitz, Halpin and Power, 1993, op. cit. p. 31).

The 1993 Education Act augmented the law on GM schools with the intended aim of encouraging more schools to opt out (Anderson 1999, p. 205). The Act also extended the powers of the Secretary of State for Education, for example, with regard to GM governing bodies, giving him the power to replace some or all of the foundation governors, should their behaviour or the poor performance of the school warrant it.
However, despite all of this, when New Labour came into power in 1997, the policy had still not lived up to the earlier claims made on its behalf by its keenest advocates.

(Anderson, 1999, p. 205)

The White Paper, *Opening Doors to a Learning Society*, published in July 1994 by the Labour Party, had stated its position. This included its intention to abolish the Funding Agency for Schools and place all schools 'within the local democratic framework' (p. 27). However, it became quickly clear that New Labour was not going to 'take on "returning GM schools to their LEAs" as a straightforward idea' (Anderson, 1999, p. 205). A paper entitled *Diversity and excellence* (Labour, 1995) published by the Labour Party introduced the concept of the three categories of schools that form the basis for the new legislation in the 1998 School Standards and Framework Act. Yet the position of GM schools was not certain; after all, the party's leader had chosen to send his son to a GM school in preference to his local secondary school and the Association of GM Heads had opened lines of communications with key figures in the Labour Party. In the event, the Education Act of 1998 did end a decade of GM schools in their existing form.

While the Labour Party committed itself to maintaining the broad features of grant-maintained schools, it became clear in the early months of the new government that the nature of these schools, would change in important ways......Grant-maintained schools have been returned to control by local education authorities, with most opting for 'foundation' status in a new scheme for the classification of schools, but maintaining a higher degree of autonomy than authority owned 'community' schools.

(Caldwell and Spinks, 1998)

Stephen Byers, the school standards minister, is reported as saying that his Government would learn from the GM experience and would seek to extend the benefits of self-management and greater control of budgets (Times Educational Supplement, 13 February, 1998). Some might say that the proposed foundation schools are just a further development in what has been called a 'policy in motion' (Fitz, Halpin and Power, 1993, p. 17). Certainly as Anderson (1999, p. 205) suggests:

*It is evident that the concept of autonomous schools as a part of government policy designed to raise educational standards is of interest to both major parties in the United Kingdom.*
Despite fears of reprisals against schools returning to their former LEAs (The Times Educational Supplement, 10 October, 1997), Anderson's research provides evidence of the confidence among former GM headteachers and chairs of governors, and lends support to the view that the earlier threat of abolishing GM schools as such has not happened and, in many significant ways, it is anticipated that schools which were formerly GM will continue to operate as before, albeit within the new framework (Hill, 1999). Foundation schools are at one remove from their authority - acting as employers, owners of their property and admissions authorities. But their funding will be channelled through the authority (Dean and Rafferty, 1999). Care has been taken to retain as much of the autonomy of GM schools as is possible, while removing their financial privileges relative to LEA schools (Levacic, 1999). Some felt that the technical paper, which put flesh on the bones of the Excellence in Schools White Paper 'appears to strengthen the autonomous sector' (The Times Educational Supplement, 8 August, 1997). Labour members called the foundation status 'a compromise following the bitter battles caused by opting out votes' (The Times Educational Supplement, 13 February, 1998). Others saw it as a sop to the GM sector - 'these anomalous monuments to greed and self-interest' - and accused the Labour government of selling out (The Times Educational Supplement, 10 October, 1997). There was also a feeling that in providing full delegation of finances to all schools, the Labour government was 'effectively making them all grant-maintained' (The Daily Mail, 30 May, 1998).

Anderson (1999, p. 206) explains what has changed, however;

...in framing its education policy, this government has distanced itself from the language of the private sector, of markets and competition and adopted, instead, the discourse of partnership, co-operation and collaboration - in its own words, a form of 'joined-up government.

She maintains that, significantly, the re-invention of GM schools as foundation schools (mostly) typifies this political strategy and this approach is not just limited to education policy:

...it is the essence of government under New Labour and has been described alternatively as 'modernising' (Levacic, 1999), 'mutualism' (Kellner, 1998, p. 15), the 'Third Way' (Blair, 1998; Giddens, 1998) - the latter term being the one most used recently

(Anderson 1999, p. 206)

Though the concept of the third way may be difficult to define, Hart (1998, p. 44), believes that from the educational perspective:
The Third Way in education means drawing a line between central and local government, on the one hand, and a totally free market, on the other: between old local authority mechanisms and the grant-maintained school experience.

(Hart, 1998, p. 46)

Opting out

The opting out process

The process of opting out is almost always characterized by local debate and disagreement.

(Bush et al., 1993, p. 66)

It was a ballot of the parents of children registered as pupils of the school which decided whether or not an application would be made for GM status i.e. whether to remain within the established LEA system or to 'opt out' of it. Rogers (1992, pp. 16-17) described the mechanics of the process:

The ballot may be initiated either by a resolution of the governing body (by far the most common way so far) or by a petition of parents submitted to the governing body.... If the majority is in favour, the governing body is then under a duty to prepare, publish and submit to the Secretary of State its application for GM status within six months of the ballot.

Before approving an application, the Secretary of State had to be satisfied that the school had a secure future and the governors and headteachers were competent to run it (DES, 1989).

If the application was approved, the initial governing body was given certain ‘transitional powers’ relating to the school once it had acquired GM status; other functions during the transitional period (which may have been weeks or months) remained with the original governing body.
Why schools opted out

When surveying the first 100 schools to opt out by September 1991, Coleman et al. (1993) indicated there was considerable speculation, much of it politically motivated, about the reasons for schools opting out of LEA control and gaining financial and managerial autonomy. The Labour Party view was predictably hostile:

_Schools went down this path to ‘preserve’ their already selective nature, to obtain financial bribes available before the April 1992 general election, or to avoid closure._

(Straw and Blunkett, 1992, p. 2)

In contrast, the Conservative Party document _Better Schools Better Standards_ (1992) expressed the view that many schools were waiting to take the same route which enabled them to break free of the local authority and to have full control of their own destinies. It is, however, to the research that we should look for the reasons why schools did opt out.

Bush et al. (1993), drawing on the survey of the first 100 schools and case studies at five of these schools, identified four main motives put forward for seeking GM status: ‘independence from the LEA; the prospect of additional funding; a wish to escape closure; and avoidance of LEA reorganization plans’ (p. 69). Independence from the LEA was the main motivator and outweighed the prospect of increased revenue, although Bush et al. warn that this finding should be interpreted with care. For example, ‘it may be due to the desire of certain respondents to indicate “acceptable” reasons for opting out rather than appearing to be motivated by greed’ (Bush et al., 1993, pp. 68-69). A survey of GM heads, conducted by Cauldwell and Reid (1996), identified independence and increased revenue as the first and second most important factors in choosing to opt out. These were both linked to ‘dissatisfaction with an LEA and a belief that a school can perform better with the full allocation of funding’ (p. 247). Thompson (1992), however, in her surveying of the Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association (AMMA), found that the main reason for opting out was the fear of closure and reorganization. It is suggested by Bush et al. (1993) that the different emphasis may be due to the fact that Thompson’s work was undertaken earlier than theirs and ‘is likely to reflect the high proportion of schools in the first cohort which were subject to unwelcome change’ (p. 69). The first eighteen schools opened in September 1989 and of these, seven were simply seeking independence from their LEAs, the other eleven were facing closure, amalgamation or an unwelcome change in status. Another possible reason for the different emphasis is that in areas where a number of schools had opted out, others felt they needed to follow suit to ‘avoid being left behind’.
Headteachers and governors opposed to opting out are being forced to consider leaving local authority control by fears of becoming second-class citizens in a two tier system.

(Times Educational Supplement, 19 June 1992)

Research conducted by Glover et al. (1993) in GM schools, including a survey of GM church schools, suggests that while the desire for independence was the main motivating factor, there was often a complicated relationship between the drive for freedom, perceived injustices at the hands of the former LEA, and the knowledge that extra revenue and capital finance would help to rectify the alleged neglect. There was also a general feeling of discontent with LEA services and belief that the school could operate more effectively alone. Some survey respondents mentioned both independence and extra funding as reasons for seeking GM status.

The decision of the former Department for Education and Science (DES) to consider applications for GM status alongside reorganization proposals, offered hope to schools facing closure and for some schools, like Bankfield in Cheshire, opting out was the last resort in the battle to survive, but not their first intention.

It was not what we were looking for but it was there at the time when we had a specific need. It was an accident of politics that we became a GM School.

(Head, Bankfield School, in Glover et al., 1993a, p. 141)

Indeed Halpin et al. (1992) found a direct link between a perceived or actual threat of closure and a school seeking GM status. Similarly, successful GM applications enabled schools to avoid unwelcome changes, such as amalgamation or loss of sixth forms, thrust on them through reorganization. The Court of Appeal judgement in the Avon case concerning Beechen Cliff School 'served to emphasize that decisions about the relative merits of reorganization plans and GM applications are matters for the Secretary of State, as long as he is acting lawfully' (Bush et al. 1993, p. 76).

While acknowledging that it is difficult to generalize about the opting out process because every school is unique, Bush et al. (1993, p. 83) have identified four models of the process which relate to the internal and external, or LEA, aspects of the transition:

- internal coherence and external neutrality;
- internal conflict and external neutrality;
- internal coherence and external hostility;
- internal conflict and external hostility.
The smoothest transition occurred in those schools where LEAs adopted a neutral position and there was little internal disagreement. Internal difficulties sometimes arose from failure to consult adequately with all stakeholders, coupled with a determination to proceed at a pace which was too fast for some of the participants. Many schools were fighting closure or reorganization plans and facing LEAs ideologically opposed to opting out. Bush et al. (1993, p. 84) maintain that the ‘obvious threat posed by closure helps to unite all groups connected with the school, producing internal coherence in search of school survival’. This was evident at the two schools studied by Bush in 1989 (Bush, 1990). There was limited evidence, however, in the research carried out by Bush et al. (1993) of schools experiencing internal conflict and external hostility.

Parity or preferential treatment?

The funding position of grant-maintained (GM) schools has been clouded by the different arguments articulated by supporters and opponents of opting out. The government has claimed that GM schools are funded on the same basis as local education authority (LEA) schools. On other occasions, however, it admits that the autonomous sector receives favourable treatment. Critics of the government’s policy sometimes claim that opted-out schools receive extra finance or ‘bribes’. At other times, they de-emphasize these benefits in order to discourage schools from opting out.

(Bush et al., 1993, p.107)

The Conservative’s stated intention with regard to funding of GM schools was that there should be parity with LEA schools:

The general principle governing the funding of grant-maintained schools is that the acquisition by a school of grant-maintained status should not change the financial position either of the school or of local community charge payers in the LEA which previously maintained the school.

(DES, 1989a, p. 332)

The funding levels of grant-maintained schools were closely related to the education budgets of their former LEAs. This decision was taken, to ensure, as Bush (1990) maintains, parity between GM schools and county and voluntary schools in each LEA area. After all, as Fitz and Halpin’s (1991) work with civil servants suggests, that parity was essential to show that autonomous schools would manage budgets more effectively than those in the LEA sector.
The rationale, as explained to us by one official, was to demonstrate that GM schools, once outside their LEAs, could manage the same amount of money more effectively and thus be more responsive to their 'customers'.

(Fitz and Halpin, 1991, p. 144)

This was, of course, also a safeguard against making severe demands on the treasury.

Flude and Hammer (1990, p. 61), however, make the point that, although it was the stated intention that local authority and grant-maintained schools would be treated equitably, the regulations provide 'power for the Secretary of State to pay special purpose grants on a contingency basis where he considers it necessary to assist a school to meet an emergency need, resulting from circumstances beyond its control' (DES, 1989a).

Despite this 'official policy of neutrality' (Bush et al., 1993, p. 108), which the Conservatives themselves openly moved away from, many like Bush et al. (1992, 1993), Rogers (1992) and Fitz and Halpin (1991) point to evidence which suggests that this was not the case, as has already been touched upon in this thesis. Rogers (1992, p.111), for example, points to the increases in several of the grants to GM schools in October 1990, 'the maximum level of transitional grant was doubled and the levels of SPG [Special Purpose Grant] (Development) and the formula allocation of capital were increased by fifty per cent'. Bush et al. (1993, p. 112) made the point that the transitional grant has no clear parallel within the LEA sector. 'It assists schools with the transfer to GM status while LEA schools do not receive equivalent sums to help them adapt to the analogous LMS status'. In 1991, Rogers maintained that the 16 per cent, allocated to GM schools to replace LEA central costs, showed that 'opted-out schools are no longer funded at the same level as local authority schools' (Times Educational Supplement, 15 March). The survey of GM church schools conducted in 1993 by Glover et al. likewise indicated that GM funding is more generous than under LEA arrangements. A Times Educational Supplement survey (Maxwell, 1992) suggested that this was at the expense of other schools in the community, while Bush et al. (1993) claim that there is evidence that GM schools are able to provide these services for much less than the AMG premium allocated for these purposes. This is supported by the experience of Stantonbury School in Milton Keynes, where Deem and Wilkins (1991) claimed that there was a substantial surplus after paying for those services previously provided by the LEA.

Furthermore, evidence suggested that the capital allocation for the GM sector was much higher than for LEA schools. Again, this was borne out in the survey of GM church schools (Glover et al., 1993). When the government indicated, in the 1992 White Paper, its intention to introduce new
arrangements for calculating AMG from 1994-5, it also indicated that it intended to protect those schools whose budget might suffer a reduction with transitional arrangements (DFE, 1992).

The situation was summed up by Bush et al. who concluded their chapter on a warning note:

....The government has given GM schools preferential treatment in respect of both capital and revenue funding. It has also protected the opted-out sector from any deleterious effects of changes in financial arrangements. This approach is likely to continue when the CFF (Common Formula Funding) is introduced. However, the deteriorating economic situation means that all public expenditure decisions will be subject to close scrutiny. The GM programme cannot escape from these economic realities.

(Bush et al, 1993, p.130)

The role of heads and governors

GM is a matter for each school to decide. You must have a management team that can manage, and a governing body that can trust.

(Respondent GM head, quoted in the research of Cauldwell and Reid, 1996, p. 259)

As Bush (1990) has pointed out, grant-maintained schools are managed in accordance with articles of government made by order of the Secretary of State. Governing bodies have wide-ranging powers in relation to admissions, finance, staffing and the curriculum. They are accountable to the Secretary of State for the implementation of the national curriculum and for the school’s standard of performance. Sherratt, himself a GM head, wrote in 1994 of the 1988 Education Act that ‘almost all the main powers have been given to governors. If they choose to exercise their powers in a vexatious way the legislation provides them with ample scope. The balance in favour of governors appears, perhaps, excessive to the extent that it may not helpfully complement the operational responsibilities of heads’ (Sherratt, 1994, pp. 27-28). He argues for a more equitable balance between the defined responsibilities of the head, supported by professional staff and those of governors, and feels that there is a case for making the respective roles clearer. David Hart, General Secretary of the National Association of Headteachers, had raised concerns about the balance of responsibilities between governors and the professional staff as early as 1990, when he claimed that governors were taking on management activities rather than determining policies and leaving headteachers and their staffs to manage schools:
The government has thrown too much responsibility on governors and achieved the wrong balance of power. They were encroaching on the role of the senior management team in some secondary schools and refusing to delegate appointments to heads. There was evidence from the grant-maintained sector that, armed with their powers, they are seeking to manage rather than govern.

(Education, 23 March, 1990)

This view was expressed by others and fuelled by well-publicised clashes between heads and governors in some GM schools. Consequently, this crucial relationship was examined by a working party of GM heads and governors, which, in conjunction with the Grant-Maintained Schools Foundation (GMSF), National Association of Headteachers (NAHT) and Secondary Heads Association (SHA), resulted in the production and publication of 'authoritative guidelines for governors and heads as they establish new working relationships under the framework created with the introduction of grant-maintained schools', as described on the book cover (1992). Sir Robert Balchin, Chairman of the Grant-Maintained Schools Foundation, wrote in the foreword 'that the Head should be recognised by the Governors as acting in the role of a chief executive of a company, of which the Governing Body, under its Chairman, is the board of directors' (p. vii).

Nevertheless, as Bush et al. (1993) indicate, the way in which these powers and responsibilities are administered is left vague and 'the law is somewhat skeletal in its approach' (Leighton, 1992, pp. 21-22). The problem as recognized by the case study heads in the research carried out by Bush et al. (1993) is that 'they are both employed by, and accountable to, the governing body of which they are part but the accountability of governors themselves is not at all clear (p. 197). In GM schools, the accountability, whilst to 'the community served by the school' (DES 1991), is not defined and this lack of clarity has been a source of concern. This concern was expressed by one head in the Bush et al survey as follows:

There is no control on governing bodies. It is generally assumed in legislation that they will be well-meaning and supportive but... they can cause havoc.

(head, survey, p. 192)

In 1992, Bush had drawn attention to the fundamental weakness of non-elected first or foundation governors who:

simply "emerge" at the time of the GM proposal and become a self-perpetuating group, accountable to no-one except the governing body itself.

(The Times Educational Supplement, May 1, 1992)
Bush et al. (1993) point to the suggestion that the head is particularly vulnerable in the GM situation where there is no longer the possibility of support from the LEA in any dispute with the governors. They continue:

All the fears expressed about governor interference appear to have been realized at Stratford School in Newham, east London. The circumstances in which this situation developed demonstrate how interference can occur because of a fundamental difference in understanding about the role of governors.

(pp. 194-195)

In 1996, Booth and Hill wrote that while the 1988 Education Act gave school governors sweeping new powers over schools, it did so without ensuring that they exercise those powers responsibly:

Little or nothing has been done to improve selection procedures or training for governors, and their performance is not adequately monitored.

(Times Educational Supplement, 21 June)

Power et al. (1996, p. 110) use the case of Stratford School 'as an illustration of the way in which central government intervenes when parental/community involvement is seen to overstep the mark'.

The Education Act of 1993 did little to address directly the troubled area of the division of labour between governors and heads. The Secretary of State, however, assumed the power to replace some or all of the first governors should this prove necessary.

Martin (1997) felt that David Hart rightly describes the relationship between headteacher and governing body as 'the central dilemma' that government legislation has failed to resolve. Despite the DfEE document Guidance on Good Governance, Hart was still maintaining that 'the law needs to be changed to remove rogue governors' (1997) and under the new Standards and Framework Act, in schools found to be failing, the Secretary of State was given powers to appoint as many additional governors as he thinks fit and appoint a chairman in place of the elected chair.
The role of local education authorities

As has been previously acknowledged, the 1988 Education Reform Act changed the pattern of relationships within education, reducing the influence of the local education authorities. Halpin et al. (1991, p. 234) observe that:

*The grant-maintained schools policy... needs to be seen as part of a broader strategic plan by the government designed to herald a new role for LEAs within which they become exclusively responsible for overall school efficiency linked to parental and user satisfaction within a diversified education market.*

In 1989, the Audit Commission referred to LEAs of the future as being among other things, providers of information to the education market, helping people to make informed choices and regulators of quality in schools and colleges. The extent of any change or adjustment in the role of LEAs may well have been dependent on the scale of opting out, both within each LEA and nationally: as Halpin et al (1991, p. 241) indicate in their research, 'many LEAs see a time when an enlarged grant-maintained sector will begin to seriously deplete their financial resources, making it difficult for them to meet their obligations to schools remaining within their control'. Indeed, the GM and LM movements were to be instrumental in effecting widespread change in LEAs in response to reduction in status and authority.

*The autonomy exercised by grant-maintained schools, and the DFE requirement to increase delegation of funds to county and voluntary schools, has caused LEAs to re-examine the way in which they function, even in an authority like Leeds where no schools are yet GM.*

(Bush et al., 1993, p. 168)

Ranson (1990) made the point that LEAs may find themselves in the future in a better position than hitherto to consolidate further their roles as managers of influence. In this role, they would increasingly offer advice on educational leadership and progress, and help set standards and disseminate good practice. In the research of Halpin et al (1991), there were suggestions that LEAs were already moving in this direction as a consequence of the grant-maintained schools policy and other related initiatives. As one of their respondents observed:
...the policy is causing us to think more carefully how we promote ourselves locally.

(LEA officer, 1991, p. 241)

The attitude of LEAs in general to the GM schools policy was one of opposition or concern, albeit Conservative LEAs may have been more 'muted' in their comments as Bush et al. (1993, p. 5) suggest, not wishing to attack a Conservative government. It was argued that the policy would fragment and disrupt the education service offered by LEAs by preventing them from providing a public service organised on a planned, coherent and equitable basis (Brent, LEA, 1988; ACC, 1988). Nevertheless, while survey evidence shows that LEAs were widely perceived to be opposed to the application for GM status, the comments of respondents indicate a range of experience from LEA co-operation to outright hostility (Bush et al. 1993, pp. 81-82).

The authority was violently against. Parents were misinformed as to what opting out would mean. The head was subject to a campaign of abuse from local councillors.

(parent governor, p. 82)

It was a matter of disappointment and resignation rather than open opposition.

(LEA officer, p. 82)

The LEA have been helpful re INSET [in-service education and training], letting us buy in advice as appropriate.

(teacher governor, p. 163)

Coleman et al. (1993) noted that while the opting out process left 'residues of bitterness' in the dealings between some schools and their former LEAs, 'the relationship with the LEA is seen by the majority as being at least satisfactory' (p. 120). It was judged that a wide range of services was being purchased from the LEA, whereas only eight per cent were unable to purchase any services from unwilling LEAs.

Many LEAs were adamant that the GM policy would undermine their capacity for strategic planning with regard to rationalisation of school provision:

LEAs argued that a school threatened with closure, amalgamation or reorganisation as part of such plans would thwart their best efforts by trying to become grant-maintained.

(Halpin et al. 1991, p. 236)
Their research subsequently shows that many LEAs had either abandoned or temporarily shelved their reorganisation plans. In 1996, the Audit Commission urged ministers to review policies on grant-maintained status for schools facing closure through reorganisation if they were serious about tackling surplus places:

It [The Audit Commission] said the government could close off the GM escape route currently available to schools threatened with closure without having to resort to legislation or abolition of the favoured policy.

(Times Educational Supplement, 20 December, 1996)

A further difficulty for LEA planning revolved around pupil admission to GM schools.

**Admissions**

Grant-maintained schools controlled their own admissions policies subject to the approval of the Secretary of State. As Bush et al. (1993) state, when the principle of GMS was established, the government intended that, at least initially, a GM school would not be able to change the nature of its entry. The 1988 Education Reform Act stated that ‘the admissions arrangements for each school will have to be consistent with the previous character of the school’ (DES, 1988, p. 18). Fears were expressed that opting out might lead to a change of character which might be more elitist or selective:

*The question of admissions to grant-maintained secondary schools has aroused a great deal of concern, particularly the possibility of 'backdoor selection' at the time of admission*....

(Coleman et al. 1993, p. 111)

Coleman et al. define selection ‘by the back door’ as generally applying to comprehensive schools who are using methods of selection which are subjective rather than objective.

Their survey of the first 100 GM schools, however, revealed that the most popular criterion for allocation of places was that of having a sibling as a present pupil. Coleman et al. make the point that whilst the majority of comprehensive schools were selecting pupils on objective criteria, such as distance from school, 30 per cent of the comprehensives responding to their questionnaire were using subjective criteria, reports from the previous school and/or interview:
These were not the only criteria being used and, in the majority of cases, were not rated as the most important but could be very significant at the margin, in determining the selection of pupils other than those who already have a sibling at the school, or who are in the immediate catchment area.

(Coleman et al., 1993, p. 112)

There is little evidence of these practices in the primary sector (Bush et al. 1993a). Similarly, a survey of GM church schools prompted Glover et al. (1993, p. 30) to conclude that there was no evidence that any selection testing was being used 'but the potential for manipulation is recognised'.

Criticism levelled at GM schools with regard to refusal of admission to pupils who are disruptive and therefore harmful to the school's reputation, lead to the amending of admission policies of grant-maintained schools so that they cannot 'refuse admission if....admission would disrupt the effective provision of education for other pupils', a clause that was previously allowed. Nevertheless, as Coleman et al. (1993) point out, research done for the Secondary Heads' Association showed that, in GM schools, the admission rate for those admitted after exclusion from elsewhere, and those admitted in order to avert exclusion from elsewhere, was almost a third of that in LEA maintained schools (Douglas, 1992). The survey of the first 100 GM schools also showed that GM schools did not necessarily accord with a stereotype of avoiding children with special needs:

Special educational needs was mentioned by 64 of our 290 respondents as being a criterion for selection when the school was over-subscribed.

(Coleman et al., 1993, p. 114)

Lack of a totally co-ordinated system of admission caused delays and difficulties, for example, in Bromley:

Meanwhile, parents were applying for their children to go to LEA schools at the same time as putting their names down at the eight opted-out schools. This created a bottleneck with some children receiving two offers while others had none.

(Times Educational Supplement, 12 June, 1992)

Recognition of this difficulty came in the White Paper in which co-ordination between GM schools and LEAs over secondary transfer was urged and if this was not possible on a voluntary basis, the Secretary of State should have a reserve power to direct the joint arrangements to be adopted by
the GM schools and LEAs concerned (DFE, 1992a, para. 5.6). The introduction of the Funding Agency for Schools (FAS) with its responsibility in respect of surplus places was an attempt to address some of these issues.

The role of parents

The importance of parental choice in education has been an ongoing theme of educational policy since the 1980 Education Act. 'Parental choice and the underlying philosophy of the market place have been encouraged directly through legislation that ensures open enrolment and funding primarily on the basis of pupil numbers.' (Bush et al, 1993, p. 173). These changes include the introduction of the Assisted Places Scheme in 1980; the granting of greater opportunity for parents to 'express a preference' for particular state-maintained schools following the Education Acts of 1980 and 1981; the development of City Technology Colleges from 1986; the 1988 restructuring of the education system through grant-maintained schools, local management of schools and open enrolment; and the 1993 Act's even greater emphasis on choice and diversity (Carroll and Walford, 1997, p. 3).

Parental involvement in education is integral to the policy of GM schools. The opting out procedures place parents at the heart of the process. They may initiate the ballot and have the decisive role in determining whether or not a school becomes GM:

In providing two routes to GM status, parents were placed at the centre of the process, and given a determinant position within it.

(Fitz and Halpin, 1991, p. 143)

This central position is very much in line with the political view that parental involvement is critical.

Parents and local communities would have new opportunities to secure the development of their schools in ways appropriate to the needs of their children and in accordance with their wishes, within the framework of a national curriculum.

(DES, 1987, par. 2.)

Halpin et al. (1993), however, make the point that 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 that their role in the whole process is largely a passive one by comparison with that played by headteachers. Rogers (1992, p. 133) even claims that, in some cases, parents are used as mere 'ballot fodder'. This is supported by studies carried out by Power

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et al. (1996). Research of Halpin et al. (1993); Power et al. (1996), together with that of others, such as Coleman et al. (1993), who conducted a survey of the first 100 GM schools and Bush et al. (1993), further suggests that involvement in the opting out process does not seem to ensure sustained involvement or the subsequent development of enhanced parental participation:

*It would seem from the survey evidence that opting out has not had a general effect on the level of parental involvement.*

(Coleman et al., 1993, p. 125)

*From our research, the clearest outcome with regard to parental involvement in GM schools is that the majority of schools report little change.*

(Bush et al, 1993, p. 175)

**The effects and outcomes of the GM schools policy**

The Conservative government was clear about the beneficial nature of the policy as expressed in the 1992 White Paper:

*GM schools are self-governing schools. That autonomy is at the heart of the government’s education policies. The common experience of GM schools is that their status significantly enhances the work of the school. The real sense of ownership they enjoy has proved highly motivating...The government firmly believes that self-government is best for state schools.*

(DFE, 1992a, paras. 3.3, 3.4)

Sherratt (1994, p. 43) drew on a keynote address by Caldwell at the Annual Conference of the Grant-Maintained Schools in 1994 to summarise the outcomes of the GM policy:

*A picture emerges of a number of schools......which are able to report significant improvements as a result of becoming grant-maintained. There have been difficulties in implementation but there seem few regrets. Commentators will properly point to the inequity in funding in comparison to locally managed schools and to the fact that existing grant-maintained schools are not a representative sample of schools. There appears to be no direct cause and effect evidence that the shift to GMS status has yet led to measurable gains in student achievement when compared to schools which have remained locally managed. Despite these qualifications, there is little ground for critics to*
argue that the reform has not been a success for those who have taken the GMS path, and for all other schools in respect to increased budget authority and a more responsive and supportive LEA.

As Fitz, Halpin and Power (1993) indicate, supporters of opting out frequently argue that its 'success' can be measured through the national patterns of uptake and the popularity of individual schools. Figures released by the Grant-Maintained Schools Centre (GMSC) at that time seemed to confirm this 'success'. For example, in 1991 it reported that 88 per cent of GM schools had boosted their rolls since opting out, with an average increase of 5.3 per cent (GMSC, 1991). When the number of schools opting out seemed to be flagging, however, the government took measures (already discussed) to promote the policy more vigorously, but were not helped by the uncertainty of the political scene, with an impending general election and flagging fortunes of the Conservative government. In fact, by the time of the general election in 1997, the total number of schools which had opted out was a little over 1100 - 656 secondary and 464 primary (CIPFA, 1997, Education Statistics 1997/98 Estimates). In 1999, when the GM experiment came to an end, 6 per cent of all schools in England (23 per cent secondary, 3 per cent primary and 2 per cent of special schools) were grant-maintained (The Times Educational Supplement, 23 April, 1999). So success as measured by uptake numbers is qualified and most would argue that success of the GM policy should really be discussed in terms of school improvement - as seen in improved teaching, learning and pupil achievement.

