

mtm SCHOOL MATTERS

APRIL 2010

DON'T MISS:

Practical Strategies for a New Decade

The autumn conference for all independent school decision-makers.

Tuesday 14th September 2010
Institute of Directors, London SW1

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General election 2010 Into the unknown

By Dick Davison

Well, whose side are they on? The glib assumption has always been that the toffs' party was in favour of independent schools and could generally be relied upon to smile on them. And with the Tories, until recently at least, comfortably ahead in most polls, many in the independent sector had also assumed that a new government in 2010 would bring in a more benign political environment.

So some eyebrows were raised when the Shadow Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, Michael Gove, told the ASCL annual conference in March that he wanted more children in *state* schools under the Conservatives and fewer in independent schools and, moreover, "I would like to see some schools that are currently in the independent sector become state schools."

Not that that should have been a surprise. The now-familiar plans for 3,000 Swedish-style independent but free schools and the extension of Labour's Academy programme should have alerted anyone to the fact that, although led by Old Etonians and with visceral instincts favouring the private sector, the Tories

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were unlikely to have goodies up their sleeves for the private sector. Forget, for the foreseeable future, vouchers and a new assisted places scheme.

But there's actually nothing new about Gove's line. Back in the 1990s, successive education secretaries in John Major's government said very similar things. Kenneth Clarke was quoted in the then *ISIS Magazine* as saying that his responsibility was to make state schools so good that no-one should feel the need to pay fees to escape them. And who could argue with that?

"I would like to see the percentage of private schools drop. I wouldn't set an arbitrary target on it, but I would like us to move in that direction."

Michael Gove

So, as forecast in the **mtm**consulting Independent Education Sector Report last year, a Conservative victory on 6 May would bring in a government with the firm intention of creating a much more competitive environment for the traditional independent sector. Political and economic realities may shake that determination, not least because the expansion of genuine parental choice in the state sector inevitably means the creation of more spare capacity in the education system. The Treasury may be less keen on that as it struggles to reduce Britain's record budget deficit.

One change that independent schools have looked more recently to the Conservatives for has been some

reduction in the burden of regulation which, on the evidence of the Independent Sector Report, is now significantly adding to schools' costs. Gove has made encouraging noises in this regard, both publicly and privately.

But don't hold your breath. Governments rarely give up powers that their predecessors have bequeathed them. And even when politicians say they are going to deregulate, their actions rarely have the effect they promise. Remember chancellor Gordon Brown's "bonfire of the quangos" - a process which amongst other changes rolled CSCI, with its child welfare responsibilities, into Ofsted and led more or less directly to the current requirement-driven inspection regime.

And, in any case, it's now by no means certain that the Conservatives are going to win. No party is likely to have a large majority and, at the time of writing, authoritative pollsters were forecasting a hung parliament as the most likely outcome of the general election.

In that event, only two things are certain. One is that we will face another general election within two years.

The coming cuts in public spending will be "tougher and deeper" than under Margaret Thatcher.

Alistair Darling

The second, whether David Cameron or Gordon Brown is in Downing Street on 7 May, is that the economic imperative - to reduce the budget deficit against a background of shaky market confidence - will dominate all political activity. All parties are understandably cagey about where they would make the inevitable cuts in public spending (likely to be more savage than anything contemplated by Margaret Thatcher, according to Alistair Darling). But two near-certainties for targeting are investment in plant and equipment and, especially, public sector pay. So, even if schools' current budgets are protected, expect protracted labour unrest affecting all public services, including schools. The Easter teachers' union conferences will revert to their role of recruiting sergeants for the independent sector.

Depressing though that prospect may be for any responsible parent or citizen, the independent sector will doubtless recognise that it represents an opportunity. Not only would a temporary pause in increasing teacher pay assist schools in their urgent search for reduced costs, but recruitment opportunities may improve just at the time when the delayed effects of the recession are biting deepest.

