

TAMARIND CHAMBERS

bringing people and ideas together

The role of the local authority in education

Views of Headteachers
and Chairs of Governors

The role of the local authority in education – views of Headteachers and Chairs of Governors

Summary

Tamarind Chambers has conducted a survey amongst Headteachers and Chairs of Governors into their views on the role that Local Authorities should play in education.

The survey shows that schools value their increased autonomy and freedoms but recognise that, within clearly defined parameters, the Local Authority still has a role to play.

In their responses, Chairs and Headteachers said that Local Authorities should continue to be responsible for assessing the special educational needs of individual pupils and providing appropriate education to meet their assessed needs. By contrast, they said that Local Authorities should not have any control over the curriculum.

Further, a clear majority were against Local Authorities having the power to enter and inspect schools as they chose. However, there was general agreement that Local Authorities should collect and report on data about schools in their area.

The responses to some questions revealed contradictory views. For example whilst most respondents said that local authorities should have a role in planning and co-ordinating school places, there was less support for Local Authorities having specific powers to make changes to the size of a school or alter a school's admissions decisions.

Methodology

Tamarind Chambers carried out the survey by email questionnaire. The questionnaire was sent to Headteachers and Chairs of Governors of a range of secondary schools across England between October 2011 and February 2012.

Responses were received from 80 schools; 4 were identified as coming from the Headteacher and 15 from the Chair of Governors, and 15 schools identified themselves as an academy, 12 as a maintained school and 5 as a grant maintained or foundation school. Half the schools had between 1000 and 1500 students, and 32 had between 500 and 1000 students.

A detailed analysis of the responses is shown on pages 5 to 7. Percentages may not add exactly to 100 due to rounding and a small number of 'dont knows'.

Views of Headteachers and Chairs of Governors

The survey showed there was general agreement among Headteachers and Chairs of Governors on a number of issues. One of these was the question of **special educational needs**, where 55% said that the Local Authority should definitely continue to be responsible for providing appropriate education to meet the assessed special educational needs of pupils, including controlling the funding, and a further 34% said they should provide for special educational needs under certain conditions.

Similarly, 50% felt that the Local Authority should definitely be responsible for assessing the special educational needs of individual pupils regardless of the source of funding, with a further 40% saying the Local Authority should be responsible under certain conditions. The survey showed that only 5% of respondents believed the Local Authority should have no responsibility for assessing special educational needs or providing for them.

Another area where there was agreement amongst respondents was on the issue of **collecting data**, with 50% saying that Local Authorities should definitely collect and report on data about schools in their area. A further 36% said they should do this under certain conditions.

Other questions generated contradictory responses. Whilst Headteachers and Chairs of Governors value their school's autonomy, they do see the need for planning and co-ordination and for someone to be able to step in to stop the actions of one school disadvantaging another. However there is less support for Local Authorities having specific powers to over-ride the decisions of a school.

On the question of regulating **competition** between schools, only 21% would give the Local Authority a free hand. Whilst 54% of respondents felt that there was some role for the Local Authority in regulating competition under certain conditions, 20% said the Local Authority should have no role at all.

There was, however, general agreement that a Local Authority should have the power to prevent a school from taking action that could damage other schools – with 38% saying they definitely should and 51% saying only under certain conditions.

On the question of **place planning**, 85% of respondents said that the Local Authority should have responsibility for planning and co-ordinating school places – of which 45% felt that this should definitely be a Local Authority responsibility. There was less universal support for the Local Authority having specific powers to force changes to school numbers and admissions decisions, with around a quarter of respondents saying this should not be a role for the Local Authority at all.

The role of the Local Authority in relation to the **curriculum** was the topic that elicited the clearest agreement across schools, with 76% saying that the Local Authority should have no control over its content. Only one respondent said that the Local Authority should determine the curriculum.

Only 15% of respondents said that Local Authorities should definitely have the power to remove or replace a **governing body**, whilst 34% said Local Authorities should not be able to do this under any circumstances.

A third of respondents were content that a Local Authority should appoint one or more governors to schools in their area, and a further 40% would accept the Local Authority appointing a governor under certain conditions.