Levacic and Hardman (1999, p. 187) maintain that there has been no thorough assessment of the GM schools policy to date which has either covered all aspects of what the policy was intended to achieve, in particular pupils' educational achievement, or which has been able to assess the impact over five or more years. Although they feel that two academic studies (Fitz et al. 1993, Bush et al. 1993) meet neither of these criteria, it is useful to note their findings, referred to elsewhere in this thesis. Levacic and Hardman (1999, p. 188) indicate that once it is realized that GM schools are on average more socially advantaged than LEA maintained schools, then their apparently superior examination performance could be explained by this important factor. Similarly, evidence that there is no significant difference between LEA and GM school examination results, once the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is taken account of, is reported in Kelly (1996). As a consequence, Levacic and Hardman state that:
Given that additional finance was channelled in the direction of the GM sector, the absence of evidence that GM schools are more effective in relation to academic outcomes than LEA schools is indicative of poor value for money for the GM schools policy.

(Levacic and Hardman, 1999, p. 202)

They refer to other research which suggests a number of factors that could explain this finding. One important factor is the motivation for schools opting out.

Studies of GM schools (Fitz et al. 1993, Bush et al. 1993, Neill et al. 1996) indicate that schools opted out primarily to become independent of the LEA and to acquire additional resources. There was no particular emphasis on school improvement in terms of student learning outcomes.

(Levacic and Hardman, 1999, p. 204)

Another factor is that all schools have been under external pressure to improve examination results.

They conclude (p. 204):

The policy's main positive legacy, now that the GM sector is being converted into foundation schools, would seem to be the option for all schools to manage 100% of their budgets (DfEE 1998).

In 1999, views about the impact of the GM policy were mixed, but there were those, like David Hart, General Secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, who felt that its effect would be more lasting:

I am sure we haven't seen the end of the GM concept.

(Times Educational Supplement, 23 April, 1999)
What has changed?

Improved resources

Research has shown that there has been increased expenditure on resources (Bush et al 1993, op. cit.). The survey of members of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) carried out by Neill et al. (1995) indicated that buildings, equipment, services and support staff were much or slightly improved in most schools. There were, however, some interesting differences reported between primary and secondary GM schools. For instance, more teachers in primaries reported greater improvement in respect of career certainty, morale, access to support agencies, capacity to appoint specialist staff, non-contact time, class size and teacher-pupil ratio. Advocates will argue that this development is a result of careful site-based management as indicated by a headteacher respondent in the Bush et al. research (1993, p. 118):

It [AMG] will clearly purchase us considerably more. More significantly, we can spend it where we need it. There are some things we have to purchase, but money left can be more flexibly applied, e.g. more into books and equipment.

Opponents of the GM policy will point to the extra funding attached to opting out and see this improvement in resources as no surprise. Indeed, Halpin et al. (1993, p. 16) suggest that ‘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’.

This is supported by the findings of Anderson and Bush (1999):

...several headteachers comment on the additional resources GM status has provided and the link between extra resources and improved standards.

(Anderson and Bush, 1999, p. 24)

Anderson also makes the point that GM comprehensive schools serving areas of serious social and economic deprivation particularly benefited from the extra resources made available to them (Anderson, 1999, p. 211).

Management

Management changes are apparent as a result of the financial delegation and often can be seen in the appointment of a bursar/business manager, who may well become a member of the senior
management team or a deputy undertaking the finances of the school as his/her major responsibility, and in the extra administrative staff. Halpin et al. (1997) maintain that GM schools are more likely to have additional administrative posts and more teacher support than adjacent locally managed LEA institutions. But these developments are not associated with an organizational structure that departs from that found in most schools - indeed, their data suggests that it is more hierarchical and traditional than that found in many LEA maintained schools.

The increased managerial role for GM heads has left them less time for teaching and some may feel that there is more concern with financial decision-making, reputation management and external relationships than pupil achievement - more in the role of chief executive than head teacher.

I see no real disadvantage except that the head has less time to spend on teaching because of his increased managerial role.

(parent governor, Bush et al., 1993, p. 204)

It has also been argued that opting out has given heads a stronger hold because of their enhanced position as gatekeeper between the autonomous institution and central government. There does not seem to be a wealth of evidence indicating a more collegiate approach to management; indeed, some have made reference to an autocratic approach:

I suppose that there is a tendency to autocratic approaches.

(teacher union representative, Bush et al., 1993, p. 204)

Innovation?

Fitz, et al. (1997, p. 17) maintain that there is little evidence that self-governing schools have provided programmes which are 'innovative or mould breaking'. Following their interviews with the headteachers of nine grant-maintained schools, they suggest that:

In curriculum terms they show a propensity to consolidate their schools' identities around what the schools have done in the past rather than embrace the opportunities to modernise presented through the government's funding priorities.

(Fitz et al., 1997, p. 17)

They argue that they demonstrate that the greater autonomy which schools enjoy does not necessarily translate into new, innovative or diverse forms of curricular or pedagogic practice,
even in circumstances where this has been officially encouraged, for example through the Technology Schools Initiative. They further argue that not only are GM schools constrained by the national curriculum, but that schools are reverting to or re-emphasizing traditional type schooling. There is an emphasis on behaviour and discipline, school uniform is often introduced or the dress code enforced more strictly. The trend is summed up succinctly by one pupil attending a GM school:

*They’ve come all heavy on politeness.*

(in Halpin et al., 1992, p. 64)

The impact on LEAs and other schools

For more than 40 years following the 1944 Education Act, LEAs enjoyed a near monopoly of state education and since 1979, there has been a shift in the balance of power from the LEAs to central government. As Bush et al. (1993, p. 207) maintain, the vehicle for much of this extension of central power is the GM programme:

*Every opt-out decision contributes to an apparently remorseless decline in LEA influence over education.*

Similarly, Fitz, Power and Halpin, (1993, p. 18) make the point that:

*There is little doubt that the [GM] policy has had a marked effect on LEAs, particularly on their planning and provision of education. It has contributed to a changing relationship between LEAs and schools, whereby LEAs are increasingly seen as ‘providers’ of services to ‘customer’ schools.*

The impact of the GM policy on other schools can also be seen in various ways (Bush et al., 1993). For example, when schools avoid closure by opting out, the pressure may simply be shifted to other schools in the area. The control that GM schools have over admissions can increase disparity between schools:

*This is likely to be particularly true in the areas served by the thirty per cent of GM comprehensive schools using interviews, reports from previous schools or, in one case, examinations to ‘select’ their pupils.*

(Bush et al. 1993, p. 206-207)
Bush and colleagues also point to the advantages enjoyed by GM schools in respect of revenue, capital funding and transitional grants which represent a transfer of funds from LEA schools to the GM sector. One approach adopted by several LEAs, for example, Leeds, to keep their schools, was to devolve much higher proportions of their potential schools budget. Arguably, it is the threat of opting out which led to greater devolution, and not a locally inspired judgement of its worth as a means of improving educational provision (Bush et al. 1993).

Parents and the community

Although the GM policy may have enabled individual schools to avoid reorganisation plans and increase their resources, it has not resolved the problem of surplus capacity and had only minimal impact on parental choice:

*Our research suggests that GM status has preserved and consolidated existing patterns of school choice rather than providing either new alternatives or wider ‘consumer’ empowerment. There is, similarly, little to indicate that opting out has altered pupils’ and parents’ experience of schooling.*

(Fitz, Power and Halpin, 1993, p. 18)

Power et al. (1994, p. 211) maintained that the significance of going GM was not perceived in terms of providing a ‘new’ choice, but in terms of holding on to an ‘old’ one. As one parent put it:

*It was not important as such, what was important was that they were kept open.*

They argued, however, that while GM schools may not constitute anything ‘new’, they are beginning to cultivate an image as somehow ‘different’ from their LEA counterparts.

In 1998, Slater, when looking at the Education Reform Act ten years on, maintained a similar view:

*Parental choice was the great myth of the 1988 Education Reform Act.....Two years ago, Trading Places, an Audit Commission report on school admissions found that almost one in five parents failed to get a place for their child in their first choice school...Parental choice, however illusory, is now politically sacrosanct... No one has found a way to reconcile choice with efficiency and market forces with fairness.*

(Times Educational Supplement, 25 December, 1998)
School improvement

While the widespread introduction of systems of self-managing schools was motivated by the desire to raise standards, the link between school autonomy and school improvement has yet to be clearly understood and established.

The GM evidence points to a link between autonomy and improvement but it is by no means conclusive. There are several contradictory factors that may weaken the case and suggest a more problematic relationship between autonomy and improvement.

(Bush, 1996, p. 144)

In 1994, Davies and Hentschke (op. cit.) wrote that developments in school autonomy have received enthusiastic promotion and support, but questioned, like many others, whether anything had significantly changed in the performance of schools. They maintained that early research had focused on describing what had happened, identifying perceived initial managerial improvements and hoped for benefits. They continue:

In England and Wales HMI reports on LMS and GMS fail to identify, at the early stages of these reforms, specific improvements in teaching and learning directly attributable to delegated school management.

(Davies and Hentschke, 1994, p. 96)

Similarly, in the USA, Wohlstetter and Odden (1992), found that where decision-making authority has been delegated to school based management (SBM) programmes, ‘the outcome concern is teacher morale and satisfaction; the impact on student learning is usually ignored....The result is that connections between student learning - the real objective of education policy - and SBM are not probed and thus not discovered’ (p. 537). Macpherson (1996, op. cit.), in looking at what has happened in Canada, makes the point that there is mounting evidence that teacher empowerment and site-based management have not led to demonstrable improvements in teaching.

Halpin et al. (1993, p. 18) indicate that headteachers ‘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’. Indeed, Cecil Knight, head of Smallheath GM School in Birmingham, made the statement (1992, in Davies and Anderson, p. 113) that ‘Grant-maintained status in itself does not create a successful educational enterprise. What counts is using the flexibility and greater control of resources wisely and purposefully, according to a well-defined educational philosophy’. Neill et al. (1995), however, did find evidence that, in those GM schools
incorporated for more than two years, educational priorities were higher, which suggests that, once the initial turmoil is over, schools return to their priorities of educating pupils. Bush and Coleman (1992, op. cit.) make the point that if the improvement is seen to be a product of enhanced funding, it suggests that all schools should be resourced at the levels currently enjoyed by the GM sector. In 1996, Campbell et al. made the further point that:

\[\text{Differential funding that does not obviously lead to improvement in learning in the schools themselves, whilst simultaneously having an adverse effect on other schools, is hard to justify as a national policy.}\]

(Campbell et al., 1996, p. 256)

In 1997a, Halpin et al., made reference to their research conducted in 1993 (Fitz et al., op. cit.) in which they were unable to provide evidence that autonomy is directly related to improvements in student attainment. In discussing the same research in the Times Educational Supplement (31 August, 1993) Halpin is quoted as saying that while children acknowledge that their schools are better equipped and decorated, they don't comment about whether the teaching has altered significantly. He is of the view that there is a lot of evidence to show that self-governance is not a necessary condition of school improvement:

\[\text{Indeed, the Rutter et al (1979) and Mortimore et al (1988) studies of secondary and junior education in Inner London, both of which predate the LMS and GMS schools policies, indicate that self-governance may not be a necessary condition for school effectiveness.}\]

(Halpin et al., 1992a, p. 19)

This is supported by Levacic (1992) who observes that many of the important factors said to be associated with school improvement - purposive leadership, positive school climate and the involvement of teachers in school decision-making - are not uniquely dependent on a high level of institutional autonomy.

Bush and Coleman (1992) urged caution at that early stage in the development of autonomous schools when examining the 1992 HMI report which stated:

\[\text{Standards of work in grant-maintained schools were rather higher than those in the maintained sector as a whole.}\]

(DES 1992a, p. 21)
Although Chubb and Moe (1992) were of the opinion that GM schools would promote higher standards, Halpin et al. (1992a) feel that the data for their claim seem to be derived from a very small and lightly researched sample of schools.

Bush et al. (1993) maintain that the higher standards, if they can be substantiated, may be as a result of the relatively high proportion of selective schools in the first cohort of GM schools and/or their enhanced level of funding. During the second reading of the education bill, the education minister, Eric Forth, cited a letter from HMI to the Secretary of State, which noted that HMI saw a higher proportion of satisfactory lessons in GM schools, that they deployed their resources to greater effect and that teachers' morale had improved (Hackett, 1992). In view of this claim, Bush et al. (1993, op. cit.) maintained that it was surprising that the DFE had not published any HMI assessments of individual GM schools, despite the fact that 66 of the first 102 schools had been visited by HMI by the end of 1991 (Hansard, 1992).

Indeed, some GM schools were identified as requiring special measures by HMI because they were failing to give their pupils an acceptable standard of education. The first of these was Stratford School in 1993. This presented an unexpected dilemma for the government, for while the 1993 Education Act makes provision for a failing LEA school to be taken over by an education association, in the inconceivable event of a failing GM school, all that the Secretary of State could do was to remove and/or replace some of the governing body. Using these powers for the first time, he appointed five additional governors onto Stratford's governing body in 1994/5.

Recognition of this omission came in the government's White Paper, *Self-Government for Schools*, in which new powers to address failing schools were provided giving the government, as a final resort, the authority to appoint a body on the lines of an Education Association to take over the school's management (The Times Educational Supplement, 5 July, 1996).

The role of the appointed governors in Stratford's improved performance is questionable. Indeed, many thought that the school's changed fortunes had little to do with the DfEE (Department for Education and Employment) governors who had been on the governing body for such a short time at that stage and, as the attendance register of governors' meetings for that period shows (Snelling, 1997), were not regular attenders. The government, however, was anxious to claim the responsibility for such a seemingly dramatic turnaround from there being no improvement in the eighteen months preceding May 1995 to removal from special measures in December 1995:
The case study suggests a political role. It does not clearly indicate that they have been any more effective in carrying out their duties or of particular value in the school improvement process. It is possible that they have legitimised the actions of the governing body, which has been accountable to the DfEE or been implanted to manage governor resistance...

(Snelling, 1997, p. 21)

OFSTED said that its statistics revealing that opt-out schools out-perform their local authority counterparts on all fronts, had to be treated cautiously (Dean, 14 March, 1997). Levacic (1998) maintained that, after the effect of the changing social composition of their intakes was allowed for, GM status was not associated with higher than average improvement (The Times Educational Supplement, 9 January, 1998).

It is perhaps interesting to note that Anderson and Bush (1999), as a result of research conducted at the time when the future of GM schools was still uncertain, suggest:

*With an eye on what the future may hold, perhaps the headteachers and chairs of governors felt the need to be realistic about the standards their schools had achieved since opting out.*

(Anderson and Bush, 1999, p. 25)

Summary

The case for self-management has been presented from several different perspectives and looks set to remain on the agenda for the main political parties. Although GM was considered by many as being 'seminal in the development of school autonomy' (Times Educational Supplement, 23 April, 1999), the GM policy caused fierce opposition and was described as 'a glorious failure' (Times Educational Supplement, 23 April, 1999). Reasons for this opposition were varied, but included issues such as parity of funding and difficulties of coherent planning for LEAs. The fortunes of the GM movement fluctuated with the evolving policy, as the Conservative government tried to encourage more schools to opt out. Loopholes in the legislation were exposed and the roles of heads, governors and LEAs came under the microscope. Bush et al (1993, p. 214-215) point to three major weaknesses. These relate to funding, admissions and the constitution of the governing body. As a consequence they maintain:
The GM programme works well for the schools concerned but the effects on other schools and the wider educational system mean that this radical innovation merits only qualified approval.

The effect of the GM schools' policy has been summed up as follows:

And while there is no proof that GM made a difference academically,...the movement has had a big impact on the way schools are funded and their relationship with local authorities.

(Dean and Rafferty, 1999)
Chapter Three

Methodology

Rationale for a case study

‘...where the case represents an extreme or unique case.’

(Yin, 1994, p. 147)

Of Stratford School

‘These events are unprecedented in the history of school governance in this country.’

(The Independent, 22 February, 1992)

Following the demise of the existing 1199 grant-maintained schools brought about by the 1998 School Standards and Framework Act (The Times Educational Supplement, 23 April, 1999), the subject of this thesis is a retrospective examination of the GM schools policy: its implementation and effects. Several areas of focus and a number of related research questions have been identified with this aim in mind.

- What has been the impact of the GM policy and what, if any, are its achievements?
- How has school-based management affected the role of, and the relationship between, heads and governors?
- What has been the nature of the relationship between local education authorities and opted out schools?
- Has the GM movement raised academic standards?
- Have parent power and choice been enhanced by GM schools?

Choosing the most suitable research approach hinged on a number of factors. Existing research on GM schools had been conducted through surveys, interviews, observation and also case studies of several and individual schools, resulting in both quantitative and qualitative data. While a survey of a representative sample of GM primary and secondary schools, directed at heads, governors and staff, could provide considerable data, particularly quantitative, another and more manageable approach for an individual researcher could be the study of a single GM school. A case study of a single GM school could provide the necessary focus and yet be set in the context
of the findings of other case study schools. As Johnson (1984) explains, research design has to take account of the aims of the study, the resources available and the general feasibility of the study area

**Survey or case study?**

Research methods can be broadly divided into *quantitative* methods, taking a *positivist* approach, and *qualitative* methods which are *relativist* in their perspective. Researchers in the positivist tradition (Durkheim, 1895) take the view that social facts exist and can be ascertained......Relative researchers, on the other hand, are less confident of the existence of social facts....Their purpose is not to obtain a set of facts, but to gain insight into a perspective.

(Johnson, 1984, pp. 20-21)

Johnson makes the point that, for the most part, it can be asserted that surveys, using structured interviewing or postal questionnaires, produce quantifiable facts, while participant observation in all its forms, and exploratory interviewing, provide a qualitative perspective. Although surveys are the form of research most familiar to the general public, case studies have, in recent years, been regularly used by professional researchers. Johnson (1994) describes case study as a research approach. Several research tools may be used to accumulate data, for example, interviewing, observation and use of records.

**Surveys**

Surveys have been in common use throughout the twentieth century and Johnson (1994, p. 13) provides a simple definition which covers all types of survey activity:

*eliciting equivalent information from an identified population*

Since the purpose of a survey is to give a research basis for collated description or comparison, the same kind of information is sought from all respondents. Consequently, the survey questions are standardised. Most survey designs identify a population and then approach a sample of them. If the sample is flawed, however, then generalising from the survey findings can produce biased statements. Wilson (1984, p. 37) summarizes the advantages and drawbacks of surveys:
The survey style of research allows information from large samples to be collected quickly and relatively cheaply, allows comparisons between individuals because answers to questions are comparable, but may be superficial in measuring sensitive or difficult aspects of behaviour.

Johnson (1994, p. 20) maintains that single-handed researchers do not typically use a survey as their only approach to a field of enquiry:

They are more likely to use interviews and questionnaires as part of a more rounded case study.

When contrasted with the systematic techniques of the survey, as outlined by Nisbet and Watt (1984, pp. 76-77) the strengths and weaknesses of case study are apparent. The survey identifies the elements which are common to a number of persons or observations. Its strengths are that it leads to generalisable findings and its procedures are well tested. It has two serious weaknesses. First, it may obliterate the unique features and patterns within small groups, or even within an institution or an individual which may hold the key to the puzzle. Secondly, the researcher finds only what he seeks: if something is not covered in the survey instruments, it will be missed unless the respondent particularly wishes to supply extra information. Both survey and case study involve formulation of hypotheses, without which both become merely a formless and uninformative collection of observations. Whereas hypotheses have to be specified at an earlier stage in a survey, and this makes it more rigorous, but also more limited, in case study, it is possible to preserve a more open approach until the researcher has really become familiar with the situation. The two approaches can be used to complement each other: they represent the macro and micro approaches. A large-scale survey can be followed up by case studies, to test out conclusions by examining specific instances. Alternatively, for opening up a new problem where it is difficult to formulate hypotheses, the case study may precede a survey, to identify key issues. Whereas the survey conveys the bigger picture, a case study captures the detail and, in so doing, may well contribute to the bigger picture.

Case study

Burns (2000, p. 459) indicates that 'case study research is not new' and 'has had a long history in educational research'. In 1975, an international conference, sponsored by the Nuffield Foundation, was held at Churchill College, Cambridge, to consider Methods of Case Study in Educational Research and Evaluation in 'an attempt to explore the problems and possibilities of case study' (Adelman et al., 1984, p. 93). In the decade which followed there 'emerged a tradition
of educational research and evaluation whose procedures, methods and styles of reporting have come to be collected under the general rubric of ‘case study’:

Although case studies have made a considerable contribution to the corpus of knowledge and practical wisdom about education, they are often regarded with suspicion and even hostility. Their general characteristics remain poorly understood and their potential underdeveloped.

(Adelman et al., op. cit., p. 93)

However, Nisbet and Watt (1984, p. 73) maintained that ‘in recent years, educational researchers have begun to use case study methods more extensively’ and ‘there has been a growing acceptance of case study as a research methodology in its own right and a recognition that it is possible to develop general procedural guidelines’.

Adelman et al. (1984) make the point that case study ‘is about moving between the general and the particular’ (p. 93). The following definition was adopted in the 1975 Cambridge conference on case study:

Case study is an umbrella term for a family of research methods having in common the decision to focus an inquiry round an instance.

(Adelman et al., 1977, pp. 139-150)

Adelman et al., subsequently, (1984, p. 94) made a number of points to clarify the term and clear up some misunderstandings:

- **Case studies should not be equated with observational studies, participant or otherwise.** This would rule out historical case studies, not least because the past is not directly observable. [Cohen and Manion (1995), however, maintain that at the heart of every case study lies a method of observation.]

- **Case studies are not simply pre-experimental.** Although case studies have often been used to make researchers more aware of significant variables subsequently manipulated or controlled in an experimental design, that is not their only use. The understandings generated by case study are significant in their own right. The generalizations produced in case study are as legitimate when about instance, rather than about the class from which the instance is drawn (i.e. generalizing about the case, rather than from it).
• ‘Case study’ is not the name for a standard methodological package. In general, the techniques for collecting information for a case study are held in common with a wider tradition of sociological and anthropological fieldwork. Case study methodology is eclectic, although techniques and procedures in common use include observation, interview, audio-visual recording, field note-taking, document collection and the negotiation of products. [Nisbet and Watt (1984) also make the point that in case study, evidence is gathered by a variety of techniques which include observation, interviews, examining documents or records or pupils’ work.]

Advantages of a case study approach

Cohen et al. (2000, p. 181) maintain that ‘Case studies can penetrate situations in ways that are not always susceptible to numerical analysis’ and ‘can establish cause and effect, indeed one of their strengths is that they observe effects in real contexts, recognizing that context is a powerful determinant of both causes and effects’. Cronbach (1975), in a widely publicised address, had drawn attention to the value of ‘observing effects in context’. As indicated by Nisbet and Watt (1984), it is the context which is often the key to understanding effects in education. Case study is about observing, describing and understanding effects in context. Kogan et al. (1984) are of the opinion that ‘extended case study work enables the dynamic of institutional processes, and individual relationships, to be monitored and appraised over time. Moreover, case studies provide a data base for analytic description of components and processes and for model-building.....The case study method has as one of its strengths the ability to explore diversity of practice’ (pp. 106-7).

Hitchcock and Hughes (1995, p. 317) consider that a case study has several hallmarks, including the following:

• It is concerned with a rich and vivid description of events relevant to the case and an attempt is made to portray the richness in writing up the case.
• It blends a description of events with the analysis of them.
• It focuses on individual actors or groups of actors and tries to understand their perception of events.
• The researcher is integrally involved in the case.

Nisbet and Watt (1984), like Johnson (1994), also make the point that case study is a style of enquiry which is particularly suited to the individual researcher, in contrast to other styles which require a research team.
Nisbet and Watt (op. cit.) are clear that an idea is better understood if an example is given and the single instance helps to clarify how the abstract principles fit together.

Quoting cases to illustrate gives the picture a three-dimensional reality.

(Nisbet and Watt, 1984, p. 73)

Researchers frequently use individual cases in this way in their reports, to support the results of their analytical studies, and to help the reader to understand their conclusions. They maintain, however, that a case study is more than just an extended example or an anecdote interestingly narrated:

*It has the same virtues - interest, relevance, a sense of reality - but it goes beyond mere illustration. First it gathers evidence systematically....second, it is concerned essentially with the interaction of factors and events.......Statistical analysis can identify important determining factors in a problem area; but to establish how these factors relate to each other in the real situation, it may be necessary to examine a specific case systematically.*

(Nisbet and Watt, 1984, p. 73)

The importance of relatability is raised by Bassey (1984) when discussing pedagogic research. Although he accepts that the search for generalization can help administrators to improve educational practice, he urges the educational research community to distinguish between pedagogic research and other forms of educational research; and in relation to pedagogic research eschew the pursuit of generalizations, unless their potential usefullness is apparent, and instead actively encourage the descriptive and evaluative study of single pedagogic events:

*The relatability of a case study is more important than its generalizability.*

(Bassey, 1984, p. 119)

Recently, however, Bassey (1999, p. 12) acknowledged that he had ‘failed to recognize the potential value’ of what he now calls ‘fuzzy generalization’ and develops the concept of educational case study leading to fuzzy generalization.

*The fuzzy generalization arises from studies of singularities and typically claims that it is possible, or likely, or unlikely that what was found in a singularity will be found in similar situations elsewhere: it is a qualitative measure.*
Simons (1996, p. 225) refers to the paradox of case study, ‘which if acknowledged and explored in depth, yields both unique and universal understanding’.

Adelman et al. (1984) argue that case studies have a number of advantageous characteristics that make them attractive to educational evaluators or researchers, some of which have already been mentioned. In summary, these are as follows.

- Case study data, paradoxically, is ‘strong in reality’ but difficult to organize. In contrast, other research data is often ‘weak in reality’ but susceptible to ready organization.
- Case studies allow generalizations either about an instance or from an instance to a class.
- Case studies recognize the complexity and ‘embeddedness’ of social truths.
- Case studies, considered as products, may form an archive of descriptive material sufficiently rich to admit subsequent reinterpretation.
- Case studies are a ‘step to action’. They begin in a world of action and contribute to it. Their insights may be directly interpreted and put to use.
- Case studies present research or evaluation data in a more publicly accessible form than other kinds of research report. Case studies, therefore, may contribute towards the ‘democratization’ of decision making (and knowledge itself). At their best, they allow the reader to judge the implications of the study for himself.

(Adapted from Adelman et al, 1980, pp. 47-61)

**Weaknesses of case study**

Case study has a number of weaknesses.

- The results are not easily generalisable, except by an intuitive judgement that ‘this case’ is similar to ‘that case’.
- The observer in a case study has to be selective but his selectivity is not normally open to the checks which can be applied in rigorously systematic inquiries such as large scale surveys - it tends to be personal and subjective. It is possible, however, to achieve a degree of objectivity by bringing bias out into the open

(Adapted from Nisbet and Watt, 1984, p. 76)

These weaknesses are echoed by both Bassey, and Cohen and Manion:
Critics of the case study method frequently point to the fact that generalization is not usually possible and that a study of a single event has limited value.

(Bassey, 1984, p. 103)

The accounts which typically emerge from participant observation are often described as subjective, biased, impressionistic, idiosyncratic and lacking in the precise quantifiable measures that are the hallmark of survey research and experimentation.

(Cohen and Manion, 1995, p. 110)

Yin (1994) suggests three tactics to overcome some of these problems and increase 'construct validity' (establishing correct operational measures for the concepts being studied), one of which is the use of multiple sources of evidence, in a manner encouraging convergent lines of inquiry, and this tactic is relevant during data collection.

Opting for a case study

Careful consideration of the relative strengths and weaknesses of case study in conjunction with other approaches led to the decision to opt for a single case study for this thesis. In choosing to focus on a case study of a grant-maintained school, the researcher was mindful that the GM schools policy presented an ideal case study in itself as Halpin et al. (1993) have pointed out:

The policy's paradoxes and unintended effects are not...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.

(Halpin et al., 1993, p. 20)

She was aware that 'historical case studies usually chart the progress of an educational institution, frequently chosen from schools that have achieved prominence or notoriety' (Verma and Mallick, 1999, p. 115). She was also conscious that she would be following in the footsteps of others who had conducted case studies of GM schools (Bush, 1990, Bush et al., 1993, Fitz, Halpin and Power, 1993, Deem and Davies, 1991). Each was unique in its own right, but contributed to an emerging picture of the implementation of the GM policy and its effects. For example, Deem and Davies (1991, p. 153) note that their case study of Stantonbury Campus, a GM school in Milton Keynes, 'suggests that the direction and development of state educational policy may often lead to unforeseen outcomes and consequences. Moreover, the analysis demonstrates that educational
change does not conform to a purely rational model and that it is significantly influenced not only by ideology, but also by human agency and meaning.

The turbulent and much publicised history of the school makes Stratford a very rich area for research and offers a unique opportunity for study, through which the implementation and effects of the GM schools policy could be charted over a period of ten years, the era of GM schools.