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- ◆ **Updating your school strategy?**
 - ◆ **Identifying trends that will impact on your school in future?**

*The **mtm**consulting Independent Sector Report 2010 defines trends, forecasts to 2020 and scenarios to 2030. Essential reading for those responsible for overall school strategy or marketing strategy.*

Find out more: jfaulker@mtmconsulting.co.uk

NEW SURVEY: School fee payment

- ◆ **Just how do your parents afford to pay school fees?**
- ◆ **What proportion of their family budget do they swallow up?**
- ◆ **What do they sacrifice to pay for their children's education?**

mtmconsulting is about to undertake a new survey of parents and their experience of fee-paying.

This will update and extend the survey we published in 2007 which, for the first time, disclosed the high degree of financial commitment parents make for their children's education.

If you would like your parents to be invited to take part in this online confidential survey, and receive a copy of the results for your own school, contact Dick Davison: rdavison@mtmconsulting.co.uk



Priority Benchmarking: A new guide to outcomes in parental surveys

It has never been more important to know what parents think of your school. Pressure on family budgets, exacerbated by the recession, is making parents much more pragmatic in their educational choices. And the prospect of heightened competition from a radically reformed state sector will further emphasise the need for schools to have regular and accurate intelligence from buyers and potential buyers.

Most schools now appreciate the value of regular surveys of parental opinion, undertaken the traditional way—with paper questionnaires— or, more frequently now, undertaken online via a secure website. Digital technology makes regular sampling of parental opinion, whether through entry or exit surveys, regular surveying of specific school years, or whole-school questionnaires, a much more cost-effective exercise for schools of all types. **mtmconsulting** offers a full range of parental survey options.

But how to interpret the results? How do the findings from your parents stack against those from other schools? How concerned should you be if your parents give you, on a satisfaction scale of 1-5, only an average of 4.1 for school discipline? Should you make this a

priority for attention or uprate it on your regular risk analysis review?

The answer is to judge the score against a benchmark. The responses to standard questions in surveys are added to an ever-growing database of results, permitting an increasingly reliable scale against which to assess the significance of your own parental opinion. So, taking the sample above, it should be reasonably reassuring to find that the benchmark score from recent **mtmconsulting** surveys is 3.9.

So far, so conventional. **mtmconsulting** has now taken this process a stage further. Gauging priorities for your own school is a matter not only of how low the satisfaction score is for a given factor, relative to the all-school benchmark, but also relative to the degree of importance assigned to that factor by your parents.

Coming soon from mtmRESEARCH

mtmconsulting's unique Mandarin market intelligence service is being upgraded, with many new user-friendly features.

From September, your Mandarin report, as well as analysing your school's market in detail, will come with a step-by-step guide on how to use the results to optimise your school marketing.



The **mtmconsulting** Priority Index

The **mtmconsulting** Priority Index, available now in school parent surveys, calibrates both the importance assigned to various factors by parents when choosing your school and their current rating of the school's performance on each factor. This index score gives you a clear guide to priorities for attention on a scale of 1-25: the higher the score, the more likely it is that parents are, or are likely to become, seriously dissatisfied with the school.

What is more, the Priority Index itself can be benchmarked. So you will be able to see, for example, that although your own parents are giving you a relatively high priority warning over school communications this may be a relatively common feature of all school surveys. That's not to say that you won't still want to do something about communications but it will give you the comfort of knowing you are dealing with an issue common to many schools.

- ◆ For information on all **mtmconsulting's** parent research services, contact Joe Faulkner: 01502 722787 or jfaulkner@mtmconsulting.co.uk

School proprietors: No longer a neglected minority

Public benefit and charitable status have dominated discourse about independent schools for so long now that the interests of privately-owned schools, run for profit, have been sidelined.

At least, that's how it has seemed to many school proprietors. Nearly one school in five within the ISC associations is privately-owned and yet many of their proprietors feel isolated, misunderstood and even ignored by the organisations which represent independent schools' interests.