On the question of whether the Local Authority should have the power to enter a school on demand to conduct an **inspection**, only 15% were in support of this, with 50% saying that a Local Authority should only have the power if there were conditions on its use.

Just over three quarters of respondents felt that the Local Authority should have responsibility for providing advice and support on **school standards** and have the power to intervene in a school which is failing to deliver the standards the Local Authority requires. Of these respondents, 46% would only accept this role under certain conditions.

On the question of the **championing** role of the Local Authority, 25% said the Local Authority should definitely provide a forum for independent scrutiny of schools on behalf of the local community, with 49% saying they should do so under certain conditions.

Similarly, 25% felt that the Local Authority should definitely represent the interests of pupils and parents rather than the school, with a further 45% again saying they should do this under certain conditions.

The survey asked a series of questions relating to the **provision of services** by the Local Authority.

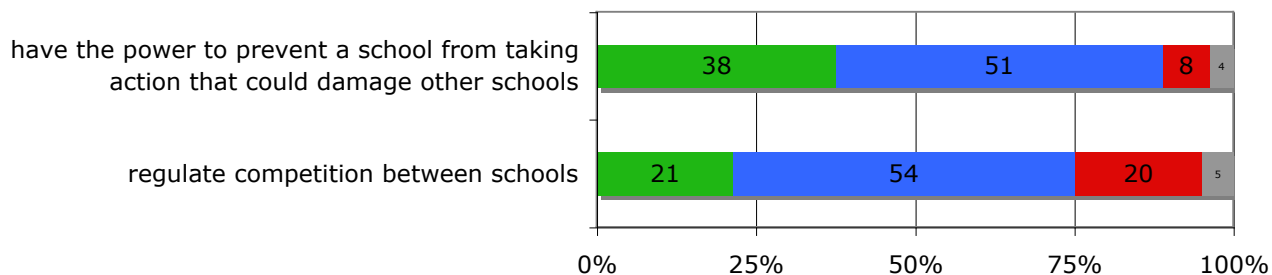
Whilst 73% of respondents saw some role for Local Authorities in providing services for schools in their area, this figure rose to 80% where the Local Authority could provide economies of scale or a better quality of service. However, half of respondents would place conditions on Local Authority involvement.

In relation to support services for governors and the governing body, respondents were more strongly in support of a Local Authority role, with 43% saying a Local Authority should definitely provide this support and 39% saying they should do so under certain conditions.