As head of Stratford School, the first GM school in East London, the researcher had intimate knowledge of the school and access to documentation and those associated with the school.

As a consequence of the school's colourful history, much documentation exists about it, generated both internally and externally. Much has been written and said about the developments at the school, in parliamentary debates, in ministerial press releases, in the media, HMI reports and in the High Court. Because of the school's high profile, there is far more reference to press statements than might be expected in a usual documentary analysis. The school's progress is also documented through evaluation reports, minutes of meetings, planning documents and letters. A retrospective and extended view of the school's progress over the past decade would be possible through documentary analysis.

Access to such documentation and the experience of being a key participant during these years in the school, were major factors in the selection of research methodology for this thesis. Nevertheless, the researcher was acutely aware that caution was needed to avoid the dangers of bias in the selection and analysis of documents.

Another factor was that a single case study is a manageable task for an individual researcher.

Yin (1994) maintains that the single-case study is an appropriate design under several circumstances and outlines three major reasons for conducting a single-case study, two of which were considered to be particularly relevant in the selection of this type of case study design:

"...A second rationale is where the case represents an extreme or unique case. A third rationale for a single-case study is the revelatory case. This situation exists when an investigator has an opportunity to observe and analyse a phenomenon previously inaccessible to scientific investigation...."

(Yin, 1994, p. 147)
Similarly, Burns (2000, p. 460) feels that ‘a case study should focus on a bounded subject/unit that is either very representative or extremely atypical’.

The researcher believes that events at Stratford constituted just such an extreme or unique case.

**Research methods chosen**

While the benefits of a longitudinal study to ascertain the changing perceptions of those involved in the process are undeniable, the project was not conceived at that early stage of opting out. Hence, this was an historical case study. Cohen and Manion (1995) suggest that historical research in the field of education is of particular value and can yield insights into some educational problems that could not be achieved by any other means. Factors influencing the choice of research method included issues such as how to elicit reliable and valid information and what was possible within the constraints of time and resources. As Burns (2000, p. 461) suggests ‘this type of case study depends heavily on records, documents and interviews’. He continues:

> Interviews are essential, as most case studies are about people and their activities....Most commonly, case study interviewers use the unstructured or open ended form of interview, so that the respondent is more of an informant than a respondent.  
> (Burns, 2000, p. 467)

Semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis were chosen for this research.

**Semi-structured interviews**

Information was sought from a range of respondents, including governors, non-teaching and teaching staff and pupils. The interviewees included a teacher governor, who worked at the school prior to the opting out process and a foundation governor who joined the governing body some time later. Staff included a senior laboratory technician, who became clerk to the GM governing body, and a representative of the NAS/UWT union, both of whom were employed at Stratford when it was a local authority school. Year 11 pupils were chosen because they had been at the school when it became grant-maintained. Their opinions were sought on a number of topics, such as the role of governors and school improvement, and their perceptions of what took place from the point at which the school opted out. The researcher had identified specific areas of focus, but wanted respondents to be encouraged to give their views and have the freedom to talk about other aspects, if they wished. A semi-structured interview provided a framework within which this
could happen, but did not impose a straitjacket restricting the development of conversation. The use of a questionnaire, for example, was not felt to be the most appropriate method since it was too limiting in the scope of information to be gained and, was particularly inappropriate for pupils, since the profile of the school population was such that, for 88% of the pupils, English was a second language and 89% of Year 7 pupils on entry to the school had a reading age below the national literacy average. Hence, a research method which involves pupils having to read and write could well be a barrier to communication, both in understanding the questions, finding them relevant to their experience and being able to express their views in writing. There was also concern that pupils may not be honest in their replies if they felt that they were going to be read by their teachers. Through interviews, however, information focusing on certain areas could be gathered.

A structured interview would not be suitable for the very reasons which excluded the use of a questionnaire. An interviewer would need the flexibility to deviate from a standardised wording to ensure communication with pupils with language difficulties and for staff and governors to be able to develop and expand on their own views. Yet the areas for questioning needed to be clearly understood and adhered to by the interviewer as far as possible to provide some structure to the discussion. As Nisbet and Watt (1984, p. 82) maintain ‘The case study interview has a style of its own’:

> The interview method used in large scale surveys follows a carefully constructed interview schedule, so that the responses from each person can be aggregated.... The case study interview is much more loosely structured. It has to allow each person to respond in his own unique way...However... You have to give some indication of the topics or the general area you want him to talk about.

(Nisbet and Watt, 1984, p. 82)

Hence, the decision was made to adopt a semi-structured interview because, as Johnson (1994, p. 45) points out, ‘a more flexible style is used, adapted to the personality and circumstances of the person being interviewed’. In this way, it was hoped that all interviewees could be encouraged both to give their opinions and also provide descriptive accounts of what they witnessed and remembered as happening following the opting out process. Consequently, a qualitative analysis of the implementation of the GM policy at Stratford was planned through semi-structured interviews. (See appendix A for interview schedules).
Purposive sampling and bias

The interviewees were chosen because of their specialist contribution to the research. Two were key instigators in the opt out campaign, a teacher and a member of the non-teaching staff, and were privy to what happened in the struggle for GM status from the onset. Another respondent experienced the struggle first hand from a different perspective as a member of the teaching staff and union representative. These three presented an internal, eye witness account of the two year opt out struggle. To present the struggle from an external perspective, an associate director of the Grant-Maintained Schools Trust was chosen, because she worked with schools after approval had been granted and was in a position to compare the Stratford situation with what was happening in other schools.

The first three interviewees remained at the school after it became grant-maintained and therefore were able to discuss the problems experienced at the school after incorporation. One of the key instigators joined the group of governors who sought to suspend the head. The other two interviewees, one of whom became a teacher governor eventually and the other, who became the clerk to the governing body for some time, chose to support the head. In this way, it was hoped to provide a balanced view of events. A fifth respondent was selected because he was part of the newly appointed GM senior management team. He was in the front line of the school's struggle to survive and improve, and had to cope with the difficulties with the LEA and with the governing body.

The sixth interviewee was chosen because he joined the governing body towards the end of the difficulties with the governing body and could provide a view of the aftermath caused, together with his perceptions of what had happened as an outsider looking on and through the media. As an ex-head teacher of long standing, he was also able to offer an informed view of the school's struggle to improve.

Finally, it was felt appropriate to talk to pupils who had been at the school for five years, had experienced at first hand the difficulties within the governing body, the school's inspection and the two years subsequently, before the school came out of special measures. Their witness accounts were thought to be significant in establishing to what extent their education had suffered.

Although the researcher had not been involved in the school's struggle to opt out, as head of the newly approved GM school, she did play a central role in the events which occurred after incorporation. Bias was clearly an issue to be addressed, which she recognised. While choosing to conduct all but the pupil interviews personally, she took the following measures to avoid bias.
• All interviews were taped. These records were retained and are available for scrutiny.
• In selecting semi-structured interviews, the researcher gave the interviewees the opportunity and freedom to provide their own witness account and interpretation of events.
• The interviews with staff and governors were conducted just prior to the researcher leaving the school, hence minimising any possible concerns they may have had about speaking openly.

Whereas the researcher herself conducted taped interviews with all the other respondents, a slightly different approach was chosen with the Year 11 pupils in order to put them at their ease and encourage them to speak openly. The group interview method was used and a different interviewer conducted these sessions. The pupils were interviewed in four groups.

In choosing an interviewer, there were a number of factors to bear in mind. It was clearly apparent that, as head, the researcher could not conduct the interviews, nor indeed would it be appropriate for other members of the staff, if it was hoped to encourage pupils to speak openly and without fear of possible consequences. Someone external to the school or in a neutral role was needed and that person had to have the requisite interviewing skills. Availability of more than one such person would determine the number of interviews possible. In the event, there was a suitable and willing candidate, but only one. In April 1996, a month prior to the research being planned, a new senior member of staff joined the school. He had recently completed a Masters Degree and had enrolled for his Doctorate: consequently research methodology was familiar to him and he felt that the experience of interviewing some students about their experiences would give him some useful background and insight into the school.

Several sessions were spent discussing what information was being sought from the pupils, what were the most suitable questions and probes to elicit this information, choice of interviewees, location for and number of interviews and method of recording. Time constraint was one of the factors which influenced the decision to hold group interviews. It was felt that these should take place during the span of the school day rather than after school in what might seem a punishment situation. So they took place during break or lunchtime or, if appropriate, during lessons. It was anticipated that they would last between twenty minutes and half an hour and that not only was it time effective to interview more than one pupil at a time, but that this length of time could be too intensive for students in individual interviews. A semi-structured discussion with care taken to involve all the participants, was considered a more fruitful situation. Groups of three were thought to be the optimum for this.
To enable as frank and full a discussion as possible, Year 11 students were selected and the interviews took place in the fortnight before they left school. Since there was much movement within the school population, care was taken to select pupils who had been at the school for the full five years. For expediency and articulation, pupils in the top English group were chosen, although there was an awareness that pupils from across the year should have been interviewed. Twelve of these students were selected on the basis of opportunity sampling. The interviews took place in the interviewer’s office with the group sitting in comfortable chairs around a coffee table. While it could have been possible for the interviewer to make notes of the salient points, it certainly would not have been possible to record anecdotes or any descriptive dialogue. Hence, the interviews were taped and it took some time to ensure adequate equipment to provide the quality of recording to allow someone not familiar with the group or the school to transcribe the tapes. Four interviews were actually recorded, each group consisted of three Year 11 pupils. The composition of the four groups was as follows: three boys, three girls, two boys and one girl, two girls and one boy.

The interviews represent witness statements to the events that took place at Stratford and because of the significance of the statements, they are often quoted at length, given the particular nature of this case study, rather than shorter extracts expected in conventional interviews. They provide the three dimensional reality, the detail in what was a colourful and often complex story. The aim was that the interviews would offer a more rounded case study.

Interesting as the perceptions of the main participants in the process at Stratford may be, however, they are not necessarily accurate, because of possible bias, possible ignorance of what actually happened and distortion arising from the lapse of time. It was in an attempt to draw upon multiple sources of evidence, that documentary analysis was used. Semi-structured interviews with pupils, staff and governors were conducted in 1996 and 1999, and similarly, documentary analysis began in late 1996 and continued into 2000. It involved much time, in the first instance, in simply sifting through material which dated back to 1989 when opting out was first considered. The range of evidence covers a vast amount of material, including minutes of meetings, correspondence, internal and external documents pertinent to the school, progress reports and media coverage. The selected material covers many aspects of the school’s life and development.

**Documentary analysis**

For a detailed consideration of the specific problems of documentary research, the reader is referred to the articles by Platt (1981) where she considers those of authenticity, availability of documents, sampling problems, inference and interpretation.
As Johnson (1994, p. 58) points out:

*The essence of a document or record is that it already exists in a definitive form.*

Duffy (1987) suggests that most educational projects will require the analysis of documentary evidence and refers to Johnson (1984, p. 23) when commenting that documentary analysis of educational files and records can prove to be an extremely valuable source of data. While research can involve the analysis of non-written sources, all of which can be classed as documents, the most common kinds of documents in educational research are written as printed sources, primary and secondary. Duffy goes on to discuss the distinction which is drawn between deliberate sources, those produced for the attention of future researchers - such as autobiographies, and inadvertent sources, such as attendance registers and staffing returns, which are used by the researcher for some purpose other than that for which they were originally intended. He makes the point that inadvertent documents are the more common and usually the more valuable kind of primary sources. They were produced for a contemporary practical purpose and would therefore seem to be more straightforward than deliberate sources. Still caution is urged because it cannot be discounted that inadvertent documents were intended to deceive someone other than the researcher. It is possible that what appear to be inadvertent sources, such as some government records, are actually attempts to justify actions to future generations. Duffy makes reference to Elton (1967, p. 102) in making these comments. In a final point about the nature of documents, that is their 'witting' and 'unwitting' evidence, he again refers the reader to another researcher, Marwick (1977, p. 63):

*Witting* evidence is the information which the original author of the document wanted to impart. *Unwitting* evidence is everything else that can be learned from the document.

Researchers need to be aware that all documents provide unwitting evidence and it is their task when researching to attempt to assess their precise significance.

The analysis of documents can be divided into external and internal criticism. External criticism aims to discover whether a document is both genuine, that is, not a forgery, and authentic i.e. it is what it purports to be and truthfully reports on its subject (Barzun and Graff, 1977, p. 85). The method more likely to be used in small-scale research projects is internal criticism, in which the contents of a document are subjected to rigorous analysis since it is important not to accept sources at face value. One significant aspect of critical scholarship is the need to separate fact from bias. Barzun and Graff (1977, p. 154) discuss this point. While biased documents are not
necessarily to be dismissed, they will need to be analysed carefully and compared with evidence from other sources. Duffy (op. cit.) warns against researchers’ own bias (a factor particularly relevant for the researcher of this thesis) by maintaining that the guiding principle in documentary analysis is that everything should be questioned. Qualities of scepticism as well as empathy need to be developed!

The stages undertaken in the investigation followed the guidance of Johnson (1994, p. 59) who outlines the essential first steps to be taken in the use of records or documents for research purposes,

\[
\text{to ascertain:}
\begin{align*}
& \text{what range of relevant documentation exists?} \\
& \text{where it is located and can be accessed?} \\
& \text{and, most importantly,} \\
& \text{for what purpose the documentation was originally prepared?}
\end{align*}
\]

A review of the possible documents available for research during this period, resulted in the following selection, which is separated into school and external records:

School documentation

- Stratford's proposal for acquisition of GM status
- Letters from:
  - The acting headteacher
  - The headteacher
  - Chairs of governors
  - Bursar
- Minutes of meetings (governing body and committees);
- School's weekly bulletin
- Leaflet announcing inaugural meeting of the PTA, 1992
- Headteacher's personal statement for OFSTED inspection 1993
- Draft school development planning document, 1995
- Stratford GM School Business and Technology Centre leaflet, 1992
- School's response to first HMI visit, 1994
- Report provided by the school for HMI visit, 24 March, 1992
- School's submission for Investor in People status, 1996
- School's submission for a National Training Award

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• Inscription accompanying crystal vase presented to the school by Schools Minister, Robin Squire

External Documentation

• Letters from:
  DES, DFE, DfEE
  Parents
  LEA
  Education Assets Board
  Lincolnshire County Council
  Director of Inspection
  Chair of Stratford School Association

• Press releases:
  DfEE
  NAS/UWT

• Newspaper articles:
  Times Educational Supplement
  The Guardian
  The Times
  The Daily Express
  The Sunday Express
  The Daily Mail
  The Daily Telegraph
  The Sunday Telegraph
  The Independent on Sunday
  The Sunday Times
  The Observer
  The Independent
  Evening Standard
  Newham/Docklands Recorder
  Stratford and Newham Yellow Advertiser

• Periodicals:
  Education

• NAHT commentary on the Education Act 1993

• Parliamentary debates

• HMCI's Annual Report, 1998
When considering Scott's (1990) classification of documents, it is possible to see that the above list covers documents of a personal and official nature (both private and state) with access that is closed, restricted and open (archival and published). For example, while some letters are clearly private, others are 'letters to the editor'.

When deciding on the choice of documents for analysis, availability and access only presented difficulty with regard to some letters and newspaper articles. The researcher had no way of ensuring that she had access to all of these documents which might exist and certainly, they were likely to be subject to bias and inaccuracy. Minutes of meetings are subject to tampering or bias and there was recognition of the researcher's own bias as a member of the governing body and as head of the school. Administrative documents, like minutes of governors' meetings, are not necessarily accurate and unbiased reports of events, as Johnson (1994, p. 27) points out:

*They are shaped by political context and by cultural and ideological assumptions.*

The next stage of the investigation led the researcher into consideration of Scott's (1990) four criteria for assessing the quality of the documentary evidence - authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning of documents; that what is being questioned is the extent to which documents can be taken for granted as accurate accounts of the events or issues with which they deal. None of these were considered serious obstacles to the investigation. The authenticity of the documents under scrutiny was beyond doubt. They were genuine and often the original documents. Aware of criticism that selection of documents could be subject to bias, the researcher endeavoured to present events from various perspectives and types of documents. Newspaper articles were selected from a wide range to cover the possible political bias. As a participant in the events of the case study, while acknowledging the danger of bias, the researcher not only had access to a substantial numbers of documents/records, but also had an understanding of what was available and their possible relevance to this study.

There were a number of advantages in using documentary research in this investigation.

1. As head of the school and a member of the governing body, the researcher had access to documents of the period.
2. There was minimal cost in terms of finance or time involved in lengthy searches. Indeed, as Robson (1993) indicates, it may provide a 'low cost' form of longitudinal analysis when a 'run' or series of documents of a particular type is available.
3. It provided the opportunity to examine primary evidence.
4. Documents and records are in permanent form and therefore can be subject to re-analysis, allowing reliability checks and replication studies (Robson, 1993).
5. It was an 'unobtrusive' measure (Webb et al., 1966). You can 'observe' without being observed and the nature of the document is not affected by the fact that you are using it for the enquiry.
6. It brings together previously unrelated material, and material which may not be in wide circulation.
7. It could be of value in supplementing data collected in the interviews and as Johnson (1994) indicates, every effort must be made with the research resources available, to check the accuracy of data by using a combination of research tools.

   Another way in which social research can be strengthened is by 'triangulation', that is, by homing in on research evidence from several points of view
   
   (Johnson, 1994, p. 8)

Anonymity

Verma and Mallick (1999, p. 114) state that a case study approach in educational research is likely to be personal and for this reason, 'all case study research has a special obligation to provide legal and ethical protection to the subjects.... The use of fictitious names is a not uncommon device for creating an air of „realism“ without compromising the identity of the individual institutions or people'. Hightown Grammar (Lacey, 1970) is an example of this. The issue of anonymity was a particular consideration in this study because of the school's very public profile which meant that the names of the key participants and many of their actions had appeared in the press and on television. So well known were some of the characters that several cartoons were produced in the media. While it was, therefore, decided to remove names from the interviews, because they were private, and school documentation, for example, minutes of governors' meetings, they were left in documents, such as newspaper articles, which were in the public domain.

Summary

The aim of this research was to shed light on how the GM policy was implemented and its effect, drawing upon predominantly qualitative evidence. Consideration of various approaches and the researcher's own circumstances resulted in the choice of a single case study. It was an attempt to look at the facts of what actually happened during this period as well as ask people what they remembered as happening over those years. What evidence was there of what took place? It
was, therefore, felt appropriate to use multiple sources of evidence by conducting semi-structured interviews and by going back to the records of the time to find what evidence was available through documentary research.
Chapter Four

The case study: documentary analysis

Of Stratford School

'Opted into Anarchy'

(The Times, 18 February, 1992)

The GM policy has been shown by researchers to have evolved over its ten year lifespan 1989-1999 and, while this case study of Stratford School in East London extends over much of this period, it is beyond the scope of this project to follow that evolution in its entirety over the decade. Therefore, in order to examine the policy in practice, its effects and some of its changes, five areas of focus were selected:

- the opting out process
- the role of head and governors
- relationships with the LEA
- raising academic standards
- parental involvement - choice and diversity

The main findings are based on interviews with those working at or associated with the school during this period and documentary evidence, much of which was collected by the researcher during her headship of Stratford School between April 1991 and December 1996. The documentary evidence appears in this chapter and the interviews are presented in chapter five.

Documentary evidence

A wide range of written materials is drawn upon from within and outside the school dating from 1989 and up to 1999. Documents include records from the school, prior to it becoming grant-maintained and after, letters, minutes of meetings, parliamentary debates, press releases and newspaper articles. (See appendix B for complete list.)
Opting out

While documentary evidence from the period 1989-1991 largely supports information gained in the interviews, it also provides further insight into the period.

Stratford's proposal for acquisition of GM status and accompanying letter to the Secretary of State, John MacGregor, dated 23 March 1990, make clear the reasons for wanting to opt out:

We seek Grant-maintained Status because it will not only keep the school open but we believe that the quality of the education will improve.

Yet extraordinarily, a letter written on behalf of the Director of Education for Newham (5 January, 1990) reveals that it was the Labour controlled authority which approached one of the few governors in support of the school opting out to write the proposal. When completed, however, the proposal was signed and forwarded by the chairperson of the existing governing body, despite its opposition to opting out and although he was not a member of the proposed governing body.

The governors of Stratford School in Newham, east London, are in the curious position of formally requesting grant-maintained status, following a narrow vote in favour by parents, and vigorously opposing it at the same time.

(The Independent, 28 August, 1990)

This clearly was not the way the GM policy had been envisaged in the legislation.

Some indication of the reaction to the move to opt out, both from the LEA and at the school, is provided in part by documentary evidence from the school during the opt-out campaign. The acting head teacher wrote to parents on behalf of the teachers of Stratford School:

Despite the problems of transfer to a new school, we agree with the Director of Education that staying at Stratford after it becomes Grant-Maintained would be a disaster for the education of your child. You must act now while you have the choice. Move your child to another Newham LEA school.

(Letter from Acting Head Teacher of Stratford School to parents, 5 November, 1990)
The school's weekly bulletin indicates how pupil numbers fell between July 1990 and February 1991 from 757 to 373.

The behaviour of the LEA was seen as harassment by one parent:

> With regard to the THIRD letter sent to us as parents of pupils attending Stratford School, which I think could be seen as harassment....

(Excerpt from letter from Parent to Newham's Director of Education, 7th March, 1991)

The DES had had occasion to write to the LEA some months earlier:

> Newham education bosses have been asked to explain themselves to the Department of Education and Science over "misleading" letters to Stratford School parents about the opt out.

(Newham/Docklands Recorder, 6 December, 1990)

Another parent wrote:

> The relentless propaganda, both subtle and crude, bearing as it does the official stamp of approval of Newham Council, has undoubtedly persuaded many parents to pull their children out. Those particularly vulnerable under this onslaught are the parents from the large ethnic communities who have great respect for authority and do not want trouble.....

(Letter to Guardian From Parent, 27 March, 1991)

Minutes of meetings of the prospective governing body clearly indicate concern over the actions of the LEA:

> There was then much discussion on the spoiling tactics of the Council and LEA in an attempt to make the school untenable.

(Minutes of meetings of the prospective board of governors, 17 July, 1990)

In particular, members of the Muslim Community would seem to have been singled out:
Both Mr. A. and Mr. H. had been approached by members of the Council and were asked to reconsider their views on opting-out. Both had also received invitations to a "private" meeting with Mr. Lawless (Director of Education)....

(Minutes of meeting of the prospective board of governors, 6 September, 1990)

Reaction to reported LEA tactics came from both ministerial level and LEA spokesmen:

Tim Eggar, the Education Minister of State, said last night: "Newham has engaged in party thuggery of the worst kind.

(The Guardian, 27 March, 1991)

A council education spokesman said: "Our teachers have not victimised pupils at the school but there has been debate and discussion in the classroom."

(Stratford and Newham Yellow Advertiser, 5 April, 1991)

It was alleged that the school's assets were systematically stripped in the months prior to it opting out. In writing to the DES about the school's annual maintenance grant, the head stated:

When the school became Grant-Maintained in April, the school's facilities were sadly lacking and many items, equipment and instruments etc. appeared to have gone missing. Consequently, significant funding in these areas has been essential to redress the balance

(Letter from head to DES, 13 November, 1991)

The opting out experience was unpleasant for pupils, parents and staff, and had provoked strong reaction from the local authority.

Another apparent motive for opting out which emerged in the media and even in parliamentary debates, was the desire to make Stratford a Muslim school:

Mr. Tony Banks: The Minister knows that that particular Labour councillor wanted to become a teacher at the school that he was trying to persuade to opt out and was even trying to turn it into a Muslim school, so he should not try to mislead the House.

(Parliamentary debate - Stratford Grant-maintained School, 15 May, 1991)

This, however, was soundly rejected by the opt-out campaigners:
The chair of governors reiterated the statement that there was no possibility of Stratford School changing its character.

(Minutes of emergency meeting of prospective board of governors, 2 September 1990)

Other documentary evidence, from within the school prior to it opting out, suggests self interest of individuals deciding to stay at the school after it became grant-maintained:

Mr P. .....felt that for particularly the non-teaching staff there should be consideration for not just maintaining their conditions but to actively improve them to develop equality of rights for all.

(Minutes of meetings of the prospective board of governors, 24 June, 1990, before the decision was made to grant GM status to Stratford)

Item A Job Security ref: RC, BP.

Let it be minuted that the following, RC, BP, TR, HS will be employed by Stratford GMS on a salary commensurate or above that of Senior Teacher Allowance “E”

Passed unanimously.

(Minutes of meetings of the prospective board of governors, 8 July, 1990 before the decision was made to grant GM status to Stratford)

Attempts were made by the GMSC and DES through meetings and resolutions to curb the actions of the prospective governing body before incorporation took place:

2. The Governors of Stratford GMS agree to the appointment of one or more consultants via the Grant-Maintained Trust to assist during the transitional period.

(Letter from chair of GMS governors to director of GMST, 1st October, 1990)

The politics behind the decision to allow the school to opt out were revealed, both in the parliamentary debates and in the media, as was the questionable justification of the decision and the viability of the school:

Mr Tony Banks: I do not support Stratford as a grant-maintained school and the Minister knows why. The only reason why Stratford opted out was that it was due for closure. The Minister’s cheap Tory dogma led that school to get grant-maintained status. It had nothing whatsoever to do with educational standards.

(Parliamentary debate - Stratford Grant-maintained School, 15 May, 1991)
Department of Education officials admitted its case was "far weaker than most". But it was the Summer of 1990 and Margaret Thatcher, impatient over the pace of her opting-out initiative, was still in Downing Street. The application was approved.

(The Independent on Sunday, 16 February, 1992)

Stratford School in Newham has lost the majority of its teachers and pupils, and is currently without a head, in the run-up to becoming grant-maintained on 1 April…..The crisis is bound to provoke questions about the school's future and raise doubts about the judgement of the Minister of State, Mr Tim Eggar, who approved the school for GM status.……Acting head Mrs Pauline Roberts told Education this week: 'I can't see how on earth the school can remain viable.'

(Education, 15 February, 1991)

It was perhaps the Times Educational Supplement that posed the significant question which in itself queried the motivation behind those advocating, and the safeguards regarding, the GM policy:

A casual observer could be forgiven for wondering just who really wanted Stratford School to opt out.

(The Times Educational Supplement 3 May 1991)

Even the chair of the prospective board of governors had indicated:

It was never our intention to go down that road. We thought we could threaten Newham with opting out as a ploy to make them talk to us.

(The Sunday Times, 28 July, 1991)

Nevertheless, in spite of the LEA's legal challenge to the government's decision to allow Stratford to opt out and, despite the difficulties encountered and possible concerns, the school became grant-maintained on 1 April, 1991.

The High Court last week upheld the Government's decision to allow Stratford School in Newham, East London, to opt out of council control.

(The Times Educational Supplement, 28 December, 1990)
Relationships between head and governors

There is evidence of difficulties within the governing body prior to the school being allowed to opt out which did not augur well for the school's future. The Times Educational Supplement cites a report by Newham Council which was sent, with evidence from the school's staff, head, governing body and the National Association of Head Teachers, to the Department of Education and Science in 1990:

It said the school was “too weak to survive” and “risks bringing disrepute on the entire GM system”....The report also warned ministers that incidents involving three governors had already led to the DES having to intervene in the school's management. Two of these governors.... are now on the body of the grant-maintained-school and are part of a faction seeking to oust Anne Snelling, the head.

(The Times Educational Supplement, 28 February, 1992)

Problems escalated in the months after the school opted out and, in Autumn 1991, led to the resignation of the chair of governors, who wrote in a letter to the head:

I am very sorry... that I cannot protect you and the staff any longer against this unholy alliance....they have completely out-manoeuvred me, and I now have no way of thwarting their take-over.

(Letter from chair of governors to head, 28 October, 1991)

In November 1991, the headteacher wrote to Tim Eggar, Minister of Education:

.....The school is, however, in crisis because of the actions of its Governing Body.

She listed a catalogue of problems and concluded:

I can find no recourse to any law which will prevent such appalling and self-seeking behaviour. It would seem that the law makes an assumption that Governing Bodies will be composed of reasonable, responsible people with only the best interests of the school at heart. If Grant-Maintained schools are here to stay, there must be the legal checks, the safeguards built in to prevent Governing Bodies behaving in such an unacceptable manner....
While the GM movement advocated the value of increased autonomy, ironically, here was a GM head urging intervention:

I have endeavoured to resolve the situation, but I am rapidly reaching the conclusion that I, my staff and a few individual Governors cannot do it on our own. We need help to redress the balance.

(Letter from head to Tim Eggar, Minister of Education, 22 November, 1991)

Details of the deteriorating situation were reported in the media:

Since then (the resignation of Rev. Reilly) events have grown more alarming. Mr Singh accused Mrs Snelling of being a racist; she attempted to persuade the governors' staff committee to look into his accusations on grounds of misconduct, but the governors refused. In December, Mr Shaida changed the timing and conduct of staff interviews, removing responsibility from the headteacher. The staff protested, and passed a unanimous vote of no confidence in their two teacher-governors. The governors countered by alleging that the leading teachers were failing in their duties.