It was to provide a regular opportunity for private

Five key facts about proprietorial schools

1. 17.1% of ISC's 1,265 member schools are NOT charities
2. Three-quarters of proprietorial schools have under 500 pupils
3. A quarter are in groups of schools, mostly small (between 2 and 5 schools)
4. Two-thirds raised their fees by less than 2% last year
5. A third of proprietorial schools devote at least 5% of fee income to BURSARIES

school owners to meet and share their concerns and business ideas that **mtm**consulting established the Proprietorial Schools' Forum in 2009. With a regular termly meeting at a central London venue, the forum now attracts a growing group of school proprietors to a unique and focused networking opportunity.

A sample survey of proprietorial schools, undertaken by **mtm**consulting in late 2009, disclosed that school owners' greatest concern—bigger than the effects of the recession—was the growing burden of Government regulation: "Get the maggot of government off our backs and leave us to run a business!" said one.

Nevertheless, many thought that their flexibility and quick-thinking business skills, combined with growing dissatisfaction with state schools, offered continuing opportunities for development: the majority had plans to expand or acquire new schools in the next three years.

- ◆ **The next Proprietor Forum will take place on Wednesday 9 June, at the Cavalry and Guards Club, 127 Piccadilly, London W1.**
- ◆ **Amongst those speaking will be Jonathan Cook, Secretary of the Independent Schools Bursars' Association, and school catering expert Edward Hall, MD of Allmanhall Ltd.**
- ◆ **To book your place at the Forum, contact **mtm**consulting at office@mtmconsulting.co.uk or ring Barbara Badrick on 01502 722787.**

In their words...

I suggest that rather than starting from scratch, the Conservative Party follow what we've seen in health, where when local state provision is unsatisfactory, or cannot meet the needs of the patient, the health trust looks to the private sector.

David Hanson, Chief Executive IAPS

Dear Parents

If you don't believe everything your child tells you about school, I will not believe everything your child tells me about home.

John Rae, former Headmaster, Westminster School

Schools are often surprisingly ill-informed about how they are actually seen by the outside world. We are fooled into thinking we know how our school is perceived, because

many of the parents we see are coming to confirm an image of the school that they have already picked up. Those put off by its image in the outside world simply never bother to come.

Martin Stephen, High Master, St Paul's School

Trying to determine what is going on in the world by reading newspapers is like trying to tell the time by watching the second hand of a watch.

Ben Hecht, journalist and Hollywood screenwriter

I'm confident Cameron will let the new schools make a profit. I'm told it will be called a 'management fee'. They can call it 'Louise' if they like because it will give the go-ahead to what we need. Hero headmasters, the ones who turn around sink schools, will be able to become education entrepreneurs.

Fraser Nelson, Editor, The Spectator

Some schools have already embraced a range of social media websites and are using them to their benefit. Others have been slower to catch on.

Senior Consultant Joe Faulkner looks at the benefits and opportunities for schools.

twitter



facebook

Tweet to woo the customer

The growth of social media in communications has been well documented, but remains staggering. Some key facts:

- ◆ It is estimated that 24 hours of new videos are uploaded to YouTube *every minute*. In January 2009 alone, more than 6 billion videos were viewed – the equivalent of one for every person on the planet
- ◆ Facebook has more than 400 million active users. If it were a country it would have the world's third highest population – behind only India and China
- ◆ By the end of 2008, 100 million tweets per quarter were posted onto Twitter. By the end of 2009, this figure had grown to 2 billion per quarter. In the first quarter of 2010 this figure doubled to 4 billion.

Compare this with a decline in printed media, blighted by consistent falls in sales (Daily Telegraph sales fell 26% over the past decade). For any forward looking business – schools included – there is a clear case for developing a social media strategy at one level or another, and investing resources in this.

The opportunities for schools in using social media should not be underestimated. Twitter, Facebook and YouTube allow for quick, regular and easy communication of news and events to stakeholders, be they current parents and pupils, alumni, prospective parents, or opinion leaders in the local community.

Twitter and Facebook also provide a great opportunity to understand what is being said about your school – and to respond to this directly where possible. Your school's reputation is being built through these websites, so be aware of the criticisms, praises and remarks directed at your school. Better still, taking an active interest and responding is likely to be a winning move.