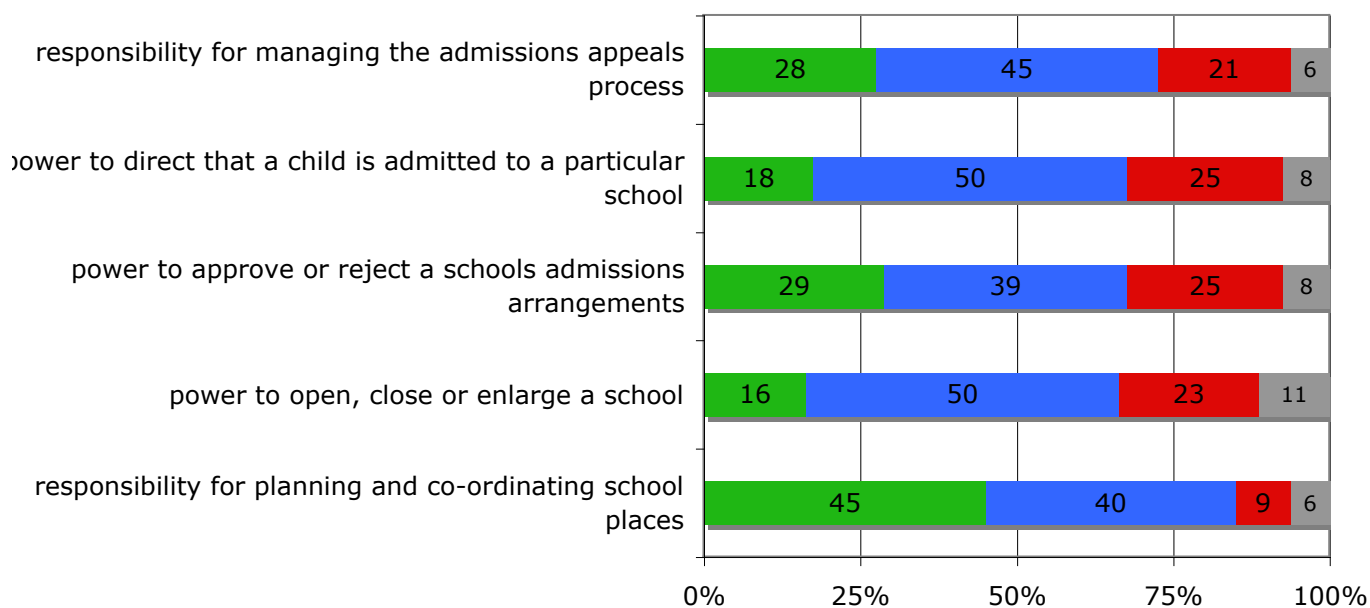
Analysis of responses

A graphical analysis of the responses received for each of the questions in the survey is given below. A total of 80 responses were received. Percentages may not add exactly to 100 due to rounding.

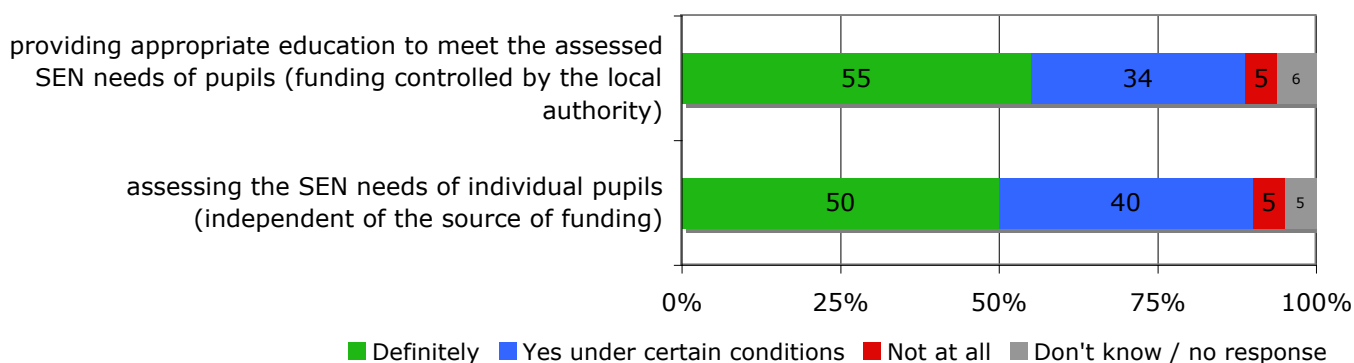
Competition: The local authority should ...



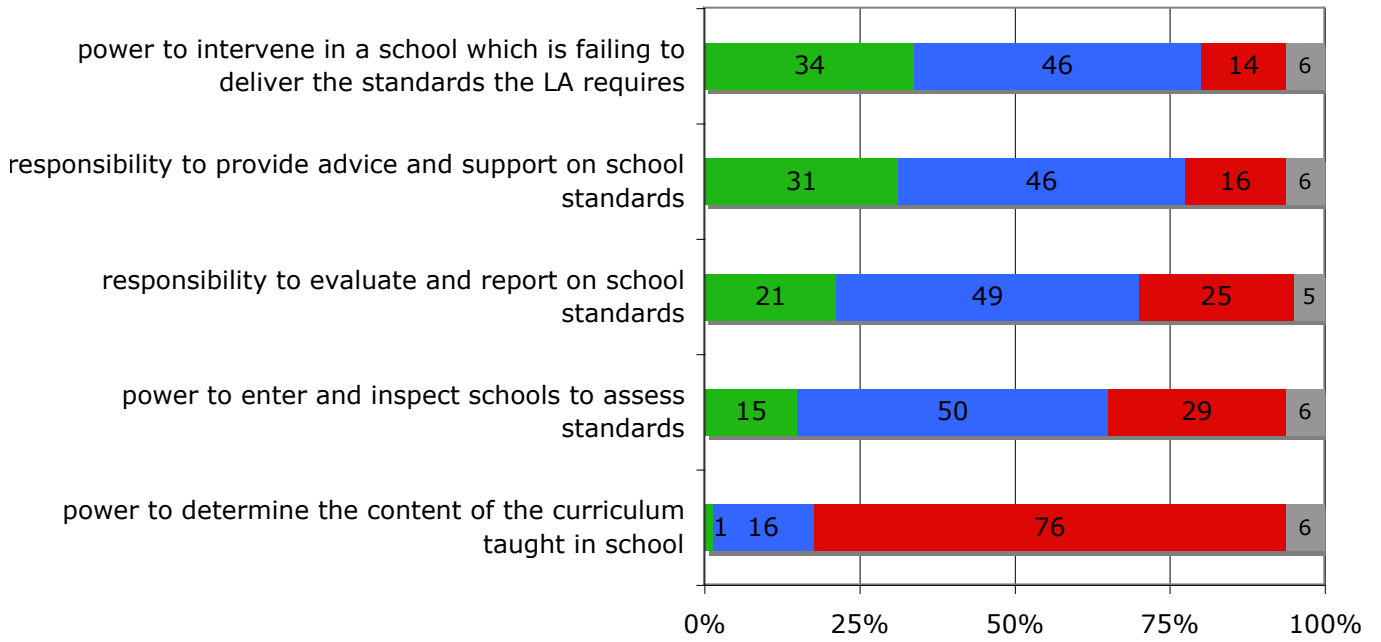
Place planning: The local authority should have ...