(The Independent, 6 February, 1992)

Blame was apportioned to the DES:

The DES was responsible in the first place for placing the running of a school in the hands of a governing body that is clearly unfamiliar with the rules that govern its procedures.

(The Times Educational Supplement, 21 February, 1992)

Matters came to a head on the first day of term in January 1992, when the head was suspended by the new chair of governors. The story became headline news:

The pioneer head of Britain's most controversial opt-out school has been suspended....She was told of the decision on Monday in a hastily drafted letter from two governors.

(The Daily Mail, 9 January, 1992)
The Secretary of State found himself in a situation where he felt it necessary to intervene in the affairs of a school supposedly freed, as a result of the GM policy, from external interference from local authorities, and intervene he did on more than one occasion. The Secretary of State requested that the headteacher be reinstated forthwith and stated:

*If the Governing Body fail to comply with this request the Secretary of State is minded to exercise his powers under section 68 of the Education Act 1944 to direct the governing body to reinstate the headteacher.*

(Letter from DES to chair of governors, 10 January, 1992)

This intervention was followed a few days later by the appointment of two additional governors:

*I am writing to inform you that the Secretary of State has decided to exercise his power to appoint additional governors to the school in accordance with paragraph 4(1) of the Instrument of Government for the school.*

(Letter from DES to chair of governors, 10 January, 1992)

The appointment of the two additional governors, however, did not resolve the problem in the short term.

Matters continued to deteriorate after the head’s reinstatement. On 22 January, the headteacher wrote to the DES wishing to put on record:

*....her considerable anxiety in a number of areas with regard to a series of events in recent months and since the election of Mr S. as Chair of Governors at Stratford School. The accumulative effect on the school is causing irreparable damage...*

(Letter from the head to DES, 22 January, 1992)

She cites examples of problems experienced with regard to relationships with staff, financial matters, staff appointments, public relations and day-to-day management.

Concern over the governing body’s financial management of the school’s resources prompted Labour to call for an investigation into the finances of all GM schools:
An immediate check on the finances of all grant-maintained schools was called for by the Labour Party on Tuesday as the troubles besetting Stratford school refused to disappear.

(Education, 20 August 1993)

Stratford was continuing to demonstrate that the GM policy in practice was not necessarily going to live up to the rhetoric:

The claim that opting out or, indeed, that delegating ever more financial responsibilities to LEA schools, will automatically create a better managed and efficient education service is looking increasingly suspect.

(Education, 20 August, 1993)

In 1992, David Hart, General Secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, had spelt out the problem with the GM policy:

The Government has been caught off-guard in that it never really thought through the implication of giving a board of governors of a grant-maintained school not just very wide powers but also very wide responsibility for a lot of taxpayers’ money.....
This is an extreme example of a problem which was always there to be uncovered.

(The Daily Telegraph, 8 February, 1992)

There was resentment within the governing body, however, at the interference of the Secretary of State and in mid February, 1992, the Governing Body sought advice from the DES as to whether it would be able to use its annual maintenance grant to fund judicial review litigation challenging the Secretary of State’s decision to appoint two additional governors. The DES responded:

.....the Secretary of State considers that the governing body would not have the power to spend AMG for this purpose.....

(DES letter to chair of governors, 28 February, 1992)

The media felt that the governors had Mr Clarke and his predecessors to thank, both for their lack of preparation and for ‘any dissonance between their actual powers and those that parents and opted-out schools were led to expect by the political rhetoric’. (The Times Educational Supplement, 24 January, 1992).
The continuing difficulties forced the DES to spell out to the chair of governors responsibilities and expectations of behaviour:

Under the terms of the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document 1991 the headteacher is responsible for the internal organisation of the school.

He (the Secretary of State) is of the strong opinion that neither you nor any member of the governing body acting in their capacity as a governor should attempt to address the pupils in assembly or otherwise, without first seeking the advice of the headteacher.

(DES fax/letter to chair of governors, 7 February, 1992)

The escalating problems prompted the call for more careful vetting of governors before schools were allowed to opt out:

The problems of Stratford School should make Mr Clarke think again about vetting the governors before schools are allowed to opt out.

(Evening Standard, 25 February, 1992)

Pupils found themselves caught up in the situation, witnessing the head being called a liar and racist in morning assembly by one of the teacher governors, and being asked at the school gates to sign a petition calling for the head's dismissial. The experience clearly affected their studying. One pupil claimed "his attempt to re-sit GCSEs was being hindered by the row":

It is disrupting the school. Students are not doing their work because of the row.

(The Daily Mail, 13 February, 1992)

David Hart, General Secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, described the events:

It is a story involving corruption, insulting behaviour towards, and intimidation of pupils and staff which must be without parallel.

(The Guardian, 19 February, 1992)

Unable to dismiss governors, the Secretary of State could direct governors how to behave and was urged to do so by the NAHT and NAS/UWT:
The association (NAHT) urged ministers to issue legally enforceable directions to prevent the governors abusing their powers...

(The Daily Telegraph, 19 February, 1992)

The government's reluctance was understandable:

The implications for the future of opted-out schools stretch far beyond the inner-city area in which the current struggle is taking place. Mr Clarke is now unwilling to take further action because such a move would leave him open to allegations of the same political interference from which he had hoped to release the education system.

(The Sunday Telegraph, 23 February, 1992)

Nevertheless, Kenneth Clarke did intervene for a third time using his powers under section 68 of the Education Act 1944 to step in and give directions when governors or other people connected with the school were acting or proposing to act unreasonably:

He ordered the governors to cease disciplinary proceedings against head teacher Anne Snelling and effectively dismissed three governors from a staffing committee.

(Daily Express, 6 March, 1992)

It was not only the dispute with the head which was causing concern, the governing body was not fulfilling its responsibilities. On 6 March and again on 23 March 1992, the DES wrote to the chair of governors on behalf of the Secretary of State, about the governors' failure to carry out various statutory duties, namely producing a curriculum complaints procedure, providing staff with written contracts and establishing grievance procedures:

The Secretary of State is of the view that, if the governing body is unable to satisfy him by Tuesday 17 March that they have so complied, he will direct them so to do under section 99 of the Education Act 1944.

(DES letter to chair of governors, 6 March 1992)

The media picked up on the government's repeated intervention:

The education department has had to produce statements at every turn, explaining where it stands on the smallest development. Behind the rhetoric of decentralisation and
local autonomy which launched opting out, lurks the ironic possibility of ever greater centralisation.

(The Times, 24 February, 1992)

The Times Educational Supplement (28 February, 1992) was quick to point out that:

The present dispute has embarrassed the government which had championed Stratford as part of its policy to remove schools from the control of left-wing councils.

The ongoing dispute provoked a number of court cases:

Mrs Snelling has launched a series of High Court legal actions.... They include moves to keep governors out of the school during lesson time. Writs have already been served to stop disciplinary moves against her. She also plans to sue for defamation over allegations that she assaulted Mr Shaida. He has taken out a private prosecution against her alleging assault.

(The Daily Mail, 19 February, 1992)

One of the outcomes of the High court proceedings was 'an undertaking that they (the governing body) would not interfere in Mrs Snelling's day-to-day management of the school' (The Independent, 5 June, 1992).

The worsening situation brought ever increasing embarrassment for the government as events began to unfold exposing the loopholes in the law for which the Secretary of State had limited powers:

What the internecine strife at Stratford has shown is how little power the DES has to determine the outcome.

(The Daily Telegraph, 8 February, 1992)

Nobody quite knows what will happen next at Stratford School. The Department of Education appears to be at a loss. And the worrying question for Mr Clarke is: will the crisis at Stratford be repeated elsewhere, and will the Secretary of State for Education again find himself struggling to control other rebellious groups of governors?

(The Independent on Sunday 16 February, 1992)
Jack Straw, Labour's education spokesman, said the dispute showed up "the inherent instability of the opt-out system" (The Times Education Supplement, 21 February, 1992).

Cartoonists likewise picked up on the theme:

![Cartoon](image)

(The Times Educational Supplement, 17 April, 1992)

'GM heads demand curbs on governors' was the front page headline in the Times Educational Supplement, 24 July, 1992. It was clear that there were problems in other schools, although only the dispute between head and governors at Stratford had 'hit the headlines'.

It was only when parent governor elections took place in mid March that the balance of power shifted and the situation began to improve (Newham Recorder, 19 March, 1992).

Initially, some media coverage assigned racial overtones to the disharmony, but those more closely involved disputed this. Daphne Gould, one of two governors appointed by the Secretary of State to help resolve the situation, denied that the problem was a racial issue:

_This is an issue over power.....I believe this is about people who have found power and don't understand the responsibility that goes with it._

(Sunday Express, 23 February, 1992)

The Independent summed up the situation:
The race question, however, is a distraction from the real issue - which is that a small group of the school's governors do not understand that they cannot run the school any way they like

(The Independent, 6 February, 1992)

Mr Balchin of the GMS Foundation, agreed that Stratford raised delicate issues and had "catapulted forward" the drawing up of effective guidelines for governors based on good practice (The Daily Telegraph, 8 February, 1992). He added, however:

I don't think they will make any difference to the Stratford situation because we have people there who are beyond reasonable dialogue.

(The Guardian 22 February, 1992)

He was at pains also to stress that:

The Grant-Maintained Schools Foundation does not want the situation at Stratford to precipitate legislation to check governors' powers. Mr Balchin said: "Independence is the very air a grant-maintained school breathes. We must be careful before suggesting that a mediating body between the governing bodies and Secretary of State is set up."

(The Times Educational Supplement, 7 February, 1992)

Similarly, Walter Ulrich, Secretary of the National Association of Governors, indicated that the organisation saw no need for further clarification of governors' powers:

The issue is not fundamentally whether the powers should be changed, the issue is whether if the powers are abused there is a remedy...

(Education, 5 June, 1992)

As early as February 1992, the Guardian reported that the Secretary of State for Education, Mr Clarke:

...is believed to be considering legislation to clarify the responsibilities of head teachers and governors at opt out schools.

(The Guardian, 22 February, 1992)

The media also picked up that the DES officials were privately advising that the school be shut down, but that Kenneth Clarke was reluctant to close it because of the 'ammunition it would
provide, just before the election, to opponents of opting out. The likely outcome, is new DES
guidelines on the roles of heads and governors in opt-out schools' (The Observer, 1 March,

In the event, guidelines were not going to be sufficient. The Secretary of State needed to be able
to remove governors who were not acting in the best interest of the school. This power came in
the 1993 Education Act section 123 - enabling him to replace core governors:

...in circumstances where the governing body has persistently failed to comply with any
statutory requirements; where any of the schools are identified in the inspection report
as failing, or likely to fail, to give an acceptable standard of education; or where the
actions or failures to act of the governing body are damaging to the provision to
education at any of the schools. This section also gives the Secretary of State the power
to fill vacancies for core governors.

(NAHT Commentary on the Education Act 1993)

The consequences of the dispute at Stratford were far reaching both in the school and at national
level. There was a view expressed that 'the ugly scene at Stratford had brought disrepute to the
GM sector' (The Times Educational Supplement, 23 April, 1999).

It has highlighted the confusion over the role and responsibilities of head teachers,
school governors and local education authorities, not merely in grant-maintained
schools but in all state schools.

(The Guardian, 30 May, 1992)

At school level, actions taken, for example in financial management, had to be unravelled and
duties not carried out had to be undertaken. With the departure of some of the governors involved
in the dispute, one member of the PTA said:

It leaves us free to run the school and pick up the mess they've left.

(The Times, 29 May, 1992)

While one of the appointed governors commented:

There is an enormous backlog of work which has simply been left untouched.

(Newham/Docklands Recorder, 2 April 1992)
Relationships with the LEA

Relationships between the school and LEA did not improve after it became grant-maintained:

Co-operation between Newham Council and grant-maintained Stratford School will be reduced to the legal minimum.

(Newham/Docklands Recorder, 13 June, 1991)

The school fully intended to make use of its new found opportunity to buy in the best possible services outside Newham, for example, it bought in personnel services, including payroll facilities, from Lincolnshire County council:

As discussed I am pleased to enclose for your consideration the renewal contract for the provision of PERSONNEL SERVICES for the financial year 1st April 1992 until 31st March 1993.

(Letter to Bursar from Lincolnshire County Council, 12 March, 1992)

Attempts were made to establish courteous relationship with the authority, but an invitation to visit the school soon after it opted out was not taken up, nor were the several invitations sent to Tony Banks, Member of Parliament for the area.

It is four years since Stratford became grant-maintained and we are very disappointed that you have been unable to visit the school during that time....
I should, therefore, like to extend yet another invitation to you to come and meet staff, pupils and parents at Stratford......

(Letter from head to Tony Banks MP, 12 May, 1995)

When the school was incorporated on 1st April 1991, there were just 190 pupils. The school's survival was dependent on a successful pupil recruitment campaign to boost the September intake. Approaches to local primary schools were not successful:

Mrs Snelling used to write, out of courtesy, to the primary school of any prospective pupil. Recently, and with increasing frequency, she has heard back that the child's parents have suddenly changed their minds - under pressure from the primary school - and no longer wished to come to Stratford.

(Daily Mail, 24 July, 1991)
As well as advertising in the local and surrounding areas, 40,000 leaflets were distributed and contacts were made with local mosques and temples. Graham Lane, Deputy Chair of Newham's Education Committee, had his own views about these tactics which he repeatedly and vociferously stated:

Distributing 40,000 leaflets or constantly making false claims will not convince people that Stratford can provide as broad and balanced education as council schools with stable and experienced staff....

In the end Stratford GMS will fail because it cannot deliver a proper education.

(Newham/Docklands recorder, 27 June, 1991)

Newham countered the school's attempts at recruitment with letters to parents:

Newham education chiefs have been accused of scare tactics in a new twist to the row over grant-maintained Stratford school.


When the school made representation to the DES, the Secretary of State stepped in:

A stern missive to Mr Lawless (Newham's Director of Education) yesterday from Mr Clarke's office said his reference to closure was likely to cause 'considerable anxiety and distress'.... The Secretary of State feels that this unfair pressure on parents must be removed.'

(Daily Mail, 25 July, 1991)

The school felt the need to complain to the DFE on more than one occasion about letters sent by the LEA to parents about Stratford. In March, 1993, a prospective parent who had already received written confirmation of a place for his child at Stratford in September, was sent the following letter by the LEA:

Further to your application for STRATFORD School.
It has not been possible at this stage to meet your first preference for a secondary school placement for (pupil's name), since the school is currently oversubscribed.
A place has therefore been allocated at FOREST GATE school.

(Letter from Director of Education, Newham, to prospective Stratford School parent, March, 1993)
The LEA's response was regret for 'the administrative error'. (Letter from Director of Education, Newham to DFE, 22 April, 1993)

Parents of children at the school were told that their children could no longer attend Newham Academy of Music:

Pupils have been banned from the local music academy, even though their parents help finance it through their local taxes, and they are no longer welcome at the official "outdoor pursuits" centre.

(The Sunday Times, 28 July, 1991)

Part of the hostility felt by the local authority was prompted by the fact that its plans for reorganisation which involved the closing of two schools, one of which was Stratford, and building a new one in the south of the borough where there were none, were blocked when Stratford was allowed to opt out. Stephen Timms, Leader of the Council, Newham, wrote in a letter to the papers about the effect of Stratford trying to avoid closure by opting out and the government allowing it to do so:

That action, and the government's surprising approval of it, undermined a process which the government itself had directed the council to take.

(Letter from The Leader of the Council, Newham to The Sunday Times, 4 August, 1991)

This was not an isolated case as Labour MP, Stephen Byers, former chairman of the CLEA, indicated:

Many authorities have given up trying to remove surplus places by reorganisation because of the GM loophole.

(The Times Educational Supplement, 25 June, 1993)

1993, however, heralded another government shift of position in its GM policy:

...in future, schools under threat of closure, and particularly those with surplus capacity would not normally be allowed to opt out, education junior minister Eric Forth tacitly admitted......that mistakes had been made in the past....

(The Times Educational Supplement, 25 June, 1993)
Diversity and parental choice

Stratford's proposal for acquisition of GM status states:

*Grant-Maintained Stratford School will be more responsive to the aspirations that parents have for their children........
There is, for parents no effective choice of school.....We wish to offer this choice...*

(Letter accompanying Stratford's proposal for acquisition of GM status, 23 March, 1990)

Parental involvement in the campaign for Stratford to opt out was very limited. The need for a second ballot, the low turn out of just over 50 per cent, and the narrow margin in the final result, testify to this:

*Votes cast in favour of an application for GMS - 349
Votes cast against an application for GMS - 331*

(Stratford proposal for acquisition of GM status 23 March, 1990)

What parents really wanted was to keep the school open. It was this desire that the GM campaigners focused on and used to produce the petition which went to Downing Street and which may have carried some sway with Margaret Thatcher.

*Stratford School campaigners delivered a petition opposing the school's closure to Downing Street on Thursday.....More than 1,300 people signed the petition which supports moves by rebel governors and teachers.*

(Newham/Docklands Recorder, 24 May, 1990)

However, parents did play a significant role in supporting the head in the years following incorporation, in the emerging problems within the governing body. The difficulties came to a head when Mr Shaida became chair of governors. He was also a parent of a child at the school. He maintained that parents should have more say and was resentful of:

*....what he sees as the hypocrisy of ministers in promoting parent power and the status of governors, and then interfering when they do not like what a group of Asian governors is doing.*

(The Independent, 6 February, 1992)
While Mr Shaida had the support of some parents, others recognised that the issue was not about race but personal ambition.

*Prem Sagoo, whose son, Ravinder, 11 is in his first year at the school, is adamant that the governors are not representing the whole community. “One or two governors think they own the whole school”, he says.*

(The Independent, 6 February, 1992)

Parents watched the dispute unfold in anger:

*Angry parents feel powerless over the dispute - and they are.*

(The Daily Telegraph, 8 February, 1992)

Despite being denied the right to form a parent teacher association by the governing body and the right to meet at the school, a group of parents held the inaugural meeting at the local church. The leaflet advertising the inaugural meeting of Stratford School PTA (3 February, 1992) announced:

*Some members of the School governing body have sought to deny us that opportunity and the right to form a PTA.....*

At this meeting, a vote of no confidence in the governing body was taken and the acting chairman of the PTA wrote to Kenneth Clarke:

*A resolution calling for the resignation of Mr S and Mr S with his supporters on the Governing body, was passed with a hundred percent majority in favour.*

(Letter to the Secretary of State from the Chair of the Stratford School Association, 6 February, 1992)

There was a palpable sense of frustration and an interesting reflection on the opting out process expressed by the chair of the new Parent Association:

*We feel that we have been used....First of all we were used in the campaign to help the school become independent, and now they want to use us to change the nature of the school. We needed to form a body which could stand up to these people.*

(The Sunday Telegraph, 23 February, 1992)
A further important role was played by parents in shifting the balance of power in Mrs Snelling’s favour when two parent governor vacancies were filled with her supporters:

*Two new governors elected at trouble-torn Stratford school have given their backing to head teacher Anne Snelling....the parents’ ballot, held last week, could tip the balance of power in her favour.*

(Newham Recorder, 19 March, 1992)

Parents had hoped for a better education for their children:

*We fought not merely to prevent a good school from closure, but for a better education for our children, which we felt the local education authority was unable to provide.....*  
(Letter to the Secretary of State from the Chair of the Stratford School Association, 6 February, 1992)

The school was providing a choice for parents in so far as it was not a school run by the local education authority, but in terms of offering something new this was not necessarily the case. As the school documentation indicated, there was an emphasis on tradition and traditional values. Much was made of the school’s former glory and achievements as a grammar school in the school’s documentation, such as its mission statement and the headteacher’s personal statement for OFSTED inspectors, 1993.

*The school’s origins date from 1894*

**THE PAST:** Stratford School was the *first maintained school in West Ham* in 1906

**THE PRESENT:** Stratford is the *first grant-maintained school in east London*

**THE FUTURE:** Stratford will be the *first school in the country to develop a Business Technology and Training Centre*

As the chair of governors wrote:

*Parents like our traditional approach to uniform, discipline and behaviour.*  
(Letter from Mark Prisk, chair of governors, to Gillian Shephard, Secretary of State, 26 August, 1994)
With regard to educational provision, the school planned to create a business and technology centre at one of the school's two sites. Its curriculum planning put emphasis on the teaching of technology and a colour leaflet was produced explaining the school's plans and attempts to attract business sponsors:

From September 1992... the Lower school site will become a business and Technology Centre, where each student will spend one full day a week......

(Stratford GM School Business and Technology Centre leaflet, 1992)

It twice successfully bid for a grant under the Technology Schools Initiative set up by the government, but its plans to become a technology college had to be put on hold when the school went into special measures.

Following the OFSTED report, it was made clear to us by DFE officials that this route (Technology College status) was not open to us while classified as a school requiring special measures.

(Draft school development planning document, 14 June, 1995)

Stratford's plans to specialise were largely thwarted and, in essence, Stratford was offering much the same as other schools. Like many other GM schools, emphasis on traditional values, school uniform and past academic standards, together with a drive towards technology, were its key notes - perhaps parents felt that this was different from what was being offered in other Newham schools.

...it is probably one of the few schools in Newham where children can be sure of a proper education, free of disruptive strikes and council interference

(Letter from parent to Newham/Docklands Recorder, 13 June, 1991)

**Inspection and school improvement**

The school's ability to deliver a quality education for pupils had been questioned both before and after it became grant-maintained. The struggle with the LEA ensured poor resourcing, insufficient teachers, few pupils and no records:
The school had almost to start from scratch, not knowing until the last moment how many pupils and staff it would have on 1 April 1991.

(Tim Eggar, Minister of Education, Parliamentary debate, 2 March, 1992)

The situation was compounded by the problems within the governing body which diverted energy and funding, together with prospective teachers, away from pupils' education.

Jack Straw had urged the government to send in inspectors:

Jack Straw, Labour's education spokesman, last night demanded in the Commons that a team from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Schools should be sent in to the school immediately and publish a report.

(The Independent, 3 March, 1992)

In fact, HMI did visit the school on at least three occasions after its incorporation. In an attempt to gauge the effect of the difficulties within the governing body on pupils and staff, during their visit on 24 March, 1992, HMI sought evidence of rates of staff and pupil absence. The information provided by the school clearly indicated an adverse effect on pupils' learning:

*There has been a significant change in the level of attendance, on average, by some 4% across the whole school. This change has been more marked in the upper school where:*

1. The students are more aware of some of the political motives which surround the confrontations
2. The students witnessed some of the more outrageous acts.

(Report provided by school for HMI visit, 24 March, 1992)

Concern was expressed by HMI about the school's viability, and after two visits, the school was put into a serious concern category. On their subsequent visit to the school in March, 1993, however, they noted that some improvements had been made:

*...on the evidence of that visit the school was no longer a cause for serious concern but nevertheless was still a cause for concern.*

(Letter from Anthea Millett, Director of Inspection, to chair of governors, 23 June, 1993)
In the Summer of 1993, only 4 per cent of pupils achieved A-C grades at GCSE and the school came close to bottom in the first of the government's national league tables. This was a tangible and measurable outcome of the school's struggles. Shortly after, the school was notified that it was going to be one of the schools to be included in the first cohort of inspections under the 1993 Education Act. There was, perhaps a certain inevitability that the school would 'fail' its inspection under the circumstances; it had not had a sufficient period of normality to address the educational issues. The head wrote to this effect in a letter she addressed to Prime Minister, John Major:

When appointed head of Stratford School in 1991, just as it was about to become grant-maintained, it was a school of 190 pupils with almost insurmountable problems, yet publicly it was being heralded by government officials as a GM flagship. In reality, it was inevitable that the school would fail the OFSTED inspection in November 1993 under those circumstances.

(Letter from head to the Prime Minister, 20 November, 1995)

Stratford became the second secondary school in the country and the first GM school, to enter special measures and experience the government's naming and shaming policy. The school found itself once again under the glare of the media and it was yet again the cause of acute embarrassment to the government on two counts:

The first failing school to be identified by the new teams of independent inspectors is likely to be one of the Government's flagship grant-maintained schools......
The prospect that Stratford School in Newham, East London, could require special action will embarrass John Patten, the Education Secretary. Not only has he insisted that such schools raise standards, but also he does not have the power to send in a so-called hit squad.

(The Times Educational Supplement, 10 December, 1993)

The head wrote of the inspection process:

While the OFSTED inspection undoubtedly concentrated the mind, the public label of failing school put all those connected with the school under incredible and sustained pressure and kept us very much in the public eye.

(Prattford School's submission for Investor in People recognition, 1996)

HMI visits occurred regularly and concentrated on different aspects of the school each time. The first monitoring visit occurred in June 1994, amid staff redundancy procedures to restructure the
school's management, and noted, not surprisingly, low staff morale. In response, the chair of governors wrote:

...since the action plan came into effect...every deadline.....has been met and the governors have restructured the management...One result of this determination to press ahead was the low morale reported by HM Inspectors.

(Response to first HMI visit by Mark Prisk, chair of governors to Gillian Shephard, Secretary of State, 26 August, 1994)

The Secretary of State expressed her disappointment at the slow progress and took action:

_The Secretary of State has therefore decided to exercise her power under section 67 of the Education Act 1993 to appoint an additional governor._

(Letter from DFE to chair of governors, 12 September, 1994)

Following the second HMI visit, the Secretary of State responded in January 1995:

_I am writing to inform you that she is not minded to use her power to replace first governors....
_The Secretary of State notes the improvements at the school and looks forward to further progress._

(Letter from DFE to chair of governors, 3 January, 1995)

The third monitoring visit prompted, as with all visits, a detailed response from the senior management and governors. The school did not feel that there was recognition of progress and questioned the validity of the limited evidence base:

_I cannot emphasise strongly enough my grave concern about the nature of these HMI visits...
_I feel that the whole process is flawed and debilitating......._

_Being critical of the HMI's visit and comments, may seem defensive and negative, but I would stress that if the evidence base for their judgements is not secure neither are the judgements themselves, nor the ensuing responses and actions which come from this report_

(Letter from head to chair of governors in response to HMI third monitoring visit and report, 7 April, 1995)
Ironically, the school was featured in March 1995 in a publication of an HMI report on Good Practice in Secondary Design and Technology:

Good practice in secondary Design and Technology publication

I am most grateful to you for your help with my visit to look at work in Design and Technology and for the subsequent photographs sent to me.......You will be pleased to see your work mentioned in the publication.

(Letter to head from HMI, 3 March, 1995)

Progress, however, was not seen to be sufficient. Under the 1993 Education Act, an LEA school deemed to be failing could be taken over by an Education Association, but in the inconceivable event of a failing GM school, all that the Secretary of State could do was to remove and/or replace some of the governing body. In a press release, Eric Forth, the Minister, announced:

The most recent report from OFSTED shows that ....the school has shown no signs of improvement since it was first found to be failing eighteen months ago.

This persistent failure to provide an acceptable standard of education cannot be tolerated. My rt hon Friend is, therefore exercising her power to remodel the governing body....and is arranging for the appointment of four new governors.

(Department for Education News, 5 May, 1995)

One replaced the chair of governors who had resigned, two filled existing governor vacancies and the fourth was appointed as an additional governor. The significance of the move was not lost on the media:

Stratford School.... is the first to have such changes forced upon it since new rules on failing schools were introduced 18 months ago.

(The Independent, 6 May, 1995)

The new governors barely had time to visit and become acquainted with the school before the summer holidays. In August, the school's percentage of pupils achieving five or more A*-C grades at GCSE rose to 28:
Stratford grant-maintained school, under threat of closure for failing to provide an adequate education, now has better exam results than eight of its neighbours in the London Borough of Newham.

(The Times Educational Supplement, 24 November, 1995)

Nevertheless - at the very time when the government had been seen to take a tough stance over Hackney Downs School, firstly by sending in the first education association and then closing it - the government needed to show that it was prepared to be equally tough with GM schools:

Announcing the closure of Hackney Downs School......Mr Squire vowed that he would show no favour to any grant-maintained school when it came to reviewing the progress of other failing schools on his failure list.

(Education, 17 November, 1995)

In December, HMI visited the school again and Stratford, subsequently, was taken out of special measures. The government felt vindicated by its actions. The Education and Employment Secretary welcomed the news. While she acknowledged that:

Clearly the school's higher GCSE results this summer were no flash in the pan

She also added:

The improvement owes much to the significant role played by the additional governors appointed.

(Newham/Docklands Recorder, 13 December, 1995)

Others connected with the school had a different view and felt that progress was being made all along by staff and governors, but was not being recognised. The chair of governors, Yakub Umer, a parent, commented two months later after the school was removed from special measures:

What has happened he says is that while Stratford was grabbing all the wrong headlines, the management and staff have been working away quietly.

"We turned the corner a while back," he says. "What is nice is that at last our efforts are being recognised."

(Newham/Docklands Recorder, 10 January, 1996)

The school did demonstrate considerable improvement and ensured its viability:
Since then (November 1993 when it was put into special measures) the exam success rate has improved dramatically, with 28 per cent of candidates achieving top marks in 1995, securing Stratford's place in the top 100 list of most improved schools in the country.

(Evening Standard, 29 November, 1995)

The Times named Stratford as School of the Year in 1995:

An unheralded success, but a triumph against the odds.