As a means of promotion, too, social media could do wonders for your school. Consider the case of Karl Fisch of Arapahoe High School in the USA. In August 2006 Fisch made a PowerPoint presentation called 'Did You Know?' to alert fellow teachers to the impact of the internet and globalisation. The presentation was added to Fisch's blog, and from there to YouTube, renamed 'Shift Happens'. The outcome? By the end of 2006 an estimated 50-100,000 other educators had watched the presentation. Three years on this has risen to 10 million.

Stories like this show how effective a marketing tool the internet and these key sites can be, when used in the right way: imagine if a video like 'Shift Happens' had carried your school's name. The opportunities to reach and engage new audiences are vast.

Try the following as an introduction:

- ◆ Use Twitter and Facebook to communicate latest news – closures, sports and exam results. News updates should all be syndicated to social media sites when adding them to your website
- ◆ Establish event pages on Facebook to help promote open events, sports fixtures and concerts
- ◆ Set up an official group page for alumni where they can add photos, network and encourage events
- ◆ Monitor comments about your school on all networking sites *regularly*. In addition, consider setting up a Google Alert for your school. This will deliver an email whenever new references to your school are found
- ◆ Post promotional, school play and concert videos on to YouTube. Involving pupils in creating their own videos and trying to win the most 'hits' is likely to be a fun and interesting exercise
- ◆ Follow key sources of sector news and information on Twitter (including **mtmconsulting!**) to ensure you are up to date with developments.

To discuss **mtmconsulting's social media and e-marketing services please contact us on 01502 722787 / jfaulkner@mtmconsulting.co.uk**

.... and, of course, follow us on Twitter:
[@mtmconsultinguk](https://twitter.com/mtmconsultinguk)

Practical Strategies for a New Decade

A conference jointly presented by **mtmconsulting** and **Veale Wasbrough Vizards**

*This annual event, staged at the beginning of the school year, is now firmly established as **the** strategic conference for school heads, bursars, governors and those responsible for the success of independent schools.*

These are challenging times for independent schools. To the continuing effects of the deepest recession since the 1930s will soon be added a new and possibly uncertain political environment. But challenges also bring opportunities: to focus on the fundamentals of running a sound educational business and ensuring that what your school offers is in line with demand as conditions improve.

The aim of this, the fifth annual conference run by **mtmconsulting** and Veale Wasbrough Vizards, remains essentially practical: to look at the business of running schools from different perspectives, to offer workshops which will give you new ideas and practical initiatives to take away with you.

Tuesday 14 September
Institute of Directors, Pall Mall, London SW1

£25 Early Booking Discount*

Book before 30 April*

Full details on our website: www.mtmconsulting.co.uk



The Speakers

Graham Able

Chief Executive of Alpha Plus Group, a privately-owned chain of independent schools. Until 2009 Master of Dulwich College and a former Chairman of the Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference.

Professor Paul Collier

Professor of Economics at Oxford University.

Professor Peter McCaffrey

Vice-Chancellor of Cumbria University and an expert in change management.

Mike Baker

Award-winning freelance journalist, broadcaster and education expert. The BBC's education editor for nearly 20 years, he is now education columnist for BBC News Online and The Guardian.

The Workshops

Flexible Fees Solutions

John Deakin (Veale Wasbrough Vizards), Angus Cater (SFS Group Ltd), David Hyner (Brooks Macdonald Asset Management)

Keeping a school at the top of its game

John Roberts CBE and Barry Martin (Chairman of Governors and Headmaster, Hampton School), Dick Davison (mtmconsulting)

The latest market information

Melanie Tucker (mtmconsulting)

Could the Swedish model work here?

Anders Hultin (CEO Gems UK and co-founder Kunskapsskolan), Joe Faulkner (mtmconsulting)

Financial Poker - Twist or Bust?

Barney Northover (Veale Wasbrough Vizards) Trevor O'Sullivan (Grant Thornton)

Preparing for inspection

Simon Bevan & Yvonne Spencer (Veale Wasbrough Vizards), Julian Ridley (Bursar and Clerk to the Governors, Stonyhurst College)