(The Time, 26 December, 1995)

Her majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools wrote to the head, prior to publication of his Annual Report for the academic year 1995/6:

In the report I will be identifying a number of schools that are achieving high standards. I will also acknowledge the significant improvements that your school has made and will be stating that I am confident of continuing improvement. I thought you would wish to know and I send my congratulations to you and your staff.

(Letter to head from Mr Woodhead, HMCI, 24 January, 1997)

In 1996, the school gained Investor in People status.

The accolade was presented by London East Training and Enterprise Council as part of the Investors in People scheme

(Newham Recorder, 16 October, 1996)

Pupil numbers rose steadily, as indicated in the school's successful submission for a National Training award in 1996, from 190 in April 1991 to over 700 in September 1997.

In February, 1997, the school was presented with an achievement award by education minister, Robin Squires. The inscription reads:

This vase was presented by the Schools Minister, Robin Squire, on 11th February, 1997 to acknowledge the remarkable recovery made by Stratford School over the previous three years.
GCSE results continued to improve, the national performance tables showing the percentage of pupils gaining five or more A*-C grades rising to 40 in 1997. In HM Chief Inspector of Schools' annual report for 1998, Stratford was listed in the top 41 improving secondary schools (The Times Educational Supplement, 12 February, 1999).

Summary

Like many of the schools which had opted out early on, Stratford's campaigners chose the GM route to avoid closure and this prompted a bitter battle, both within the school and with the LEA. It effectively blocked the LEA's reorganisation plans and relationships remained sour for the rest of the decade. The decision to allow the school to opt-out was open to considerable criticism. Many felt that it was a political decision taken irrespective of the warning that the school was not strong enough to survive. The extent of parental support and involvement in the campaign to opt out was minimal, but clearly many did want the school to stay open. Parents did, however, play a much more significant role in the years following the school's incorporation, during the emerging difficulties within the governing body. Relationships between head and governors presented some difficulties in other schools, but the severity of the situation at Stratford forced the Secretary of State to intervene and exposed the loopholes in the law concerning the GM policy. Events at Stratford demonstrated that government rhetoric about GM schools delivering improved standards in education was not necessarily true. Pupils' learning was affected by the circumstances following opting out and it took four years before standards improved significantly. While parents felt that Stratford offered an alternative to other schools in Newham, a local education authority at the bottom of the league tables for pupil achievement, little that Stratford offered was innovative or radically different.
Chapter Five

The case study: interviews

‘As soon as it had been granted approval, it began to unravel.’

(Interviewee 4)

‘I saw a school that was demoralised.... because of the very sad battle that had been fought over it.’

(Interviewee 5)

Whereas the documentary evidence is presented by theme, in order to provide a more focused perspective of each of the aspects of the GM policy being examined, the interviews are presented individually to give witness evidence on what was happening at this time.

The interviews

The individuals or groups were selected initially because of the detail they could provide on the opting out process and its effects at Stratford School, secondly because of the different perspectives and range of information they could offer and thirdly because of their willingness to be interviewed. As a consequence, interviews with the following people were conducted and taped, all by the researcher, with the exception of the pupil interviews, which were carried out by a senior member of staff for reasons explained in chapter three:

1. one of the teacher governors involved in the initial decision for the school to opt out and in the subsequent campaign;
2. a teacher union representative who chose to stay at the school after it became grant-maintained and later became a teacher governor when the school had opted out;
3. the senior laboratory technician who was one of the key GM campaigners and who later became clerk to the governing body at the time of opting out;
4. one of the associate directors of the Grant-Maintained Schools Trust at the time of Stratford’s opting out;
5. a foundation governor, an ex-headteacher, who joined the governing body in 1993;
6. the deputy head teacher appointed in April 1991;
7. four groups of Year 11 pupils who were the first cohort of students to go through the school after it became grant-maintained.

The first four interviews

The first four interviews deal principally with the opting out experience, which had serious repercussions on all the other four areas of focus of this thesis. They include insight into the nature of the governing body, relationships with the LEA and role of parents. While the first three interviewees present what happened from within the school, the fourth interview offers an external perception from someone who could set Stratford’s situation against that of other schools opting out at the time.

Interview 1

This interviewee had been a teacher at Stratford School since 1981 and was there at the time of the reorganisation proposals. He was one of the proponents and a key instigator of the opting out process. He later became a teacher governor. This interviewee was central to what happened. The interview was conducted in December 1996.

He explains that the LEA had published plans to close Stratford School in the early eighties. The staff opposed the closure year after year. There was almost no parental involvement. Plans were put back and the decision was deferred; but eventually by 1989, the authority had made a firm decision and the appropriate notice of closure was posted at the school. Most of the staff seemed resigned to this:

> It was at this time, that the legislation introducing grant-maintained schools had just become effective and the first GM schools were getting approval.

It is he who suggested that the only way in which the school could be saved was through applying for grant-maintained status, but there was absolutely no support for this:

> In fact, at the staff association meeting when it was discussed, there was only one vote in flavour. The vast majority of staff were opposed and other staff, most of those who subsequently transferred, abstained.
He explains the lack of support:

Likely reasons for the opposition stemmed from the NUT opposition. Most of the staff belonged to the NUT, and it was union policy to oppose GM schools in general.

His reasons for proposing opting out are quite clear:

I felt that we could do one of two things. We could either threaten grant-maintained status and get the authority to change their mind......or simply go forward with it and actually obtain grant-maintained status and in that way keep the school open.

It was only when he was approached privately by one of the governors, an outreach teacher at the school - to see if he was interested in joining a campaign which was going to be very largely parents, given that the staff clearly were not interested - that the process began. He makes it clear that parents were neither strongly involved, nor wanting anything really other than for the school to stay open:

That was the point from which the campaign started really, except it became very apparent that parents was only just plural....... An application had to be made and clearly the governors were not going to make it, but the Act provided for parents to bypass governors. That was very easy. If you ask people to sign their name to keep a school open, almost everybody signs....so triggering the ballot was effortless.

It (the first ballot) just happened very quietly and the turn out was extremely low, but there was actually a majority against GM status.

Since there had been less than a fifty per cent turn out, however, a second ballot had to be held:

....(in the second ballot) the actual result was a very narrow win for grant-maintained status, possibly some ten votes.

The way in which the campaign was fought by both sides is described:

First, there was the campaign by the relatively small number of people who wanted GMS, which had grown from three to about eight. They obtained an alphabetical list of parents' names and addresses which one is entitled to request and then proceeded to re-allocate the list into streets so that parents could be visited...... The campaign on
behalf of the staff, who were now becoming more organised, was through the pupils. They were encouraging the pupils to tell their parents that they should vote against grant-maintained status because it would be a bad thing for all sorts of reasons and the existing staff would leave anyway.

Reaction to the second ballot was perhaps understandable:

In the circumstances, it was not unreasonable for the authority and everybody else to think that there was no chance of the government approving this and the signals that we were getting from the DFE at this time were the same.... All the staff and senior staff (management) did not want to stay.... Hence the LEA were not too concerned at this stage.

Nothing, however, could happen until a submission on behalf of the school had been made and this raised the question as to who was going to prepare it:

The legislation is obviously framed in a way in which it’s assumed that the governing body would be in support. I don’t think it had ever crossed anybody’s mind that there would be a situation in which the governing body in fact would not be in support....

So here there was a governing body which, barring two members, was opposed to opting out, being expected to produce the school’s submission for GM status....

It is interesting to learn how that submission was actually produced in light of the governing body’s opposition:

What they actually did was to form a GM submission sub-committee consisting of those two governors, one teacher governor and one parent governor, in favour of opting out. In practice, this subcommittee delegated it to myself and (someone who was a supply teacher at the school). They put it forward as their own document and the governing body submitted it. So the DFE received the submission from the governing body by March 1990.

The help provided by the GMSC is described:

We did not really write it from scratch. The Grant-Maintained Schools’ Centre (GMSC) presented us with a submission from another school in Lancashire and simply said
'Copy this out and just change the names'. Our original contact had been someone called Andrew Turner (Choice in Education), but he dropped out of the picture after some time and we had contact with more senior people like Bob Balchin. He was the person, by and large, who gave us guidance on what to do and said he would do what he could for us.

Even so, the submission which fell into two sections, presented a major difficulty, which most other GM schools did not have to face:

The hard part was completing the page for the governing body because the form could only be forwarded if it actually had a prospective governing body and there wasn’t one. There were only two governors of the existing governing body who wished to be on the new governing body. The rest of the governors declined. This meant that there was a large number of vacancies, some fifteen or sixteen, which had to be filled. This presented a problem......

Finding the foundation governors was very difficult. Representatives of the local business community were sought and found. But...by and large, every time we found somebody, they withdrew.

He suspects that the LEA were responsible:

......the local authority obviously put the story around that if you were in business in this area, it is not a good idea to be on the governing body, not of Stratford Grant-Maintained School...... There was no evidence of what was happening but strong suspicion.

This explained why the vacancies were filled with the people we had. They were largely people who were not in business. In many cases, they were unemployed, people who were beyond the reach of the local authority....

Response to the submission seemed a foregone conclusion:

It looked fairly obvious that the DFE advice to the minister was to reject the application.

This led to a change in tactic by the opt-out campaigners:
We felt that the only way round this was for the DFE to be overruled politically. Either the Secretary of State would reject the advice of his officials or the Prime Minister would exert pressure on her Secretary of State. Advice from various people in the Tory Party who were making soundings on our behalf suggested that attention should be directed at Margaret Thatcher.

Thus our strategy changed. It was felt that some expression of local support was needed, so a petition was arranged. Four thousand signatures were collected of people who, supposedly, by putting their names on this petition were saying that they wished the school to become grant-maintained. Of course, in reality they didn't wish any such thought. They were simply being asked to sign their names and so they did.

Perhaps the suggestion that parents and the local community really did want the school to opt out had the desired effect on a government advocating the importance of parental choice:

It achieved, however, its purpose it seems because the GMS people were then saying that we had the Prime Minister on our side. She was putting pressure on the Secretary of State....But the DFE officials were still advising against.

The crucial role of the GMSC is revealed:

In the meantime, people like Bob Balchin were indicating behind the scenes that he thought we were going to swing it.....There was one proviso though. An adviser would be produced and....if we were agreeable to this.......the decision was ours. So naturally, of course, we agreed......

There seems little doubt that the DFE were overruled..... Sources indicate that The Secretary of State overruled the officials for two reasons; one, Margaret Thatcher was asking 'Why not?' and secondly, Bob Balchin was saying, 'I've been there. I've spoken to these people. I've put somebody in that we can trust.'

The LEA intensified its action. They immediately launched a legal action against the decision which was heard in the High Court in late December 1990. At the same time, they endeavoured to ensure that the school was either closed through lack of numbers or would be unsuccessful as a GM school:
...the LEA had already been taking measures into their own hands in other ways. During the Autumn term, they had begun to remove pupils from the school. They had largely done this before the legal action. Possibly, they did not have much confidence in the outcome of the court case, possibly, they were determined to close the school irrespective.....

Of the 750 pupils, something like 500 agreed to leave. They seemingly were offered just about anything they wanted. For example, places were now available at schools previously inaccessible. There was tremendous advice from most of the teaching staff that pupils should transfer. If they did not return their transfer forms signed by parents, they were questioned and sent home with another form....

It is thought that all these arrangements were made pending the court case and as soon as the outcome was known, they went ahead and transferred the 500 pupils. So, in January, the school shrank by two thirds.

Not only must those months of tension and uncertainty have been very difficult for pupils and parents, the atmosphere within the school became increasingly unpleasant:

Once the approval was given in October, the atmosphere at the school became very unpleasant right through to incorporation in April. Some people were unpleasant, others became very unpleasant. Violence was threatened, personal possessions were damaged.

Interview 2

The second interviewee was also a long established teacher at the school, who decided to stay at Stratford when it became grant-maintained, but had not been particularly active in the campaign. Appointed to the school in 1974, he was the NAS/UWT representative. The interview was conducted in October 1996.

I was the NAS union rep....The influence of the left wingers was quite strong with the majority. So there were vociferous noises made against grant-maintained.....

He talks about his own reasons for staying with the school when it opted out:
I was quite sure I had made the right decision. I had nothing to lose. Certainly was not a political decision...I didn't really know anything about GM........

There was no way I was going to another school in Newham, because.....I had no faith in the authority.

He refers to measures taken to persuade pupils to change schools:

It was a question of 'All those who are going to stay after it goes grant-maintained, stand up'. And they were questioned. Obvious pressure being put on them. They were told stories about what would happen after it went grant-maintained by staff....... They went to the extent of bussing pupils down to the new school to look round. During school time, not with parents, just staff.

Equipment went missing:

......I never saw any Maths or PE equipment go, but I heard that electrical bits and pieces were going........

He talks about English books being cleared out:

Quite where it all went I have no idea. Kitchen equipment must have gone during the Christmas holiday.

He too mentions the atmosphere in the school during the opting out process:

...at that stage, people were applying for jobs and trying not to get involved in the unpleasantness in the staff room and not to have people on their back, I suppose. There were a couple of incidents when they picked on individuals.... They certainly had a rough ride.

Interview 3

The third interview took place with a member of the support staff, who had been a student at the school when it was a grammar school and had been employed there since 1965. In 1975, he became senior laboratory technician, was the non-teaching member of the governing body and
one of the four key players in the opt out process. He later became the clerk to the governing body. The interview was conducted in October 1996.

He is keen to explain the motivation for the opt out campaign:

To be honest everybody, with the exception possibly of one or two people, was strong to keep the school open..... people used to say that GM is just a Tory thing, but for us it wasn't... it was a mechanism that we could use.

He confirms that the management of the school, the majority of the teaching staff and the governing body did not want the school to opt out. As indeed the LEA did not:

Someone from the council, our manager, came down, talked to us about closure, talked to us about GM in a very negative way...... As it seemed that 'the option to opt-out' idea was getting quite popular, then the pressure started. I was threatened with the sack for talking about GM.

The way in which the campaign was conducted is described:

Newham council would write letters to parents and there were four or five of us with no facilities...So to counter the negative things, when they sent a letter out, we.....bought some space in the Newham Recorder and replied......

The council had done a lot beforehand. They had moved whole blocks of people out.....They said kids could not take their exams here.

Lots of people came under all sorts of pressures and threats and encouragements from the council to move away...... But non-teaching people were rock solid about keeping the school open as a GM school. I think the teachers....it's difficult for me to say because I'm not a teacher....I think they came under more pressure, they had more to lose.

There were a number of teachers here who were quite young, quite new to teaching and very left wing. They were very anti-GM school. If I walked around the school I was pushed, I was shouted at....The intimidation just made you feel stronger.

He refers to a meeting at the DFE:
...not long before the decision was made, a group of us were invited to see a minister at the department.....It was an informal, but secret meeting, with several people from the department there. They just asked us how we would manage the school.

After the decision, there appeared to be a split within the new governing body, which hinged on the choice of the head and about which the DFE appeared to express concern:

Just after the school had the decision, myself and a couple of the others became outsiders then. That was sad because we'd all really worked very hard and then to turn on ourselves was one of the worst things that could have happened.... I'm sure there was a lot of talk that the three of us were not involved in, as to manipulate it so that one of the campaigners could be made the head teacher. We were quite worried about that.....They (Department for Education) were really angry and worried.

Interview 4

The interviewee was appointed as associate director of the GMST in May 1989 and was able to give her perceptions of Stratford's opting out process. The interview was conducted in October 1996)

She explains her role:

We at the GMST only worked with schools once they were given approval. We always visited schools once they were approved. We (she and a colleague) went to Stratford together in the Summer (1990).

Her memories of that visit and the Stratford situation follow:

When we went out (to Stratford) on that August, we were expecting it to be just another ordinary school. But it wasn't......We were just advising them on what they should be doing during this transition period, but there was controversy because they were such a funny group of people. It didn't have a head. Certainly, there wasn't anybody from the senior staff who had anything to do with it......We were concerned that they should get the right things in place. But they were the only people we had contact with. So we just had to trust them that they were going to do it.
Her perception of why the school was allowed to opt out is clear:

_They let it go through because they basically wanted any schools to opt out. As soon as it had been granted approval, it began to unravel._

Clearly there were concerns, not only in the months leading up to the decision to allow the school to opt out, but increasingly so after it became grant-maintained, such that Bob Balchin, as he was then, was asked to get involved:

_Over those months, there were more and more concerns....there couldn't be a school seen to fail. And that was why Bob was told (by the DFE) you've got to sort this one out. That was the only school he did that......There were other schools where there was concern but Stratford was the only one.....because of the political issues. They were really worried._

There was a clear policy decision made that Bob Balchin would handle Stratford:

_When we had our meetings, Stratford was always on the agenda....its progress. Because there was real concern and Bob had taken it on, we were told about it but weren't involved. It was all to be done through Bob. It was clear policy that he would handle it and we were not to get involved. But we talked about it in terms of passing it on and making sure it didn't happen again._

**The other group of interviews**

These interviews deal with issues principally concerning the role of governors, inspection and school improvement.

**Interview 5**

The fifth interviewee is an ex-headteacher who joined the governing body as a foundation governor in 1993. As such, he provides an internal view of events since his appointment. The interview was conducted in December 1996.

He describes the school at the point when he joined the governing body:
I saw a school that was demoralised... because of the very sad battle that had been fought over it. You can't have battles like that, you can't have court cases and you can't have the sort of high level of publicity that occurred without an effect on the place. I saw a school that was in a bad state indeed.

He refers to Stratford's experience of being identified as a school failing to give its pupils an adequate education and, consequently, requiring special measures. Clearly, he views this particular government tactic as:

....a blunt instrument

which is negative and:

puts everyone into a negative frame of mind.

He objects to the label 'failing schools':

Education is not about failure and if special measures are about failure then it won't do. There must be better ways of dealing with these things..... We have to refine these things in ways that in the end bring them into a much more positive system than it is at present.

I don't think it (public branding) helps the school in the end, because...it seems to me, looking both from the outside at one point and from the inside in the last four or five years, you've had to overcome that as well as internally what was wrong. ...You've had to cope with a fantastic amount of stuff from the public domain and press. I don't see that that is necessary or helpful and it just diverts your energies and the energies of the senior staff.

As chair of the school's interview panel, he recalls how a new appointee withdrew his acceptance of a post within days of a negative public announcement about the school's progress by Eric Forth, the Minister of Education:

It's bound to happen.....a lot of people are going to ask why on earth they should work there. What about my career? Is it going to be affected? None of that is going to help... in putting right what's wrong educationally or what's deficient educationally.
In his opinion, the DfEE governors were not necessary:

*Putting in (DfEE appointed) governors, I don’t think does anything at all. In fact, I think it puts the school and governors in a completely false position because people come in from all kinds of backgrounds having little to do with the actual context that the school is working in and work here for a little bit and then go off and the school still has not built up its base in the community with governors who are really going to be part of it because they want to be part of it. They live here, they work, they’ve got children here. That’s what’s needed.*

*I know they bring a great deal of expertise, but not all of it is helpful either..... they don’t necessarily bring things that are needed.*

*At the last meeting, when we had got one or two new governors present who are people from this area, they made no contribution at all because they were over-awed completely. Now that situation will continue until it’s changed....It depressed me that that was the position.....So I don’t think that implanting people like that is a good system.*

On the relationship between head and governors, he comments:

*The relationship between head and governors must be one of full co-operation. You can’t legislate for that, but what you can do is remove the position that enables powerful governors to gain far too much influence.*

He agrees that the Stratford saga is bound up in politics:

*...it became to a large extent a battle between London Borough of Newham politics and national politics of course. The school has found itself in the middle of that and it’s been no help at all.*

*Too much bureaucracy has been engendered by the special measures system, by the DfEE.*

*I was very concerned indeed at one comment at the Institute of Education conference....that indicated clearly in writing that because certain people had been put on the governing body by the DfEE, therefore special measures were over. There is no therefore about it at all.*
He gives his view of Stratford a year after the school has come out of special measures:

....you've come out of it with a school that is now clearly on the way up and that, at one time, a lot of us felt was going to be a very, very difficult job. I think at the time of the court cases, most people would have thought that this a school which is going to go under.

Now...it seems that we have a school that has faced these things, but has come through, has survived and is growing and thriving......

Interview 6

The sixth interviewee was appointed in February 1991 as the future deputy head of Stratford School when it became grant-maintained. His appointment took place the day after that of the headteacher and he worked at the school until October 1995 when he took up the headship of another GM school. The interview was conducted in March 1999.

By the time I applied for Stratford, I was convinced GM was a good idea... What GM did was to cut through LEAs who were taking an awful lot of money which should have been in schools......All schools should be funded the same, but at the GM rate.

Though a firm advocate of opting out, he recognises the pitfalls which were highlighted at Stratford:

There were faults to it (GM) - Stratford probably showed up the faults more than any other school. If .....they (DES) are saying here's two and half million pounds to run a school without checking that they (the governors) are actually competent enough to do that, there's a problem. Now that didn't arise in most schools because you had your existing governing body and that turned into your GM governing body. So if there'd been financial mismanagement before, it would have been picked up on an audit at some stage. But Stratford showed that this didn't have to be the case... They had no management experience. There were no checks on the governing body.

He is critical of the training provided by the DES for senior managers and governors:
We (senior management) got called up (before incorporation) to the department (DES).......to learn how to become GM managers....That was the only training we had for it...I ended up confused....Did the entire rainbow pack in a morning.... Personnel management - what you're responsible for, what you've got to do, what you've got to sign, what you've got to return. With that, chairs of governors were expected to know what they were meant to do.

Impressions of the school on incorporation are vivid:

It was a mess. I remember going into the staffroom and finding half eaten sandwiches which had just been left there....Doors hanging off lockers. There were no records, no log of what had been bought by the school, no record keeping, no inventories, no registers.

With just 190 pupils, the school was desperate to boost numbers and much effort was devoted to recruitment.

We had to have bodies and although we interviewed pupils, often it was done to try and bring in siblings and friends as well....The LEA seemed to actively counter the school's recruitment drive, wherever they could.

He recalls the difficulties facing them:

It was a messy start. To be left with a couple of weeks before the school's open to get cover staff in, wasn't on.

The major loophole was the workforce. We weren't left with enough teachers to run the school and as children came back to us we were rushed into making appointments which we wouldn't have otherwise made. We couldn't live for ever on Australian teachers, We were acutely aware that you could not build a school on short term part time contracts....We needed a pool of experienced middle managers in shortage subjects to get us off the ground and buy some time to make suitable appointments....We didn't have time to bring in people who could learn the job, we wanted people who could come in who could do the job.... It was a problem we inherited, going into complete independence. This was not an issue the GMSC could help with, unlike possibly an LEA.
Commenting on people's motives for staying at the school when it became grant-maintained, he says:

_I doubt if there were many there who stayed because they wanted the school to be a success or believed in GM._

He talks about the difficulty of producing a suitable curriculum because there was no knowledge of how many children they were catering for, their ages or the courses they had been following until the school opened and term began:

_The first curriculum was written on the hoof.....We were putting in a pretty basic curriculum just to get something in place. Also frantic trying to get a curriculum ready for the following year._

Pupil numbers were changing daily, requiring additional classes. Pupils were arriving who did not speak English. It was a coping strategy, whilst trying to look ahead to the needs of the coming year:

_The curriculum for the following year was broadly led by staffing, the eleven who had transferred to the school when it opted out and the temporary staff._

_Then of course we had to survive on that curriculum for a year....It was all far too rushed. A recipe for disaster. HMI came in, in an inspectorial role, not advisory._

He recalls problems within the governing body occurring early on:

_Then during the first term, we had rumblings from the governors. It really came to a head in the second term after the summer holidays._

When asked why the legislation wasn't able to prevent things going wrong, he replied:

_Because it was such an extraordinary situation. Legislation was written to govern a normal school....You don't have governors who have a hidden agenda about their own standing. There were no checks. When they applied for GM status and put forward their list of governors, nobody checked to see what qualifications they had, what experience they had got of management._

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They (Stratford governors) could not see the difference between day-to-day running of the school and governors’ responsibilities.

He recalls the difficulty experienced when the head suspended a teacher governor and he came back the following day as a governor in charge of lettings. The head could do nothing about it when he came into school because:

He was there as a governor. There was no way round that. I'm not sure that the law has changed now to prevent that.

He remembers not only the difficulty in trying to remove governors, but the repeated occasions when the response from the DES to appeals for help or advice was that they were charting new territory and the civil servants did not have or know the solutions:

You could not get rid of governors, no matter how useless they were. They (DfEE) hadn't had to deal with a rebel governing body before. When phone calls were made to them saying this is happening what should we do....'Never come across that before'.... was the response.

He talks about the effect on himself:

I think it took me a long time to recover, physically as well as mentally.....I think my Stratford experience prepared me for most things in life.

Threatened by the chair of governors himself, he recalls:

Staff intimidated.....pupils threatened.

He explains how the school began to right itself:

Despite the appointment of two additional governors, the situation would not have been resolved without the parent governor elections which broke the majority on the existing governing body...altered the balance of power. When S. lost his court case against the head, he lost face publicly....in the community.

His views of the DfEE appointed governors are made clear:
The theory behind the DfEE governors I think, is very good. Unfortunately, I think that the DfEE governors we got went in with a secret agenda. They wanted to be known as the people who sorted out Stratford School and instead of helping the school, they put the school backwards because what they didn't want was to come into a school and say it's already sorted. Well done. They had to delay the fact that it had been sorted until such a time as they could take credit for it.

Group interviews

This section differs from the other interviews in that it brings together and summarises the views expressed in four group interviews with Year 11 pupils, in which they reflect on their five years of secondary schooling at Stratford. Each group consisted of three students. The composition of the four groups was as follows: three boys, three girls, two boys and one girl, two girls and one boy. These students were in the first cohort of pupils to complete five full years at the school and they provide a perspective on that period. The interviews cover a range of topics, such as the difficulties when the school opted out and the role of governors, but principally school improvement. Unlike the other interviews, these were conducted by a senior member of staff who was new to the school, rather than the researcher. These interviews took place in May 1996. Their responses have been summarised in appendix C. The interviews demonstrate that the students responded in a sensible and adult manner, were interested in their learning and capable of making shrewd assessments of the learning situation in which they found themselves. As one might expect with shared experiences, there were similarities in their responses and the stories they recalled, for example, their views about who was responsible for the school's improvement and their recall of the incident during an assembly when the head was called a racist and liar by one of the teacher governors.

They vividly recall the difficulties within the governing body some five years previously and were obviously disturbed by them. They found the incident in assembly a frightening experience, which shook them:

*It was pretty frightening.....*

*...It kind of shook me up because it's not the thing you expect in a school.*

They remember being asked to sign petitions seeking the head's removal:
...during the lessons and out of lessons...trying to get us to sign petitions. Mrs S. didn’t do that, but......the governors did.

They recall what they refer to as the bad times, how unsettled the school was, the rowing and interruptions in class, how the trouble with governors had a great effect on their learning. They talk about teachers being preoccupied with what was going on:

*When we had trouble with the governors......I can’t remember exactly when it all started, but it had a great effect on our learning.....more attention was being paid to what was going on.*

They are able to discuss in a mature fashion the quality of education they were getting when the school was first GM and are critical of the teaching. Looking back, they clearly recognised that their education was suffering and identify subjects, like maths and music, where this was the case. They agreed with the findings of the OFSTED report that the school was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education, although they did not realise this at the time.

*...at the time we didn’t know that we were missing out on what we were until now.*

They acknowledged that teaching could have been better, even though they felt that in 1993 it was better than before and was improving. Yet, equally, they realised that because of the controversy, the school had to take the teachers it could get:

*...because of the controversy not a lot of people wanted to come and teach us ....they had to take who they could get and some of them weren’t up to teaching standards.*

The pupils were aware of the stress generated by the inspection process and talk about the effect of the HMI follow up visits - teachers stressed, this sometimes being reflected in their teaching, papers flying around, getting work up to date. They recall staff working harder during that week and how they could not have kept up that pace. Nevertheless, they do feel that inspection is a good idea and the school did improve. Teaching standards improved. The school brought in new, better teachers - whereas there had been many cover teachers when they were in Year 7 - teachers who were more experienced and paid more attention to students. There were better facilities, for example, the music department and new technology centre, more stable staff, more tests and more homework.
...they're much better than the teachers we had....we get on with all the teachers we have for our subjects....before, we mainly had cover teachers, especially in Year 7.

In talking about how the improvement was achieved, they refer to the head as the driving force and staff all working together:

All the teachers working together and the head.........she was the driving force behind it.

They are less clear about the role of governors, since they felt that they hardly see them. Some felt that they stand beside the school to help collaborate and make decisions about the school's future, giving support to the head.

Clearly the media attention was distressing, constantly reading about the school's impending closure:

You read stuff in the newspapers and you see stuff on the telly and it gets you worried.

.... you got the feeling that the school was going to shut down and you don't know what you're going to do.

They were unhappy about the publicity, considering it unfair because the publicity was not all true. They recognise that the media lives off gossip and bad news, rather than reporting the good news, yet it made them determined to show the press that the school could improve:

(We were).....really upset that they were picking on us, but we were determined to show them that we could do it.

Overview of interview findings

The interviews provide insights into the problems experienced at various stages of implementation of the GM policy and its effects at school level.

Opting out

The move to opt out at Stratford School was not motivated by any ideological or party political drive. It was purely an expedient measure, a last resort to keep the school open, which
conveniently presented itself through the GM route at just the right time. Political views did, however, come to the fore and play a part during and long after the opt out process. The school was caught in the middle of a left wing local authority, left wing union members and Conservative government policy.

Most people associated with the school, those on the governing body, the senior management team and the staff, were opposed to opting out. A parental ballot had to be held twice and, even then, there was only the smallest of majorities. This was a very unusual, if not unique situation, one not envisaged by the policy makers, in which a governing body found itself submitting a proposal for GM status to which it was overwhelmingly opposed. Most thought that the application would be unsuccessful. There are strong indications that the decision to allow the school to opt out, when it came, was politically motivated rather than based on the relative merits of the proposal and that the DES, if not the Secretary of State as well, was overruled by the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. However, the motives of individuals who decided to stay, once the school opted out, were varied and often those of self interest, rather than being politically inspired.

Parents did not appear to be in favour of opting out, nor were they pro-active in the initial campaign. Parental support was acquired on the basis of their desire to keep the school open. Nevertheless, the semblance of parental support in the form of a petition delivered to Downing Street may have played a part in the school being granted GM status, in keeping with the government's advocacy of diversity and parental choice.

The struggle to opt out took its toll on those involved, not least the staff and pupils. It was an uncomfortable, unsettling and unpleasant situation, which periodically flared up into verbal and violent incidents.

Teaching unions, particularly the National Union of Teachers, were strongly opposed to the GM policy at this stage of its development. The Grant-Maintained Schools Trust and, in particular, Sir Robert Balchin, Chairman of the Grant-Maintained Schools Foundation, seem to have played a significant part in the Stratford opting out process, in terms of acting as a go-between with ministers and a facilitator for the process.

Relationships between head and governors

The Stratford events not only revealed what could go wrong in a GM school, they demonstrated what little power the law provided for the removal of governors behaving inappropriately.
Unlike other opted out schools, Stratford, on the threshold of gaining increased autonomy, did not have an established governing body which had a proven record of running a school. Splits occurred within the GM governing body within weeks of the Secretary of State's approval being given. They centred on the choice of the new head. This situation existed prior to the advertisements for the headship and before the new head appeared on the scene.

The problems within the governing body, which became highly publicised, had a disturbing and memorable effect on staff and pupils. The struggle surrounding the opting out process had already created real difficulties in terms of providing continuity of education, adequate and suitable staff and resources, and pupil numbers. The school's viability was undoubtedly in question. To be confronted with further internal strife only compounded the difficulties and prevented what was desperately needed which was a concerted and unified effort to provide a stable environment and an appropriate education for the pupils. The problems between the newly appointed head and governors spilt over into assemblies, lessons and corridors in school, outside the school gates and into the local community. The effect on the quality of their education is recognised by the pupils. They recall staff preoccupied by the problems with governors and the difficulty of getting staff to work at the school in these circumstances.

The difficulties within the governing body presented problems for the DfEE for which they did not seem to have answers and, in fact, were not resolved by the imposition of the additional governors by the DfEE. The balance of power only began to alter after the crucial elections of two parent governors. Again parents played a vital role in the school's fortunes.

Relationships with the LEA

The role that the LEA played not only delayed the process through its appeal against the decision to allow Stratford to opt out, it was almost successful in achieving its aim of closing the school by persuading pupils and parents to change schools. The LEA ensured that the school, once opted out, had few teachers, much reduced pupil numbers and inadequate resources. There are suggestions that the difficulty experienced in filling the vacancies on the GM governing body, and the resultant group which emerged, were a direct consequence of LEA hostility. The struggle to survive and be a successful school was made very difficult by events before Stratford became grant-maintained. The hostility and bitterness which the process generated between the protagonists and the LEA, not only led to a vitriolic two year battle culminating in a High Court judgement, but also had repercussions for the following decade enforcing isolation on the school.
The school could not afford to be selective in its pupil admissions. Numbers had to be increased for survival and because the school's annual maintenance grant was dependent on pupil numbers. Much time was spent on recruitment strategies, which the LEA often tried to counter.

**Inspection and school improvement**

The two year struggle to opt out, followed by another two years of difficulties within the governing body, left the school demoralised and fighting for survival. Educational standards were clearly affected. Because of the unusual circumstances surrounding the opting out of Stratford, staffing presented a major problem. Over half of the staff were temporary teachers, often from Australia, New Zealand or South Africa. Without a stable team of experienced, quality teachers, providing an acceptable standard of education proved very difficult.

Pupils' perspectives on the quality of teaching when the school opted out support this view. They were critical of teaching standards. They recall many cover staff and the preoccupation of teachers when the difficulties within the governing body erupted. They agreed with the findings of the OFSTED report which identified the school as failing to provide an acceptable standard of education. Media attention provided an unnecessary stress factor for all, especially the students who were distressed by reading of the school's closure or what they considered to be unfair publicity.

Stratford was in the first cohort of schools to be inspected by OFSTED in November 1993. The difficulties within the governing body had abated as its composition changed, but they had taken their toll. The school was found to be failing to give pupils an acceptable standard of education and went into special measures. It was the second secondary school in the country to fail and the first GM school to go into special measures. The school experienced what was to become known as the public 'naming and shaming' of a failing school and it was against this background that it had to try and turn itself around and without LEA support. Putting schools into special measures was felt to be a negative process, which did little to help the school improve. While the school clearly needed to improve, and rigorous measures are required to ensure this happens, the effect of the publicity made it harder.

DfEE governors were appointed to the governing body while the school was in special measures. While in theory the idea is sound, their value is questioned for a number of cited reasons. First, the political motive behind their imposition is raised. It was felt to be politically expedient by the then Conservative government to be seen taking action in a failing GM school and, more importantly, their action having a successful outcome. The DfEE governors were imposed in May.
1995 and the school was removed from special measures in December 1995. Secondly, it was felt that imposing DfEE governors put the school and governing body in a false position because they come from different backgrounds, stay with the school for a while but are not members of the community. There are clear suggestions that these DfEE governors, though with considerable expertise and some of them with substantial educational experience, did not necessarily bring the expertise needed at Stratford, because they were not familiar with the local context. Another consequence of their imposition is that members of the existing governing body were over-awed by them and tended not to play a full part.

Irrespective of the problems, which many thought the school would not survive, Stratford is growing and thriving.

**Diversity and choice**

There is little evidence of diversity or choice in the Stratford story. Parents at Stratford were not voting for diversity but continuity, not GM status but the school’s survival. They did not play an active part in the campaign to opt out. There is testimony to manipulation of parental support by the protagonists and they may have indirectly played a part in the decision to grant the school GM status through the petition which went to Downing Street. Parental choice in parent governor elections did, however, alter the balance of power within the governing body at a critical time.

Stratford as a grant-maintained school offered little new in curriculum terms.
Chapter Six

Analysis

'Stratford tarnished the dreams of some of the GM originators.'
(The Times Educational Supplement, 23 April, 1999)

The evidence presented in chapters four and five records aspects of the impact on one school which followed the GM route. Much of the content of the interviews is supported by the documentary analysis. Together, the evidence presents considerable insight into the unusual, possibly unique, set of circumstances surrounding the opting out of Stratford School, which accentuated the potential problems with the GM policy. The main findings of this case study are placed in context with other research work discussed in chapters one and two. The analysis is presented in relation to the five areas of focus which were selected:

- the opting out process
- the role of head and governors
- relationships with the LEA
- raising academic standards
- parental involvement - choice and diversity

Opting out

Political origins

Many countries have experienced a shift in varying degrees along the centralisation-decentralisation continuum referred to by Caldwell and Spinks (1988) with regard to the management of education. Whitty et al, 1998 argue that, in both Australia and New Zealand, governments of different political persuasion have supported reform; and even in England and Wales, where changes have been brought about by the Conservative New Right, the election of a Labour government, while signalling the end of grant-maintained schools, has kept the key elements of the reforms in place. It is not surprising, therefore, that civil servants interviewed by Fitz and Halpin (1991, p.134) claim that the GM policy was devised by politicians and their
advisers, and then passed to the DES for implementation. The concept enjoyed Prime Ministerial support (Fitz, Halpin and Power, 1993).

The interviews and documentary evidence support this. There are strong indications that the decision to allow the school to opt out, when it came, was politically motivated rather than based on the relative merits of the proposal and that the DES, if not the Secretary of State as well, were overruled by the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher:

*There seems little doubt that the DFE were overruled.*

(Interviewee 1)

The school's case was weak. Most of those involved with the struggle, including the protagonists, the LEA and DES officials, felt that the submission stood little chance of success. The timing of the submission, in March 1990, and the location of the school, were probably crucial factors in the decision. The GM campaign was in its infancy and the Conservatives were keen to promote it:

*My perception is that they let it go through because they basically wanted any schools to opt out.*

(Interviewee 4)

As Fitz et al. (1993) indicate, the government's support for, and encouragement of, GM status for schools had been full-blooded from start to finish, as indeed was the opposition which it had stirred up. Stratford, situated as it was in Labour's heartland, may have been seen as a trophy for the Tories and an embarrassment for Labour. The temptation was too great, despite the doubts. The school was caught in the middle of a left wing local authority and Conservative government policy.

The view that the decision to allow Stratford to opt out was politically driven rather than based on the strength of the school's proposal for GM status is supported by the attempts of the DES and Bob Balchin to ensure that potential problems were managed if and when the school was allowed to opt out. The role of the GMSC, particularly Bob Balchin as a go-between with ministers and facilitator of the opting out process, is revealed in the interviews and one has to question whether or not GM status would have been granted without the Trust's involvement and his assurance that all would be well.

The politics behind the decision to allow the school to opt out were revealed, both in the parliamentary debates and in the media, as was the questionable justification of the decision and
the viability of the school. Expectations were unrealistically high, enemies became intransigent and, as with all new policies/movements, there were unforeseen outcomes and consequences, which inevitably emerged and had to be addressed.

**Why schools opted out**

Thompson (1992), in her survey for the Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association [AMMA], found that the main reason for opting out was the fear of closure and reorganization. Bush et al. (1993) identified three additional main motives for seeking GM status, and argue that these differences may be due to the fact that Thompson’s work was undertaken earlier than theirs and ‘is likely to reflect the high proportion of schools in the first cohort which were subject to unwelcome change’ (p. 69). The first eighteen schools opened in September 1989 and of these, seven were simply seeking independence from their LEAs, the other eleven were facing closure, amalgamation or an unwelcome change in status.

The findings of this case study support Thompson’s research. Stratford was one of the first fifty schools to opt out and the main reason was fear of closure. While the decision to allow Stratford to opt out was undoubtedly political, the interviews and documentary evidence clearly show that those seeking GM status were not motivated by any ideological or party political drive. It was purely an expedient measure to avoid closure as a result of the LEA’s reorganisation plans. It was a last resort to keep the school open, which conveniently presented itself through the GM route at just the right time.

The decision of the former Department for Education and Science (DES) to consider applications for GM status alongside reorganization proposals, offered hope to schools facing closure and for schools, like Bankfield in Cheshire, opting out was the last resort in the battle to survive, but not their first intention. Similarly, at Stratford:

*... it was a mechanism that we could use.*

(Interviewee 3)

Indeed Halpin et al. (1992) found a direct link between a perceived or actual threat of closure and a school seeking GM status. The situation at Stratford school seems to support this.
The opting out process

While acknowledging that it is difficult to generalize about the opting out process because every school is unique, Bush et al. (1993, p. 83) identified four models of the process which relate to the internal and external, or LEA, aspects of the transition:

- internal coherence and external neutrality;
- internal conflict and external neutrality;
- internal coherence and external hostility;
- internal conflict and external hostility.

Many schools were fighting closure or reorganization plans and facing LEAs ideologically opposed to opting out. Bush et al. (1993, p. 84) maintain that the 'obvious threat posed by closure helps to unite all groups connected with the school, producing internal coherence in search of school survival'. This was evident at the two schools studied by Bush in 1989 (Bush, 1990). There was limited evidence, however, in the research carried out by Bush et al. (1993) of schools experiencing internal conflict and external hostility.

Certainly, Stratford School was fighting closure and facing an LEA ideologically opposed to opting out, but the threat of closure did not unite all groups in search of survival. In fact, here was a case of a school experiencing both internal conflict and external hostility. The interviews and documentary evidence show that Stratford was also atypical in that most people associated with the school, those on the governing body, the senior management team and the staff, were opposed to opting out:

_All the staff and (management) senior staff did not want to stay_...

(Interviewee 1)

As Rogers (1992, pp. 16-17) indicates, when describing the mechanics of the opting out process, the most common way of a ballot being initiated was by a resolution of the governing body rather than by a petition of parents submitted to the governing body. At Stratford, however, one or two protagonists managed to persuade parents who were keen to keep the school open to sign a petition, thus triggering the process. Because of the low turn out, a parental ballot had to be held twice and, even then, there was only the smallest of majorities. Such was the limited amount of support for opting out, that one has to question the wisdom of and motive behind the Secretary of
State’s decision to grant GM status. It was perhaps the Times Educational Supplement that posed the significant question which in itself questioned both the motivation behind those advocating, and the safeguards regarding, the GM policy:

A casual observer could be forgiven for wondering just who really wanted Stratford School to opt out.

(The Times Educational Supplement 3 May 1991)

The governing body, opposed as it was to opting out, found itself having to produce a submission for acquisition of GM status. The strange, possibly unique, circumstances under which the submission was produced become clear. The Director of Education for Newham, the Labour controlled authority, approached one of the few governors in support of the school opting out to write the proposal. The proposal when completed, however, was signed and forwarded by the chairperson of the existing governing body, despite its opposition to opting out and although he was not a member of the proposed governing body. This clearly was not the way the GM policy had been envisaged in the legislation. It was one of a number of unexpected outcomes. Similarly, earlier research had identified unforeseen outcomes (Deem and Davies, 1991; Power, Halpin and Fitz, 1996).

In 1992, Bush had drawn attention to the fundamental weakness of non-elected first or foundation governors who simply emerged at the time of the GM proposal and became a self-perpetuating group, accountable to no-one except the governing body itself. The Stratford situation seems to reinforce this. Filling the many vacancies on the proposed GM governing body had proved very difficult for Stratford campaigners to achieve in the light of LEA hostility and presented a major difficulty, which most other GM schools did not have to face. Enlisting governing body members of appropriate quality had been even more problematic and there were few safeguards within the legislation to ensure this.

Parent Power

In October 1990, the then Secretary of State, John MacGregor, told the Conservative party conference that GM schools were ‘the “Jewel in the Crown” of parent power.

At Stratford, however, few parents appeared to be in favour of opting out and they were not active in the initial campaign. One interviewee makes it clear that parents were neither strongly involved, nor wanting anything really other than for the school to stay open:
If you ask people to sign their name to keep a school open, almost everybody signs... so triggering the ballot was effortless.

(Interviewee 1)

Parental support was acquired on the basis of their wish to keep the school open. This supports the view of Power et al. (1994, p. 211) who argued that the significance of going GM was not perceived in terms of providing a ‘new’ choice, but in terms of holding on to an ‘old’ one. As one parent put it:

It was not important as such, what was important was that they were kept open.

It becomes apparent that parents were used to trigger the process and to provide a semblance of parental and local support in the form of a petition delivered to Downing Street. This demonstration of support may have played a part in the school being granted GM status, in keeping with the government’s advocacy of diversity and parental choice.

Hostility and bitterness engendered by the GM policy

Maclure (1988, p. 56) points out that ‘no provision in the Act aroused stronger feelings than those on grant-maintained schools’. The strong feelings engendered by the GM policy are recorded by some researchers (Bush et al., 1993; Fitz, Halpin and Power, 1993)

At Stratford, the interviews reveal the extent to which the struggle to opt out took its toll on those involved, not least the staff and pupils. It was an uncomfortable, unsettling and unpleasant situation, which periodically flared up into verbal and violent incidents. There is evidence of pressure being brought to bear on both staff and pupils alike. One interviewee refers to measures taken to persuade pupils to change schools and ‘obvious pressure being put on them’. Tactics used by both sides are open to criticism, for example, the petitioning of parents on the one side and the intense pressure put on pupils and parents to leave the school on the other.

As Bush et al. (1993) show, the GM proposal aroused fierce opposition from local authorities, professional organizations, church groups and political parties. The National Union of Teachers (NUT) was strongly opposed to the concept. Union opposition was confirmed in the interviews and documentary evidence.

While ministerial reaction to reported LEA tactics provoked the comment that ‘Newham has engaged in party thuggery of the worst kind’ (The Guardian, 27 March, 1991), an LEA spokesman
maintained that 'there has been debate and discussion in the classroom'. (Stratford and Newham Yellow Advertiser, 5 April, 1991).

Events at Stratford exposed loopholes in the legislation. They revealed how a handful of individuals could use the GM route to keep a school open, despite the overwhelming opposition to the opting out policy, how they could use parents as a lever, although they really favoured keeping the school open rather than wanting GM status and could use the political climate to influence ministers, who were keen to promote the GM policy.

The role of heads and governors

The case for self-management...political/economic

As Caldwell and Spinks (1988) suggest, the case for self-management can be presented from several perspectives drawn from fields of inquiry such as economics, politics or organisation theory. Campbell et al. (1996) put forward the view that the GM policy's advocates have consistently claimed that opting out has three related benefits, one of which was that it would locate key decision-making at the level of the school rather than the LEA and, consequently, foster greater managerial efficiency and an increased capacity on the part of individual grant-maintained schools to recognise and respond to local needs.

This did not prove to be the case at Stratford, however, in the immediate years following its incorporation, as the interviews and documentary evidence suggest. Locating key decision-making at school level did not, as a consequence, foster greater managerial efficiency. This was in part due to a lack of clarity and understanding of roles. The evidence of Stratford suggests that, irrespective of the localised decision-making process, when responsibilities and roles are not clear or understood, the potential for the breakdown in relationships and conflict is magnified rather than managerial efficiency being enhanced.

The role of the head and governing body of a GM school carried increased responsibilities. It was a new concept of school offering much greater autonomy, but with heavy legal, financial and educational responsibilities. Yet Stratford School was allowed to opt out without a headteacher or senior management team appointed and without an established governing body, despite warnings received by the DES about potential problems within the governing body (The Times Educational Supplement, 28 February, 1992). Evidence from the interviewees suggests that there were no checks made on the suitability of the governors. This approval also seems to fly in the face of
assurances given that, before approving an application, the Secretary of State had to be satisfied that the school had a secure future and the governors and headteachers were competent to run it (DES, 1989).

DES training for GM senior managers and governors, which may have countered some of the forthcoming problems, appears minimal and governors' lack of understanding of their responsibilities is summed up by Daphne Gould, one of two governors appointed by the Secretary of State to help resolve the situation:

I believe this is about people who have found power and don't understand the responsibility that goes with it....

(Sunday Express, 23 February, 1992)

The escalating problems between head and governors prompted the call for more careful vetting of governors before schools were allowed to opt out (Evening Standard, 25 February, 1992).

The political justification for decentralisation is, according to Davies and Hentschke (1994, op. cit.), the argument that the closer government is to 'the people' the more likely it is to be responsive to their demands and interests. This, however, was not substantiated by this case study from the point of view of parents, pupils or staff. Parents were denied the right to form a parents' association or meet in the school. Examples of governors' unreasonable behaviour were rife and they failed to carry out their duties. On 6 March, and again on 23 March 1992, the DES wrote to the chair of governors on behalf of the Secretary of State, about the governors' failure to carry out various statutory duties, namely producing a curriculum complaints procedure, providing staff with written contracts and establishing grievance procedures. Far from fostering greater managerial efficiency or being responsive to people's demands and interests, the move to GM status led to problems within the governing body, which became highly publicised, and had a devastating and demoralising effect on staff and pupils. David Hart, General Secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, described the events:

It is a story involving corruption, insulting behaviour towards, and intimidation of pupils and staff which must be without parallel.

(The Guardian, 19 February, 1992)

The struggle surrounding the opting out process had already created real difficulties in terms of providing continuity of education, adequate and suitable staff and resources, and pupil numbers. The school's viability was undoubtedly in question. To be confronted with further internal strife only
compounded the difficulties and prevented what was desperately needed which was a concerted and unified effort to provide a stable environment and an appropriate education for the pupils. The problems between the newly appointed head and governors spilt over into assemblies, lessons and corridors in school, outside the school gates and into the local community. The effect on the quality of their education is recognised by the pupils. They recall staff preoccupied by the problems with governors and the difficulty of getting staff to work at the school in these circumstances.

Thomas (1987, pp. 224-234) makes the case that decentralised unit managers are better able to make choices to maximise efficiency, but this was not the finding of this research in the early years after the school opted out. The consequences of the dispute at Stratford were far reaching, both in the school and at national level. It was maintained that ‘the ugly scenes at Stratford had brought disrepute’ to the GM sector (The Times Educational Supplement, 23 April, 1999) and, as such, to the concept of self-management.

At school level, actions taken had to be unravelled at considerable expense and duties not carried out had to be undertaken. One of the appointed governors commented on the ‘enormous backlog of work which has simply been left untouched’ (Newham/Docklands Recorder, 2 April 1992).

Sheila Lawlor of the Conservative ‘think tank’, the Centre for Policy Studies, who set out the political principles underpinning the GM proposal in 1988, had maintained that freed from the frustrations of local authority interference, heads and governors would be able to shape their schools as they saw fit. Grant-maintained schools would make for better quality and greater choice within the state system.

Stratford in its early days of opting out, did not fulfil this dream.

In 1987, the National Association of Governors and Managers had expressed concern about the accountability of GM governing bodies. This became a significant question as the Stratford story unfolded and the Secretary of State’s powers seemed limited.

The political/economic argument for self-management is not supported by the findings in this case study.
The case for self-management....organization theory

Organization theory presents another argument for self-management. The appropriate balance of centralization and decentralization is discussed by many, such as Perrow (1970), Weick (1976), Peters and Waterman (1982) and Caldwell and Spinks (1988). The parallel in education is explained by Caldwell and Spinks (op. cit.) in terms of the centralised determination of broad goals and purposes of education accompanied by decentralised decision-making about the means by which these goals and purposes will be achieved, with those people who are decentralised being accountable to those centralised for the achievement of outcomes.

Lawton (1992) maintains that the idea of effective organizations being 'loosely-coupled' (Weick, 1976) or using a combination of 'tight-loose' control - control that is tight on objectives but loose on procedures - has redefined the notion of how organizations should be run. Loose procedures may present a problem, however, if roles and responsibilities are not understood or are not fulfilled and there may be a need for intervention which affects that balance. It is this balance, however, which was questioned when the Secretary of State found himself reluctantly having to intervene in the affairs of the governing body at Stratford. Unable to dismiss governors, the Secretary of State could direct governors how to behave and was urged to do so by the NAHT and NAS/UWT. The significance of the Secretary of State's interventions was not lost on the media:

The implications for the future of opted-out schools stretch far beyond the inner-city area in which the current struggle is taking place. Mr Clarke is now unwilling to take further action because such a move would leave him open to allegations of the same political interference from which he had hoped to release the education system.

(The Sunday Telegraph, 23 February, 1992)

Autonomy was one of the key elements of the GM policy (DFE, 1992a, paras. 3.3, 3.4). Yet, ironically, the situation at Stratford drove the head, supported by staff and parents, to appeal to the DfEE for help and urge the Secretary of State to intervene which he was forced to do on several occasions, knowing that he faced criticism of growing centralisation and external interference.

Just as politics influenced the decision to allow Stratford to opt out, it was probably a political decision to keep it open during turbulent times when many called for the school's closure. The Government tried to find a way through the problems and this often meant intervention, introduction of guidelines for heads and governors, and changes in legislation. Power et al. (1996,
use the case of Stratford School 'as an illustration of the way in which central government intervenes when parental/community involvement is seen to overstep the mark'.

One has to question, in the light of this situation, whether the GM policy offered the right balance of centralization and decentralization. Despite the repeated interference by the Secretary of State, the worsening situation brought ever increasing embarrassment for the government as events began to unfold exposing the loopholes in the law for which the Secretary of State had limited powers:

*What the internecine strife at Stratford has shown is how little power the DES has to determine the outcome.*

(The Daily Telegraph, 8 February, 1992)

**The case for self-management....the professional perspective**

Macpherson (1996, p. 141) maintained that ‘the professional perspective (of self-management) takes the view that schools will improve when educators and their immediate leaders are given greater opportunity to develop skills, exercise judgement and have greater control over their work’.

Sherratt (1994), headteacher of one of the first cohort of schools to opt out, had indicated that this new freedom helped heads, their senior management teams and governors to create a new culture in schools, a culture of self-determination in which teachers could take initiatives that reflected the needs and planned direction of their particular school. By contrast, the experience at Stratford revealed intimidation and interference in day-to-day running of the school. Details of the deteriorating situation were reported in the media.

Neill et al. (1995) found that many of the teachers in their survey (of the National Union of Teachers) referred to the ‘professional isolation’ they experienced working in a GM school and suggest that teachers’ morale and job security are less than one might have expected. This certainly was the case at Stratford where the school was isolated by a hostile LEA and the staff found themselves in the climate of intimidation which was described and without written contracts which the governing body consistently failed to provide in the early years of being grant-maintained.
Legislating for opting out

Sherratt (1994, pp. 27-28) wrote of the 1988 Education Act that “almost all the main powers have been given to governors. If they choose to exercise their powers in a vexatious way the legislation provides them with ample scope. The balance in favour of governors appears, perhaps, excessive to the extent that it may not helpfully complement the operational responsibilities of heads’. He argues for a more equitable balance between the defined responsibilities of the head, supported by professional staff and those of governors, and feels that there is a case for making the respective roles clearer. David Hart, General Secretary of the National Association of Headteachers, had raised concerns about the balance of responsibilities between governors and the professional staff as early as 1990, when he claimed that governors were taking on management activities rather than determining policies and leaving headteachers and their staffs to manage schools.

This view was expressed by others and fuelled by well-publicised clashes between heads and governors in some GM schools, including Stratford. Mr Balchin of the GMS Foundation agreed that Stratford raised delicate issues and had “catapulted forward” the drawing up of effective guidelines for governors based on good practice (The Daily Telegraph, 8 February, 1992). He was at pains, however, to stress that the Grant-Maintained Schools Foundation did not want the situation at Stratford to precipitate legislation to check governors’ powers because ‘independence is the very air a grant-maintained school breathes’ (The Times Educational Supplement, 7 February, 1992).

Similarly, Walter Ulrich (1992), Secretary of the National Association of Governors, indicated that the organisation saw no need for further clarification of governors’ powers. The issue for him was whether there was a remedy, should these powers be abused.

Nevertheless, as early as February 1992, amid all the difficulties at Stratford, it was reported that the Secretary of State for Education, Mr Clarke ‘is believed to be considering legislation to clarify the responsibilities of head teachers and governors at opt out schools’. (The Guardian, 22 February, 1992)

The conflict between Stratford’s head and governors, which revealed a lack of clarity over roles and responsibilities, supports the view of Bush et al. (1993) that the way in which these powers and responsibilities are administered is left vague and ‘the law is somewhat skeletal in its approach’ (Leighton, 1992, pp. 21-22). In GM schools, the accountability, whilst to ‘the community
served by the school' (DES 1991), is not defined and this lack of clarity has been a source of concern. This concern was expressed by one head in the Bush et al. (1993) survey, who felt that there was no control over governing bodies and that they could cause havoc.

It was such behaviour, however, which was witnessed at Stratford. There was an expectation that governing bodies were made up of reasonable people whose priority was the well being of the school. Rogue governors, it seems, were not anticipated and, therefore, there was no provision for their removal in the 1988 Education Reform Act. All the Secretary of State could do was to appoint up to two additional governors. Conversations with the DfEE indicated that they were being confronted with situations at Stratford which they had not come across before and for which they had no solutions.

_They (DfEE) hadn't had to deal with a rebel governing body before._

(Interviewee 6)

The events at Stratford, which led to the head's suspension and subsequent court cases, led Bush et al. (1993) to suggest that the head is particularly vulnerable in the GM situation where there is no longer the possibility of support from the LEA in any dispute with the governors. They continue:

_All the fears expressed about governor interference appear to have been realized at Stratford School in Newham, east London. The circumstances in which this situation developed demonstrate how interference can occur because of a fundamental difference in understanding about the role of governors._

(pp. 194-195)

When loopholes in the law allowed the situation to develop at Stratford, the difficulties in resolving the problem highlighted yet further the inadequacies of the legal framework supporting the GM policy. The Secretary of State could not remove governors who were acting in an unreasonable manner. He could only appoint two additional governors. Code of behaviour guidelines were not felt to be adequate. The Stratford experience revealed the need to change the law and the 1993 Education Act empowered the Secretary of State to remove and/or replace such governors should this prove necessary. The Education Act of 1993 did little, however, to address directly the troubled area of the division of labour between governors and heads.
Relationships with the LEA

Outright hostility

The attitude of LEAs in general to the GM schools policy was one of opposition or concern, although Conservative LEAs may have been more 'muted' in their comments, as Bush et al. (1993, p.5) suggest, not wishing to attack a Conservative government.

The hostility and bitterness, which the Stratford opting out process generated between the protagonists and the LEA, mirrored the outright hostility experienced by some of the respondents in the survey conducted by Bush et al. (1993, pp 81-2). It not only led to a vitriolic two year battle culminating in a High Court judgement, as it did at Beechen Cliff School, but also had repercussions for the following decade. The role that the LEA played not only delayed the process through its appeal against the decision to allow Stratford to opt out, it was almost successful in achieving its aim of closing the school by persuading pupils and parents to change schools. At the very least, the LEA ensured that the school, once opted out, had few teachers, much reduced pupil numbers and inadequate resources. There are suggestions that the difficulty experienced in filling the vacancies on the GM governing body, and the resultant group which emerged, were a direct consequence of LEA hostility. Newham made it very difficult for the school to survive.

Coleman et al. (1993) noted that, while the opting out process left 'residues of bitterness' in the dealings between some schools and their former LEAs, 'the relationship with the LEA is seen by the majority as being at least satisfactory'( p. 120). It was judged that a wide range of services was being purchased from the LEA, whereas only eight per cent were unable to purchase any services from unwilling LEAs.

Because of the hostility surrounding Stratford's opting out, however, relationships with the local authority remained sour and the school was both unwilling and unable to buy in any of the LEA services. Stratford, the only school in the local authority to opt out, was isolated within the area and contact was minimal.

Admissions

As Bush et al. (1993) state, when the principle of GMS was established, the government intended that, at least initially, a GM school would not be able to change the nature of its entry. The 1988 Education Reform Act stated that 'the admissions arrangements for each school will have to be
consistent with the previous character of the school' (DES, 1988, p. 18). Fears were expressed that opting out might lead to a change of character which might be more elitist or selective. Reference was made to selection 'by the back door' (Coleman et al. 1993, p. 111), defined as generally applying to comprehensive schools which are using subjective rather than objective methods of selection. At Stratford, however, these fears were not realised, mainly because pupil numbers were so low at incorporation. A secondary school with just 190 pupils was not viable. Recruitment was vital for survival. The school could not afford to be selective.

Coleman et al. (op. cit.) make the point that whilst the majority of comprehensive schools were selecting pupils on objective criteria, such as distance from school, 30 per cent of the comprehensives responding to their questionnaire were using subjective criteria, reports from the previous school and/or interview. At Stratford, too, procedures for interviewing pupils before entry were gradually introduced, but as one of the interviewees indicates:

_We had to have bodies and although we interviewed pupils, often it was done to try and bring in siblings and friends as well._

(Interviewee 5)

The school bought in none of the LEA services. The idea of working with the LEA on an admissions policy was not feasible in the light of the situation. The school desperately needed to attract pupils and there is evidence to suggest that the LEA actively countered this. As well as advertising in the local and surrounding areas, 40,000 leaflets were distributed and contacts were made with local mosques and temples. Newham countered the school’s attempts at recruitment with letters to parents. Again government ministers had to intervene to stop the LEA tactics which were seen to be exerting unfair pressure on parents and giving the impression that the school would be closing. Pupils were deprived of services, for example, the Music Academy, funded by taxpayers’ money and this was seen as a further attempt to dissuade parents from choosing Stratford.

Lack of a totally co-ordinated system of admission caused delays and difficulties, for example, in Bromley (Times Educational Supplement, 12 June, 1992) and, similarly, such problems were experienced at Stratford because of the hostility between the school and LEA.

**LEA reorganisation plans**

Many LEAs were adamant that the GM policy would undermine their capacity for strategic planning with regard to rationalisation of school provision (Halpin et al. 1991, p. 236). Their
research subsequently shows that many LEAs had either abandoned or temporarily shelved their reorganisation plans.

Part of the hostility felt by Newham was the fact that its plans for reorganisation, which involved the closing of two schools, one of which was Stratford, were blocked when Stratford was allowed to opt out. Stephen Timms, Leader of Newham Council, wrote that the government's action in allowing Stratford to opt out had 'undermined a process which the government itself had directed the council to take'. (The Sunday Times, 4 August, 1991)

This was not an isolated case. Labour MP Stephen Byers, former chairman of the CLEA, had suggested that many authorities had given up trying to remove surplus places by reorganisation because of the GM loophole. In 1993, the government acknowledged that mistakes had been made early on in allowing such schools to opt. There was a recognition that the GM policy had to be modified in this respect in order for surplus places to be removed. This could only be done if LEA reorganisation plans were not allowed to be compromised by schools using the GM loophole.

**Diversity and choice**

**Parent power**

Parental involvement in education was integral to the policy of GM schools. The opting out procedures place parents at the heart of the process (Fitz and Halpin, 1991, p.143). They were able to initiate the ballot and have the decisive role in determining whether or not a school becomes GM.

This was very important at Stratford, since the governing body was clearly not going to apply for GM status. Even though few parents were in favour of opting out, the pro-campaigners managed to organise a petition of parents which then prompted the ballot. In view of this situation, what happened at the ballot was not surprising. The need for a second ballot, the low turn out of just over 50 per cent, and the narrow margin in the final result, testify to the lack of parental involvement. The parent ballot, however, forced the governors to act.

The low parent turn out and modest support for opting out run counter to the point made by Halpin et al. (1993), that large numbers of parents participate enthusiastically in ballots to determine whether schools can make applications to the Secretary of State to opt out. Rogers (1992, p. 133) even claims that, in some cases, parents are used as mere 'ballot fodder' and evidence suggests
that this was the case at Stratford. Parents wanted to keep the school open and they were used to trigger the opt-out process. It was this desire that the GM campaigners focused on and used to produce the petition which went to Downing Street. Perhaps the suggestion that parents really did want the school to opt out had the desired effect on a government advocating the importance of parental choice.

Research by Halpin et al. (1993), Coleman et al., (1993) and Bush et al. (1993), further suggests that involvement in the opting out process does not seem to ensure sustained involvement or the subsequent development of enhanced parental participation. At Stratford, there was a rather different experience. Parents did become involved, particularly when the problems within the governing body came to the fore and an example of this can be seen in the parents’ reaction to being denied the right to form a Parent Teacher Association (PTA) by the governing body. They ignored the governors and, although unable to hold their first meeting in school, they used the local church hall and invited the media. Parents were angry and frustrated by the problems within the governing body, and the chair of the new Parent Association expressed the view of some that they had been used (The Sunday Telegraph, 23 February, 1992). The chair of governors, himself a parent, and his supporters, had a different view. They found it difficult to equate ministers’ interference in the running of the school with the rhetoric of parent power which accompanied the government’s GM policy.

Nevertheless, parents did play a significant role in the school’s future. Parental support for the head and staff, and their vote of no confidence in the chair of governors and other members of the governing body, helped to sway the balance of power. They spoke out to the media about their views and wrote to ministers. Similarly, it was the parent governor elections which significantly altered the balance of power in the governing body, not the appointment of the two additional governors by the Secretary of State.

Choice

When moving the second reading of the Great Education Reform Bill, The Secretary of State for Education, Kenneth Baker (1987), explained that the Government’s reforms would widen choice for many parents in the state-maintained sector for whom all too often the only choice is to take it or leave it.

At the very least, lip service was paid to the importance of parental choice in the Stratford proposal for GM status.
Fitz et al., (1993), Power et al. (1994) and Slater (1998) report that GM status had only minimal impact on parental choice and there is evidence at Stratford of the LEA attempting to stifle that choice. The school had occasion to complain to the DFE on more than one occasion about letters sent by the LEA to parents about Stratford.

The rise in pupil numbers is testament to the parents of Newham and the surrounding area choosing Stratford. This supports findings about pupil numbers from the GMSC. In 1991, it reported that 88 per cent of GM schools had boosted their rolls since opting out, with an average increase of 5.3 per cent (GMSC, 1991).

Parents welcomed this choice and had hoped for a better education for their children:

\[
\text{We fought not merely to prevent a good school from closure, but for a better education for our children, which we felt the local education authority was unable to provide.}
\]

(Letter to the Secretary of State from the Chair of the Stratford School Association, 6 February, 1992)

Stratford gave them the opportunity to send their children to a school that was not run by an LEA which was close to the bottom of the national performance tables. While the extent and diversity of that choice are open to question, the attitudes of the Stratford parents seem to be in keeping with the research of Powers, Halpin and Fitz (1994) who argued that while GM schools may not constitute anything ‘new’, they are beginning to cultivate an image as somehow ‘different’ from their LEA counterparts.

**Diversity**

Fitz et al. (1997, p. 17) argue that the greater autonomy which schools enjoy does not necessarily translate into new, innovative or diverse forms of curricular or pedagogic practice, even in circumstances where this has been officially encouraged, for example, through the Technology Schools Initiative.

When Stratford became grant-maintained, providing a suitable and adequate curriculum presented a problem. Because there was no knowledge of how many children the school was catering for, their ages or the course they had been following prior to the school opening, the curriculum for the summer term was written ad hoc. It was a basic curriculum just to get something in place and ensure that the growing numbers of children had teachers. Pupil numbers were changing daily, requiring additional classes; many pupils were arriving with no knowledge of
English and who were not literate in their mother language. It was a coping strategy that the school was engaged in, while trying to look ahead to the needs of the coming year. The curriculum for the following year, however, was driven by the availability of staff.

The situation was clearly one of survival first and foremost, though there were plans to create a business and technology centre at one of the school's two sites with a view to becoming a technology college. Curriculum planning put emphasis on the teaching of technology and a colour leaflet was produced explaining the school's plans and attempts to attract business sponsors. The school twice successfully bid for a grant under the Technology Schools Initiative set up by the government, but its plans to become a technology college had to be put on hold when the school went into special measures. Emphasis had to be placed on demonstrating school improvement rather than innovation and, despite these attempts, Stratford as a grant-maintained school offered little new in curriculum terms.

Fitz et al. (1997, p. 17) further argue that not only are GM schools constrained by the national curriculum, but that schools are reverting to or re-emphasizing traditional type schooling. There is an emphasis on behaviour and discipline, school uniform is often introduced or the dress code enforced more strictly. This was certainly true of Stratford. As the school documentation indicated, there was an emphasis on tradition and traditional values. A school uniform was introduced and much was made of the school's former glory and achievements as a grammar school.

The school was providing a choice for parents in so far as it was not a school run by Newham local education authority but, in terms of offering something new, this was not necessarily the case. There is limited evidence of diversity or choice in the Stratford story. Parents at Stratford were not voting for diversity but continuity, not GM status but the school's survival.

Parents repeatedly said that they thought progress had been made in the school since it had opted out, despite the publicised problems. Mark Prisk, chair of governors, wrote to the Secretary of State, (26 August, 1994) stating that 'parents like our traditional approach to uniform, discipline and behaviour'. They did feel that Stratford offered an alternative to other schools in Newham, a local authority at the bottom of the league tables for pupil achievement.

In effect, little that Stratford offered was innovative or radically different.
Raising academic standards

Beacons of excellence

While the widespread introduction of systems of self-managing schools was motivated by the desire to raise standards, GM schools were heralded as flagships, which would 'provide a standard of excellence and will be beacons' (Baker, Parliamentary Debates, 1989). Increasingly, the case for self-management was argued on the basis of findings from studies of school effectiveness (Purkey and Smith, 1985).

It is argued by some, however, like Bush (1996), that the link between school autonomy and school improvement has yet to be clearly understood and established. Davies and Hentschke (1994) questioned, like many others, whether anything had significantly changed in the performance of schools as a result of school autonomy. Indeed, Cecil Knight, head of Smallheath GM School in Birmingham, made the statement (in Davies and Anderson, 1992, p. 113) that 'grant-maintained status in itself does not create a successful educational enterprise. What counts is using the flexibility and greater control of resources wisely and purposefully, according to a well-defined educational philosophy'.

Problems within the governing body at Stratford made this difficult to achieve in the early years after incorporation and the school proved to be anything other than a beacon of excellence. In many respects, it was an acute embarrassment to the government and GM advocates, not least in terms of its educational standards. The two year struggle to opt out, followed by another two years of difficulties within the governing body, left the school demoralised and fighting for survival. Records of increased levels of pupil absence, and pupils' vivid recall of the turbulent and very unpleasant times in 1991/92, reveal the extent to which they were affected by this experience. They were quite clear that the quality of their education had been adversely affected.

Because of the unusual circumstances surrounding the opting out of Stratford, staffing presented a major problem. Only eleven teachers chose to stay and their subject expertise did not cover the full curriculum. Without a stable, experienced and quality staff, providing an acceptable standard of education proved very difficult. The quality of delivery in the classroom has to be questioned. Pupils' perspective of the quality of teaching when the school opted out supports this view. Research by Halpin (Times Educational Supplement, 31 August, 1993) suggests that, while children acknowledge that their schools are better equipped and decorated, they don't comment
about whether the teaching has altered significantly. At Stratford, however, pupils were able to talk about the quality of teaching they were receiving. They were critical of teaching standards. They recall many cover staff and the preoccupation of teachers when the difficulties within the governing body erupted. ‘It had a great effect on our learning.’ (Pupil interviews)

In the Summer of 1993, only 4 per cent of pupils achieved A-C grades at GCSE and the school came close to bottom in the first of the government’s national league tables. This was a tangible and measurable outcome of the school’s struggles. Shortly after, the school was notified that it was going to be in the first cohort of schools to be inspected under the 1993 Education Act. There was, perhaps, a certain inevitability that the school would ‘fail’ its inspection under the circumstances; it had not had a sufficient period of normality to address the educational issues. The head wrote to this effect in a letter she addressed to the Prime Minister, John Major.

...In reality, it was inevitable that the school would fail the OFSTED inspection in November 1993 under those circumstances.

(Letter from head to the Prime Minister, 20 November, 1995)

**Inspection and special measures**

Bush and Coleman (1992) urged caution when examining the 1992 HMI report which stated that standards of work in grant-maintained schools were rather higher than those in the maintained sector as a whole. These findings certainly need to be set against the fact that, as a result of the OFSTED inspection process, a number of GM schools were identified as requiring special measures because they were failing to give their pupils an acceptable standard of education. The first of these was Stratford. This presented an unexpected dilemma for the government, since the 1993 Education Act, while making provision for LEA failing schools in terms of an education association, makes no such provision for GM schools failing their OFSTED inspection.

The school found itself once again under the glare of the media and it was yet again the cause of acute embarrassment to the government on two counts:

*The first failing school to be identified by the new teams of independent inspectors is likely to be one of the Government’s flagship grant-maintained schools......*  
*The prospect that Stratford School in Newham, East London, could require special action will embarrass John Patten, the Education Secretary. Not only has he insisted*
that such schools raise standards, but also he does not have the power to send in a so-called hit squad.

(The Times Educational Supplement, 10 December, 1993)

Stratford became the second secondary school in the country, and the first GM school, to enter special measures and experience the government's naming and shaming policy, which did little to help the school recover. One of the Stratford interviewees clearly views this particular government tactic as a blunt instrument which puts everyone into a negative frame of mind.

Power et al. (1997, p. 358) indicate that it is 'persuasive to suggest that making educational decision-making the responsibility of individual institutions is an effective strategy for "shifting the blame". The failure of individual schools to flourish as "stand alone" institutions can then be attributed to poor leadership or teaching quality'. This was indeed the experience at Stratford.

The pupils were aware of the stress generated by the inspection process and talk about the effect of the HMI follow up visits - teachers stressed, this sometimes being reflected in their teaching, papers flying around, getting work up to date. They recall staff working harder during that week and how they could not have kept up that pace. Nevertheless, they do feel that inspection is a good idea and the school did improve. Teaching standards improved. The school brought in new better teachers - whereas there had been many cover teachers when they were in Year 7 - teachers who were more experienced and paid more attention to students. There were better facilities, for example, the music department and new technology centre, more stable staff, more tests and more homework.

The media provided an unnecessary stress factor for all, especially the students who were distressed by reading of the school's possible closure or what they considered to be unfair publicity.

DfEE appointed governors

As if having a GM school in special measures was not sufficient embarrassment for the government and its GM policy, further difficulty arose when considering what to do in such a situation. Whereas the 1993 Education Act made provision for an LEA school to be taken over by an education association if it were seen to be failing, no such provision was made for GM schools. All the Secretary of State could do was to remove and/or replace some of the governors. As the school hit the headlines again, there was pressure on ministers to take strong action as seen at
Hackney Downs and be seen to be successful in that action. Hence, four new governors found their way onto the governing body.

The appointment of DfEE governors is a relatively rare occurrence and little has been written or researched about their role, which seems to vary depending on the school's situation. For example, at Stratford, probably the only school where governors have been imposed on two separate occasions, the reasons differed. The first appointment was prompted by difficulties between the head and governors and, on the second occasion, when the school was in special measures. Stratford was the first school to have DfEE governors appointed to the governing body while the school was in special measures.

When the school came out of special measures five months later, having supposedly made no progress in the previous eighteen months since inspection, the success was credited to the government's intervention.

The Education and Employment Secretary welcomed the news:

> Clearly the school's higher GCSE results this summer were no flash in the pan.....
> The improvement owes much to the significant role played by the additional governors appointed.

(Newham/Docklands Recorder, 13 December, 1995)

This is not the conclusion arrived at by Stratford's interviewees. While in theory the idea is sound, their value is questioned for a number of cited reasons. For example, the political motive behind their imposition is raised. It was felt to be politically expedient by the then Conservative Government to be seen taking action in a failing GM school and, more importantly, their action having a successful outcome.

Research conducted on the role of DfEE appointed governors in school improvement at Stratford (Snelling, 1997) also suggests a political role. It was felt by the interviewees that imposing DfEE governors put the school and governing body in a false position because they come from different backgrounds, stay with the school for a while but are not of the community. There are clear suggestions that these DfEE governors, though with expertise, did not necessarily bring the expertise needed at Stratford and were not familiar with the local context. Another consequence of their imposition is that members of the existing governing body were over-awed by them and tended not to play a full part.
Improving standards

Levacic and Hardman (1999, p. 188) indicate that, once it is realized that GM schools are on average more socially advantaged than LEA maintained schools, then their apparently superior examination performance could be explained by this important factor. Similarly, evidence that there is no significant difference between LEA and GM school examination results, once the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is taken account of, is reported in Kelly (1996). As a consequence, Levacic and Hardman (1999) conclude that given that additional finance was channelled in the direction of the GM sector, the absence of evidence that GM schools are more effective in relation to academic outcomes than LEA schools is indicative of poor value for money for the GM schools policy.

Events at Stratford demonstrated that government rhetoric about GM schools delivering improved standards in education was not necessarily true. It was patently demonstrated through the government’s own policy of external inspection of schools. The case study findings support much of the research which questions whether anything significantly changed in the performance of schools as a result of school autonomy. Indeed, in the initial period after incorporation, pupils’ learning suffered. Nevertheless, it also needs to be noted that pupils at Stratford were not socially advantaged, many having low literacy levels and, as Anderson (1999) comments, the extra funding went into resources which were sorely needed.

Neill et al. (1995), however, did find evidence that, in those GM schools incorporated for more than two years, educational priorities were higher, which suggests that, once the initial turmoil is over, schools return to their priorities of educating pupils. This was also true of Stratford, as it emerged from special measures in 1995, but it took longer.

As one of the first schools to experience the government’s ‘naming and shaming’ policy, the school’s recollection was that it was a stressful, unpleasant and difficult period; but the school did improve substantially.

Whether this was through inspection and government intervention is debatable. Despite the view of the DfEE and Secretary of State, others connected with the school had a different opinion and felt that progress was being made all along by staff and governors, but was not being recognised. The chair of governors, Yakub Umer, a parent, commented two months after the school was removed from special measures, that ‘while Stratford was grabbing all the wrong headlines, the management and staff have been working away quietly….We turned the corner a while back.'
What is nice is that at last our efforts are being recognised'. (Newham/Docklands Recorder, 10 January, 1996)

The publicity attached certainly did not make it any easier to cope with and can be demonstrated to have had a detrimental effect on attracting quality teachers. The inspection and monitoring process was not viewed as a supportive experience that would help the school to move forward. It was intimidatory and raised bitter resentment about the way it was conducted. The school did not feel that there was recognition of progress and questioned the validity of the limited evidence base.

Summary

In many respects, the Stratford experience supports the findings of other research and mirrors what was happening in other GM schools. Significantly, however, the evidence does not support the case for self-management, at least in the school's early opt-out years.

Davies and Anderson (1992) summarise the disadvantages of opting out from two perspectives - that of the effect on the education system as a whole and that of the effect on the management at the individual school level:

The School Level Perspective

- schools becoming insular
- increased applications for the wrong reasons
- grant-maintained schools as private monopolies
- autocratic management styles
- governors becoming managers instead of governing
- erosion of staff rights
- maintaining rather than developing standards

(Davies and Anderson, 1992, pp. 115, 118)

In terms of the school level, many of these disadvantages were experienced at Stratford. The LEA hostility ensured isolation, the school used the GM route as a means to avoid closure rather than from a strong belief in the policy, difficulties between the head and governors arose in part over a lack of understanding of roles and responsibilities. There were governors who felt that they could take on the day-to-day management of the school, as a result of which staff rights were infringed.
Stratford's early years as a GM school were devoted to survival and re-establishing standards rather than developing new horizons in education.

Chubb and Moe (1992, p. 14) argue that educational reform arises out of politics, and politics is driven by power:

_It is serious business, the stakes are high, and the most powerful players - public officials, party leaders, leaders of organized interests - tend to have very diverse views of what ought to be done.....The battle is waged under the banner of school improvement, but for many players there is much more involved than that._

This is certainly true of Stratford. It was a political battlefield at national, LEA and school level. The story vividly illustrates how a GM school could career out of control. Yet, despite its many difficulties, the school not only survived to prove its opponents wrong, it flourished, gaining public recognition of its progress and the substantial improvement in pupil achievement.
Chapter Seven

Conclusion

This [the Stratford situation] is an extreme example of a problem which was always there to be uncovered.

(The Daily Telegraph, 8 February, 1992)

Main findings

Many of the findings from this case study reflect what happened in other GM schools. Like a number of the schools which became GM early on, the move to opt out at Stratford School was purely an expedient measure, a last resort to avoid closure, which conveniently presented itself through the GM route at just the right time. Parents were used as 'ballot fodder', as in some other schools.

Political controversy surrounded the opting out process. The decision to allow Stratford to opt out was clearly political, as with other schools, which also suffered the consequences of political expediency and dogma. The Grant-Maintained Schools Trust and, in particular, Sir Robert Balchin, Chairman of the Grant-Maintained Schools Foundation, seem to have played a significant part in the opting out process at Stratford. The political nature of the GM policy caused considerable stress for those involved in the opt out. Teaching unions, particularly the National Union of Teachers, were strongly opposed to the GM policy at this stage of its development.

Relations with an antagonistic LEA, which challenged the approval of GM status, continued to be very hostile long after the school had opted out and led to professional isolation for staff. The school was unwilling and unable to buy in services from the local authority. Co-operation on a co-ordinated admissions policy was not possible. The decision to allow Stratford to opt out effectively blocked the LEA's reorganization plans.

The introduction of school uniform and the emphasis on traditional values were seen in other GM schools. Like other GM schools, Stratford took advantage of the government's Technology Schools Initiative Scheme to establish a business and technology centre at one of its two sites,
but the school's route to Technology College status was blocked when it went into special measures. In effect, little that Stratford offered was innovative or radically different.

Other findings from this research run counter to what happened in most other GM schools. Notable was the lack of support for opting out. Most people associated with the school, those on the governing body, the senior management team and the staff were opposed to opting out. A parental ballot had to be held twice and, even then, there was only the smallest of majorities. This was a very unusual situation, one not envisaged by the policy makers, in which a governing body found itself submitting a proposal for GM status to which it was overwhelmingly opposed. Unlike most schools, a parental ballot was used to trigger the opt out process.

Again, unlike other opted out schools, Stratford, on the threshold of gaining increased autonomy, did not have an established governing body which had a proven record of running a school. Approval was granted despite warnings about the school's viability and potential problems within the governing body. One has to question the Secretary of State's judgement in taking this decision and the principles underlying the GM policy. The Stratford events revealed what could go wrong in a GM school.

The difficulties within the governing body presented intractable problems for the government which were not resolved by the imposition of the additional governors by the DfEE. The balance of power only began to alter significantly after the crucial election of two parent governors. Parents played a vital role in the school's fortunes.

When loopholes in the law made it possible for the situation to develop at Stratford, the difficulties in resolving the problem highlighted yet further the inadequacies of the legal framework supporting the GM policy. The Secretary of State was powerless to remove governors who were acting in an unreasonable manner. He could only appoint two additional governors. Code of behaviour guidelines were not felt to be adequate. Legislation followed in 1993 in an attempt to address this situation.

Pupils' education was adversely affected by the school's problems. Events at Stratford demonstrated that the government's hopes of GM schools delivering improved standards in education were not necessarily going to come to fruition and it was the government's own policy of external inspection of schools which revealed this when Stratford became the first GM school to fail its OFSTED inspection.
Having a GM school in special measures was embarrassment enough for the government and its GM policy, but another difficulty arose when considering what to do in such a situation. Though the 1993 Education Act made provision for an LEA school to be taken over by an education association if it were seen to be failing, no such provision was made for GM schools. All the Secretary of State could do was to remove and/or replace some of the governors. As the story hit the headlines again, there was pressure on ministers to take action and be seen to be successful in that action. Hence, five DfEE appointed governors found their way on to the governing body by 1995.

As one of the first schools to experience the government’s ‘naming and shaming’ policy, participants’ recollection is that it was a stressful, unpleasant and difficult period; but the school did improve substantially. It is difficult to attribute that success to its GM status, however, and whether this was through inspection and government intervention is debatable.

Research questions re-visited

Five research questions were identified for the purpose of this case study.

- What has been the impact of the GM policy and what, if any, are its achievements?
- How has school-based management affected the role of, and the relationship between, heads and governors?
- What has been the nature of the relationship between local education authorities and opted out schools?
- Has the GM movement raised academic standards?
- Have parent power and choice been enhanced by GM schools?

What has been the impact of the GM policy and what, if any, are its achievements?

Though grant-maintained schools have been abolished, the principle of self-management has been preserved through foundation and voluntary schools and remains an important concept in present day education policy. The impact of the GM policy on Stratford School was enormous. It saved the school from closure, but brought chaos in its wake as the instability of Stratford’s situation exposed the policy’s weaknesses. Despite the problems, however, the school survived and flourished, receiving public recognition for its progress.
How has school-based management affected the role of, and the relationship between, heads and governors?

School based management demonstrated the lack of clarity and understanding of roles of heads and governors, not just in GM schools, and the consequent potential for conflict and possible disruption of pupils' education. The legislation regarding GM schools was flawed. Nowhere was this conflict and severe disruption of pupils' education seen more dramatically than at Stratford.

What has been the nature of the relationship between local education authorities and opted out schools?

While some LEAs sought to work with GM schools, offering their services, the Stratford experience revealed damaging relationships for both school and the local authority.

Has the GM movement raised academic standards?

Evidence that the GM movement has raised academic standards is inconclusive, as is the evidence from this case study. While there is evidence to suggest that standards at Stratford have improved, it is difficult to attribute that improvement to the school's GM status.

Have parent power and choice been enhanced by GM schools?

Though parents at Stratford did play an important role in the school's development, there is little to show that parent power and choice have been significantly enhanced by GM schools.

Bullock and Thomas (1997, p. 1) maintain that Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and decentralised school management have much in common. 'They each contain phenomena - real and imagined - which are new to conventional experience. These phenomena are not always what they appear to be and are sometimes the opposite of their appearance.' The findings of this thesis would tend to support this view.

Significance and limitations of the case study

Stratford School has provided a rich and colourful focus for research. Its chequered history not only made it an interesting subject in itself, it provided further insight into the GM policy, the opting out process and existence as a GM school. The researcher presents Stratford School as a unique
case which throws light on the general principles of self-management, the concept of which is still very much on the political agenda, as demonstrated by the Secretary of State's (2000) announcement of more direct funding to schools. Choosing documentary analysis proved to be an appropriate research method, as the school's fortunes were well documented in the media, in addition to the availability of the school's own documentation. The school's high profile during this period explains the extent of reference to statements in the press, which one might not normally see. The interviews provide the flesh on the story and generally support the documentary evidence.

As Anderson and Bush (1999, p. 19) point out, despite their comparatively short life, GM schools have been the subject of a significant number of research studies in recent years (see Bell et al., 1996; Bush et al., 1993; Fitz et al., 1993; Tritter and Chadwick 1997); and, although these research projects have adopted different methodologies, their research designs focus 'largely on the views and perceptions of the key actors in the opting out process, most notably headteachers and, to a lesser extent, chairs of governors'.

Similarly, in this present research, it was the key participants in the opting out process who were selected for interview. It is notable here, however, that the acting head and chair of governors were not key players in the move to opt out and while their perspectives of the process would have been equally interesting, given their antagonism and in view of the researcher's position, they were not asked to participate. The central participants included governors and teachers. As with other research, the case study also draws evidence from teacher governors, union representatives and pupils who were all caught up in and felt the repercussions of, or participated in, the opting out process at Stratford. Although key players were chosen as subjects, it could have been useful to interview, in addition, a parent, DfEE governor and representatives of the LEA and DfEE. Where it proved difficult to access respondents for interviews or was not practical in terms of time involved, however, care was taken to allow their voices to be heard through documentary evidence. For example, the documentary analysis does draw on evidence from the acting headteacher and four of the six chairs of governors during this period, from parents, a DfEE appointed governor, and spokesmen from the DfEE and local authority.

If one accepts Yin's (1994, p. 147) rationale for a case study '...where the case represents an extreme or unique case', then case study was a suitable choice of research approach and Stratford was a suitable subject because the events at the school highlighted much of what could go wrong with the GM policy. Stratford raised several GM issues in acute circumstances. Certainly, events were acknowledged to be unprecedented in the history of school governance in this country. Stratford did not just experience teething troubles, it was a scenario of extremes -
encountering both internal and external difficulties, which led to ugly scenes, a very public breakdown in relationships between the head and governors resulting in several court cases, extremely hostile relations with the LEA, which chose to challenge the decision to allow the school to opt out, and a struggle to survive and improve educational standards, while labelled a failing school. In examining what happened, in the relatively early days of GM schools, it is possible, using Bassey’s (1999) ‘fuzzy generalization’ to see potential problems for self-management, from which successive governments have learnt. Other researchers have already used Stratford to illustrate, for example, the vulnerability of heads (Bush, 1993) and the way central government intervenes when the parental community is seen to overstep the mark (Power et al., 1996). As an historical study, this research helps us to understand how the present education system has come about (Cohen and Manion, 1995).

The researcher was in a privileged position to have access to key participants in the process and documents, as well as playing a central role herself. Such involvement, however, opens up the possibility of bias, for example, in the selection of documentation, of which the researcher was very much aware. The case study presents an account of events through the eyes of the players, their perceptions and opinions, and documentary sources are used to provide further evidence of what happened. This research follows in the footsteps of other case studies of GM schools. Each was unique in its own right, but contributed to an emerging picture of the implementation of the GM policy and its effects. This case study, like that of Deem and Davies (1991), clearly indicates that the direction and development of state educational policy may often lead to unforeseen outcomes and consequences.

The Stratford story, as is the paradox of a case study, yields ‘both unique and universal understanding’ (Simon, 1996, p. 225). This research not only sheds light on events at the school, and on the GM policy during its ten years’ life span, it has relevance for today’s political agenda of self-managing schools, which both major political parties appear to be advocating. It is of both historical interest and contemporary significance for those involved with, and interested in, self-managing schools.

**Concepts of self-management**

The findings from this case study support much of the research on GM schools, but this is not always the case. The evidence of Stratford supports earlier research which points to the GM policy being politically motivated, highly controversial, and used by schools to avoid reorganization and closure. Expectations were too high, enemies became intransigent and, as with all new
policies/movements, there were unexpected outcomes and consequences, which inevitably emerged and had to be addressed.

Relationships with the LEA

The hostility and bitterness which the Stratford opting out process generated between the protagonists and the LEA mirrored the outright hostility experienced by some of the respondents in the survey conducted by Bush et al (1993, pp 81-2). Despite Coleman et al. (1993) noting that the relationship with the LEA is seen by the majority as being at least satisfactory, relationships between Stratford and Newham remained hostile. Like the eight per cent of schools identified by Coleman et al. (1993) as being unable to purchase any services from unwilling LEAs, Stratford was both unwilling and unable to buy in their services from Newham. Lack of a totally co-ordinated system of admission caused delays and difficulties, for example, in Bromley (Times Educational Supplement, 12 June, 1992), and similar problems were experienced at Stratford.

Many LEAs were adamant that the GM policy would undermine their capacity for strategic planning with regard to rationalisation of school provision (Halpin et al. 1991). Their research subsequently shows that many LEAs had either abandoned or temporarily shelved their reorganisation plans. Similarly, Newham's reorganisation plans were blocked when Stratford was allowed to opt out.

Diversity and choice

The low parent turn out and modest support for opting out run counter to the point made by Halpin et al. (1993), that large numbers of parents participate enthusiastically in ballots to determine whether schools can make applications to the Secretary of State to opt out. Rogers (1992, p. 133) claims that, in some cases, parents are used as mere 'ballot fodder' and evidence suggests that this was the case at Stratford. Parents primarily wanted to keep the school open as Power et al. (1994) had found and they were used to trigger the opt-out process.

Research by Halpin et al. (1993), Coleman et al., (1993) and Bush et al. (1993), further suggests that involvement in the opting out process does not seem to ensure sustained involvement or the subsequent development of enhanced parental participation. At Stratford, there was a different experience. Parents did play a significant role in the school's future. Though denied the right to establish a parent teacher association, they took matters into their own hands, holding the inaugural PTA meeting in the local church hall. Parents' support for the head and staff, and their
vote of no confidence in the chair of governors and other members of the governing body, helped
to sway the balance of power.

Research conducted by Fitz et al. (1993) suggests that GM status had only minimal impact on
parental choice and there is evidence at Stratford of the LEA attempting to stifle that choice. The
rise in pupil numbers is testament to the parents of Newham and the surrounding area choosing
Stratford. This supports findings about rising pupil numbers from the GMSC. Stratford gave them
the opportunity to send their children to a school that was not run by an LEA which was positioned
close to the bottom of the national performance tables. This seems to be in keeping with the view
that, while GM schools may not constitute anything ‘new’, they were cultivating an image as
somehow ‘different’ from their LEA counterparts (Power et al., 1994). The extent and diversity of
that choice are open to question even though the school became part of the Technology Schools
Initiative (TSI). This supports the view of Fitz et al. (1997, p. 17) that the greater autonomy which
schools enjoy does not necessarily translate into new, innovative or diverse forms of curricular or
pedagogic practice, even in circumstances where this has been officially encouraged, for
example, through the Technology Schools Initiative.

Fitz et al. (1997, p. 17) further argue that not only are GM schools constrained by the national
curriculum, but that schools are reverting to or re-emphasizing traditional type schooling. There is
an emphasis on behaviour and discipline; school uniform is often introduced or the dress code
enforced more strictly. This was certainly true of Stratford. As the school documentation indicated,
there was an emphasis on tradition and traditional values.

Stratford’s story revealed that the concept of self-management does not ensure sustained
parental involvement or real diversity and choice.

**School improvement**

Increasingly, the case for self-management was argued on the basis of findings from studies of
school effectiveness (Purkey and Smith, 1985). Events at Stratford, however, demonstrated that
government rhetoric about GM schools delivering improved standards in education was not
necessarily true. The case study findings support much of the research which questions whether
anything significantly changed in the performance of schools as a result of school autonomy
(Bush and Coleman, 1992; Bush, 1996; Davies and Hentschke, 1994; Levacic and Hardman,
1999). Indeed, in the initial period after incorporation, pupils’ learning suffered. Nevertheless, it
also needs to be noted that, contrary to the point made by Levacic and Hardman (1999), that GM

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schools are on average more socially advantaged, pupils at Stratford were not socially advantaged.

Halpin (1993) notes that, while children acknowledge that their schools are better equipped and decorated, they don’t comment about whether the teaching has altered significantly. At Stratford, however, pupils were able to talk about the standard of teaching they were receiving. They were critical of teaching standards.

Power et al. (1997, p. 358) indicate that it is ‘persuasive to suggest that making educational decision-making the responsibility of individual institutions is an effective strategy for “shifting the blame”. The failure of individual schools to flourish as “stand alone” institutions can then be attributed to poor leadership or teaching quality’. This was indeed the experience at Stratford.

Research conducted on the role of DfEE appointed governors in school improvement at Stratford (Snelling, 1997) suggests a political role. It does not clearly indicate that they have been any more effective in carrying out their duties or of particular value in the school improvement process. It is possible that they have legitimised the actions of the governing body.

Neill et al. (1995), however, did find evidence that, in those GM schools incorporated for more than two years, educational priorities were higher, which suggests that, once the initial turmoil is over, schools return to their priorities of educating pupils. This was also true of Stratford, as it emerged from special measures in 1995, but it took longer.

Relationships between head and governors - the case for self-management

The case for self-management as presented by Davies and Hentschke, (1994) and Thomas, (1987), was not supported by events at Stratford, at least in the immediate years after incorporation. When roles and responsibilities are not clear or understood, the potential for the breakdown in relationships and conflict is magnified rather than managerial efficiency being enhanced as the GM policy’s advocates consistently claimed (Campbell et al., 1996).

Far from fostering greater managerial efficiency, the move to GM status led to problems within the governing body, which became highly publicised, and had a devastating and demoralising effect on staff and on pupils whose education was also seriously affected. Stratford, in its early days of opting out, did not fulfil the Conservative Party dream where grant-maintained schools would make for better quality (Lawlor, 1988).
It is the appropriate balance of centralization and decentralization as discussed by many, such as Perrow (1970), Weick (1976), Peters and Waterman (1982) and Caldwell and Spinks (1988) in terms of organization theory as an argument for self-management, which was highlighted in the case study school. This balance was called into question when the Secretary of State found himself reluctantly having to intervene in the affairs of the governing body at Stratford on a number of occasions. Events led observers to ask whether the GM policy offered the right balance of centralization and decentralization.

Similarly, the case for self-management, as presented from a professional perspective (Sherratt, 1994; Macpherson, 1996) contrasted with the experience at Stratford which revealed intimidation and interference in day-to-day running of the school.

Neill et al. (1995) found that many of the teachers in their survey (of the National Union of Teachers) referred to the 'professional isolation' they experienced working in a GM school and suggest that teachers' morale and job security are less than one might have expected. This was certainly the case at Stratford where the school was isolated by a hostile LEA and staff found themselves in a climate of intimidation and without written contracts which the governing body consistently failed to provide in the early years of being grant-maintained.

The school's difficulty in finding suitable governors and lack of vetting procedures highlight the fundamental weakness of non-elected first or foundation governors who simply 'emerge' at the time of the GM proposal (Bush 1992).

The view expressed by some (Sherratt, 1994; Hart, 1990) that the balance in favour of governors appeared excessive to the extent that it may not helpfully complement the operational responsibilities of heads, was fuelled by the well-publicised clash between head and governors at Stratford and exacerbated by the vagueness identified by Bush et al. (1993) and Leighton (1992) in the administration of governors' powers and responsibilities. When Bush et al. (1993) identified that the head is particularly vulnerable in the GM situation, where there is no longer the possibility of support from the LEA in any dispute with the governors, it was to Stratford that they turned for an example.

The GM policy made provision for the most extreme form of school self-management in England and Wales and events at Stratford GM School demonstrated what could go wrong in such an institution. What happened does not support the case for self-management as presented from a political/economic, organizational, professional or indeed a school improvement perspective, at least in the early years after incorporation. Success came to Stratford later, when initial difficulties
were overcome. The school's results compared favourably with those of similar schools and other schools in the LEA. Its rate of improvement in terms of pupil achievement was identified by HMCI as being among the best the country. Although this later success may support the case for self-management, the role of GM status in this success is difficult to analyse. Does school autonomy work? The research evidence is inconclusive, as indeed it is from this case study.

Lessons of Stratford School

Stratford did not live up to expectations, just as the GM policy did not live up to the earlier claims made by its advocates (Anderson, 1999) but, as Stephen Byers maintained, the Labour government would learn from the GM experience and seek to extend the benefits of self-management. Lessons were learned, not least from Stratford. While Stratford was affected by the evolving GM policy (Fitz, Halpin and Power, 1993), for example, the school benefited from increased funding and grants, events at the school also helped to shape that policy and subsequent legislation, for example, with regard to governors. The policy had loopholes and the Stratford players found them. The Stratford experience showed that things could go dramatically wrong and they did. Parents were both used and played a role in the unfolding events. Stratford showed that autonomous schools were not automatically better and more efficient with improved standards. Standards did improve eventually, but it is difficult to equate the reason for this with GM status. Improved resources no doubt played their part. Here, it is perhaps worth restating that during this period, Stratford was a multi-cultural comprehensive situated in one of the most deprived LEAs in the country, with nearly ninety per cent of pupils having a mother tongue other than English, 89 per cent of pupils in Year 7 below the national literacy average and 56 per cent entitled to free school meals.

This contrasted starkly with other GM and LEA schools as indicated in a study from the London Research Centre, which showed that a third of youngsters in LEA schools speak a first language other than English while the same is true of only 9 per cent of those attending GM schools.....council-run schools take in 45 per cent of children from ethnic backgrounds compared with 38 per cent in GM schools (Lepkowska, 1998).

The resources and extra funding were sorely needed and, as Anderson (1999, p. 211) says ‘GM comprehensive schools serving areas of serious and economic deprivation particularly benefited from the extra resources made available to them'. One has to remember, however, that Stratford would not have survived to provide these improved standards without taking the GM route.
In researching the perceptions of headteachers and chairs of governors as the GM era was
drawing to a close, Anderson and Bush (1999, p. 25) refer to the ability to ‘see through’ the
circumstances of one’s work and there are elements of this ability in the interviews during this
case study when, for example, senior managers look back and realise that appointments were
rushed and pupils knew that their education was suffering.

While the principle of self-management may be generally accepted, the Stratford experience of
repeated government intervention to try and resolve matters suggests that complete autonomy as
experienced by GM schools could pose problems, both for individual institutions and for the
education system as a whole. It calls into question the need for some safeguards, to prevent
difficulties or, in the event of things going wrong, if responsibilities are not properly carried out.
Clearly, the Secretary of State, DfEE or the Funding Agency would have been hard pressed to
resolve such problems if all schools had been grant-maintained. If roles of heads and governors
remain unclear, then procedures for conflict resolution are needed.

Public funds must be safeguarded with adequate accountability procedures. Schools in isolation
do provide difficulties for an overarching admissions policy. The problems of surplus places have
to be addressed and this may mean school closures. Ironically, at Stratford, the places which
Newham hoped to lose through the school’s closure, are sorely needed twelve years on.

School improvement fundamentally has to happen from within, but outside assistance can be of
immense use, whether it be from the LEA or independent external consultants, and professional
isolation can be demoralising, if not damaging. Certainly improved resources are linked to
educational improvement and parity of funding is essential. GM status is not a necessary
requirement for school improvement. Nor does it necessarily provide diversity and choice.

Cracknell and Douglas (1997) maintain:

The “self-managing” school is the modern vehicle for maintaining and improving
education….But “self-managing” should not mean completely autonomous.
(The Times Educational Supplement, 5 December, 1997)

They argue for a mature partnership in which the respective powers and contribution of schools
and authorities are recognised. All of which may well lead us to the question Kellner (1998) asks:
Should part of Labour’s strategy be to link these two themes (old-left socialism and new-right advocacy of the free market): to apply third-way principles to the future of our schools?

(The Times Educational Supplement, 19 June, 1998)

Perhaps the third way is an appropriate step forward. It is certainly worth noting that the isolation experienced at Stratford and other GM schools, as a result of the British policy of autonomy by self-selection, was not witnessed in other countries which moved towards decentralization.

Self-management and the future

Referring to New Labour’s approach to GM schools, Anderson suggests that there is emerging a new politics of education that is ‘above’ the bi-polar approach of ‘Left’ or ‘Right’:

Thus, rather than adopting an ‘either-or’ approach to the existence- or not- of GM schools, the government’s stand is one of inclusion - or the politics of ‘And-Also’..... Hence, the government’s approach to GM schools can be viewed as one of the early examples of third way education policy.


Moreover, she maintains (p. 210) that there is some evidence of ‘elements of a third way attitude’ among GM headteachers and chairs of governors, and, ‘synergy with that of the current government’:

It is evident that, far from the end of the GM-form of autonomous schools, this type of school has been re-invented within a new framework. On the basis that third way politics is about inclusivity, and that policy formation is not bound by rigid ideology (Price, 1999), the implication of all of this is that some of the third way values identified by Giddens articulate with the GM schools policy.

It is interesting to note that Stratford’s present relations with the LEA, as a foundation school, are described as being positive by one of the interviewees. An extension of this research might well examine Stratford’s experience of foundation status and its apparent success at building bridges with what was a very hostile LEA.
Irrespective of the change of government in 1997 and the end of the GM policy, both major political parties have shown in their recent statements (the Secretary of State's speech to the NAHT conference 2000 and the Conservative Party's Common Sense Revolution Policy document 1999) that self-management is still very much on the political agenda. Hence, as a study of school self-management, the Stratford story is of continuing significance.

Stratford was expected to be the experiment which blew up the laboratory, and it certainly experienced acute difficulties, but the school survived all the crises. Perhaps its message was that, given the problems experienced, the third way may be an appropriate way forward, ensuring maximum financial delegation and self-management, within a wider, inclusive framework of support and accountability, rather than the Stratford story of exclusion and isolation.
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APPENDIX A

Interview Schedule

Individual interviews

Five areas of focus were selected:

- the opting-out process
- the role of head and governors
- relationships with the LEA
- raising academic standards
- parental - choice and diversity

The respondents were considered more as informants than respondents, offering detailed information about and their perceptions of events which took place, the effects of these occurrences and the role of the key players. Hence specific questions were few and related to the five areas of focus. Often the role of the interviewer was to prompt the respondent to enlarge on or clarify a point. The areas and degree of focus were not the same for all interviewees. For example, interviewees 1, 2 and 3 had much to offer about the origins and nature of the school's campaign to opt out, whereas interviewees 5 and 6 could offer little to this aspect, but had a significant contribution in looking at the school's improvement. Hence not all interviewees were asked the same questions.

Nature of the questions asked:

- set the context -
  When did you come to the school?
  What was the school like then?

- establish background to opting-out -
  How and why did the GM campaign start?
  What was your attitude and role in the campaign and that of others?
  (key players, staff, governors, parents, LEA)
  Why was the school granted GM status?
Describe events up to the time when approval was given.

- **establish events after the approval was granted** -
  Describe events after the school's application was accepted, leading up to incorporation in April 1991.
  
  With hindsight are there any regrets about going GM?

- **establish nature of the relationship between head and governors** -
  Describe the relationship between the head and governors from the time of the head's appointment and give your views of the events which took place and their effect on the school.

- **establish nature of relationship between school and LEA after Stratford became GM**
  What were relations like with the LEA after the school became GM?
  How did they progress over the years?

- **establish what happened in terms of the school's academic progress as a GM school**
  What was the school reputation academically prior to becoming GM?
  What was the effect of going GM on pupils' progress?
  Describe the inspection process and its effect.
  What did it mean to be a GM school in special measures?
  What are your impressions of the 'naming and shaming' policy?
  Comment on the school's progress.
  What are your views about the DfEE appointed governors and their role?
Interview Schedule

GROUP INTERVIEWS WITH YEAR 11 PUPILS

1. What are your strongest memories of Stratford School which you will take away with you when you leave? Give examples of incidents, people (staff and pupils), lessons, which you will remember and why.

2. Describe what you remember about settling into Stratford in Year 7 or whenever you joined the school. Did you feel that it was a good school? A bad one? Describe incidents to show how you felt.

3. When you were in Year 9, the school was visited by a team of inspectors and found to be failing. What do you remember about that time? What were your feelings generally about the school? Recall any incidents from them. Do you think the school was failing? In what ways was it failing or successful?

4. The inspectors said that the school was failing. What is your reaction to this statement? Clarify your response.

5. In December the school was again visited by a team of inspectors. What do you remember about this time?

6. The inspectors said that the school was improved. What is your reaction to this statement? Clarify your response.

7. If you feel the school has improved, give examples of the improvement e.g. in the classroom, teaching around the school. Is homework set regularly? In what ways has the staff, pupils, the teaching, lesson changed/improved if at all, give examples.

8. Have pupils' attitudes about the school changed in the last two years? Are pupils working harder now or not? Give examples.
   If there have been changes/improvements who or what do you think is responsible? the pupils themselves? staff? parents? or governors?

9. What do you think the school governors do? Have you met any of the governors? If so, when?
   Describe what part, if any, you feel the governors may have placed in the school's improvement.

10. Over the past five years the school has received a lot of publicity on the TV, Radio and Newspaper. Describe how you felt about the publicity about the school. If you can remember give examples of what was said in the papers and say what you thought about it.
APPENDIX B

Documentary evidence

Opting out

1. The Times, 18 February, 1992
3. Letter from Andrew Panton for Director of Education, Newham to Mr Singh, one of the pro GM governors, 5 January, 1990
4. The Independent, 28 August, 1990
5. Letter from Acting Head Teacher of Stratford School to parents, 5 November, 1990
6. Excerpts from the school’s weekly bulletin prior to opting out between July 1990 and March 1991
7. Letter from parent to Director of Education, Newham, 7 March, 1991
10. Minutes of meeting of the prospective board of governors, 17 July, 1990
11. Minutes of meeting of the prospective board of governors, 6 September, 1990
13. Stratford and Newham Yellow Advertiser, 5 April, 1991
16. Minutes of the prospective board of governors’ emergency meeting, 2 September, 1990
17. Minutes of meeting of the prospective board of governors, 24 June, 1990
18. Minutes of meeting of the prospective board of governors, 8 July, 1990
19. Letter from chair of GMS governors to director of GMST, 1 October, 1990
21. The Independent on Sunday, 16 February, 1992
23. The Times Educational Supplement, 3 May, 1991
25. The Times Educational Supplement, 28 December, 1990
Relationships between heads and governors

1. The Times Educational Supplement, 28 February, 1992
2. Letter from chair of governors to the headteacher, 28 October, 1991
3. Letter from head to Tim Eggar, Minister of Education, 22 November 1991
4. The Independent, 6 February, 1992
6. The Daily Mail, 9 January 1992
7. Letter from DES to chair of governors, 10 January, 1992
8. Second letter from DES to chair of governors, 10 January, 1992
9. Letter from head to DES, 22 January, 1992
10. Education, 20 August, 1993
11. The Daily Telegraph, 8 February, 1992
12. DES letter to chair of governors, 28 February, 1992
13. The Times Educational Supplement 24 January, 1992
14. DES fax/letter to chair of governors, 7 February, 1992
16. The Daily Mail, 13 February, 1992
17. The Guardian, 19 February, 1992
18. The Daily Telegraph, 19 February, 1992
19. The Sunday Telegraph, 23 February, 1992
20. The Daily Express, 6 March, 1992
21. Letter from DES to chair of governors, 6 March, 1992
22. Letter from DES to chair of governors, 23 March, 1992
23. The Times, 24 February, 1992
24. The Times Educational Supplement, 28 February
25. The Daily Mail, 19 February, 1992
26. The Independent, 5 June, 1992
27. The Daily Telegraph, 8 February, 1992
28. The Independent on Sunday, 16 February, 1992
29. The Times Educational Supplement, 21 February
30. The Times Educational Supplement, 17 April, 1992
31. The Times Educational Supplement, 24 July, 1992
32. Newham Recorder, 19 March, 1992
33. The Sunday Express, 23 February, 1992
34. The Independent, 6 February, 1992
Relationships with the LEA

2. Letter to Bursar from Lincolnshire County Council, 12 March, 1992
3. Letter from head to Tony Banks MP, 12 May, 1995
8. Letter from Director of Education, Newham to prospective Stratford School parent, March, 1993
9. Letter from Director of Education, Newham, to DFE, 22 April, 1993
11. Letter from the Leader of the Council, Newham to The Sunday Times, 4 August, 1991
12. The Times Educational Supplement, 25 June, 1993

Inspection and school improvement

1. Parliamentary debate, 2 March, 1992
2. The Independent, 3 March, 1992
3. Report provided by school for HMI visit, 24 March, 1992
4. Letter from Anthea Millett, Director of Inspection to chair of governors, 23 June, 1993
5. Letter from head to the Prime Minister, 20 November, 1995
6. The Times Educational Supplement, 10 December, 1993
7. Stratford School's submission for Investor in People status, 1996
8. Response to first HMI visit by Mark Prisk, chair of governors to Gillian Shephard, Secretary of State, 26 August, 1994
9. Letter from DFE to chair of governors, 12 September, 1994
10. Letter from DFE to chair of governors, 3 January, 1995
11. Letter from head to chair of governors in response to HMI third monitoring visit and report, 7 April, 1995
12. Letter to head from HMI, 3 March, 1995
14. The Independent, 6 May, 1995
15. The Times Educational Supplement, 24 November, 1995
20. The Times, 26 December, 1995
22. Newham Recorder, 16 October, 1996
23. Excerpt from school’s successful submission for a National Training award
24. Inscription accompanying crystal vase presented to the school by Schools Minister, Robin Squire
26. The Times Educational Supplement, 12 February, 1999

Diversity and parental choice

1. Letter accompanying proposal for acquisition of GM status, 23 March, 1990
2. Stratford proposal for acquisition of GM status, 23 March, 1990
4. Leaflet announcing inaugural meeting of PTA, 3 February, 1992
5. Letter from chair of the Stratford School Association to the Secretary of State, 6 February, 1992
6. The Sunday Telegraph, 23 February, 1992
8. Headteacher’s personal statement for OFSTED inspectors, 1993
9. Stratford GM School Business and Technology Centre leaflet, 1992
10. Draft school development planning document, 14 June, 1995
11. Letter from Mark Prisk, chair of governors, to Gillian Shephard, Secretary of State, 26 August, 1994
## ANALYSIS OF PUPILS' VIEWS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTIONS</th>
<th>TAPE 1</th>
<th>TAPE 2</th>
<th>TAPE 3</th>
<th>TAPE 4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Strongest memories of Stratford.</td>
<td>Trouble with Governors had great effect on pupils' learning. Signing petitions. Incident in assembly - frightening experience.</td>
<td>Purple blazers. Incident in Hall. It shook them. Pupils had been messed about, lots of teachers left, school threatened with closure rowing/interruptions in class.</td>
<td>Purple blazers. Incident in school assembly with Mrs Snelling &amp; Governors. Bad times.</td>
<td>How the school was unsettled Mrs Snelling in assembly, newspaper reports. News that school was going to close.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Settling in to Year 7.</td>
<td>We lost a lot of friends who left the school. The classes were really small.</td>
<td>Remembered the first day - no uniform then, so it was quite easy to settle in.</td>
<td>Remembered some of the bad times when the school was going through a bad patch.</td>
<td>Was not very good in our first year, but afterwards it got better. Teachers preoccupied with what was going on.</td>
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<td>3. Memories of OFSTED Inspection in Year 9.</td>
<td>Aware they were under the microscope, thought they were being inspected.</td>
<td>Worried about what they read and heard in media. Worried that school may close.</td>
<td>Pupils on best behaviour. Don't think they blamed the students, they blamed the teachers more than anything else. They did point out the things that were wrong and that the teachers should get organised.</td>
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<td>4. Reaction to school found to be failing.</td>
<td>Pupils agreed - they were not getting the quality of education e.g. in Maths &amp; Music. They didn't realise at the time that they were missing out. Because of controversy, the school had to take the teachers it could get. Embarrassed when people found out they attended Stratford.</td>
<td>Reaction of people outside. Children leaving. Inspectors came &amp; made decisions - they would have criteria, but we know now, that it isn't failing.</td>
<td>Teaching could be better. SEN students not getting the attention they should. School being picked on.</td>
<td>1993 was better than before, improving. Classes were separated into divisions.</td>
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<td>5. Memories of HMI visit in December 1995.</td>
<td>Teachers stressed, sometimes reflected in their teaching, papers flying around, getting work up to date. Staff working harder during that week. Could not keep it up.</td>
<td>More important. School could close down if it had not improved. Grades went up.</td>
<td>Inspectors were looking at classwork/homework, but also looking at things beyond the classroom because that's what makes the school. Looking to see if school improved.</td>
<td>Used to the HMI visits.</td>
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<td>6. Reaction to news that Stratford no longer failing.</td>
<td>Agreed that school had improved.</td>
<td>Inspection a good idea - if someone not tell you what's wrong, you don’t know.</td>
<td>It did improve because the school was no longer in the press and teaching standards did improve.</td>
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<td>7. Pupil perceptions of improvement or changes.</td>
<td>New, better teachers more experienced. They were friends with them, where there were cover teachers before, especially in Year 7.</td>
<td>School was better mentoring scheme introduced. Improved music dept, equipment and teaching. Teamwork Staff communicating. New Technology Centre. Staff much happier.</td>
<td>Teachers worked really hard. Good classroom teachers who socialise. Teachers even came in on Saturdays. New Technology Centre. More tests.</td>
<td>Got better. Brought in new, better teachers and they sorted it out. Teaching improved, teachers paid more attention to students better facilities, more stable staff, more homework.</td>
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<td>8. Who or what was responsible for the changes.</td>
<td>All the teachers together and Mrs Snelling because she was put under a lot of pressure.</td>
<td>Mrs Snelling was the driving force behind it. Staff working together.</td>
<td>The Headteacher &amp; Governors. The Headteacher went to the teachers &amp; told them you are doing this wrong. Teamwork. All teachers got together, planned: everything organised.</td>
<td>The Head.</td>
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<td>9. Pupil perceptions of school governors and their role in school improvement.</td>
<td>Governors help run the school. Make a lot of decisions. Hardly see them. People are not clear what they do. Get letters for parent governors - not know what it's about. Met some once.</td>
<td>Governors stand beside the school to help collaborate and make decisions about the school's future. Giving support to Mrs Snelling. Helping with hiring of new staff.</td>
<td>Head has meeting with Governors and she comes back and tells the teachers what governors said. Should see the Governors more.</td>
<td>Don't know - they sit &amp; discuss issues.</td>
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<td>10. Pupil views concerning the publicity about Stratford.</td>
<td>Upset. Media, lives off gossip/bad news.</td>
<td>Publicity not all true. Reaction of people outside. It caught everyone's attention. Other schools carried on as normal.</td>
<td>Unhappy about the publicity. Unfair. Reaction of outsiders. They never report the good stuff.</td>
<td>The school was not as bad as they said it was. The publicity was very stressful, worried them.</td>
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