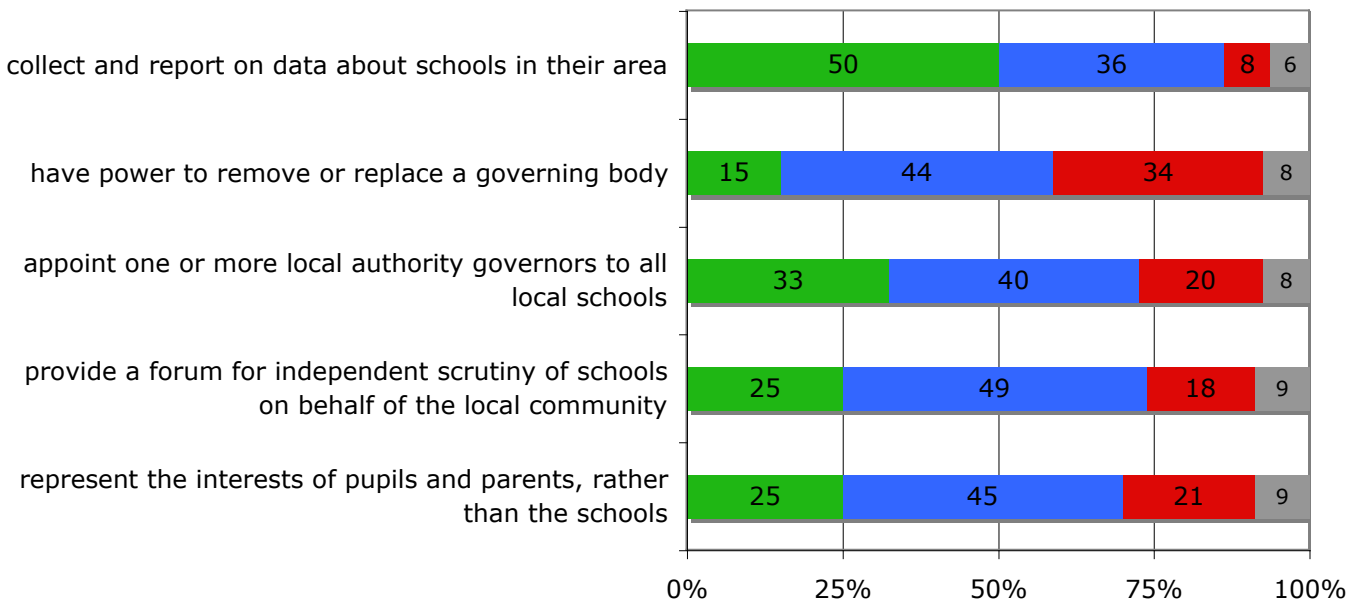
SEN: The local authority should be responsible for ...



Quality and improvement: The local authority should have

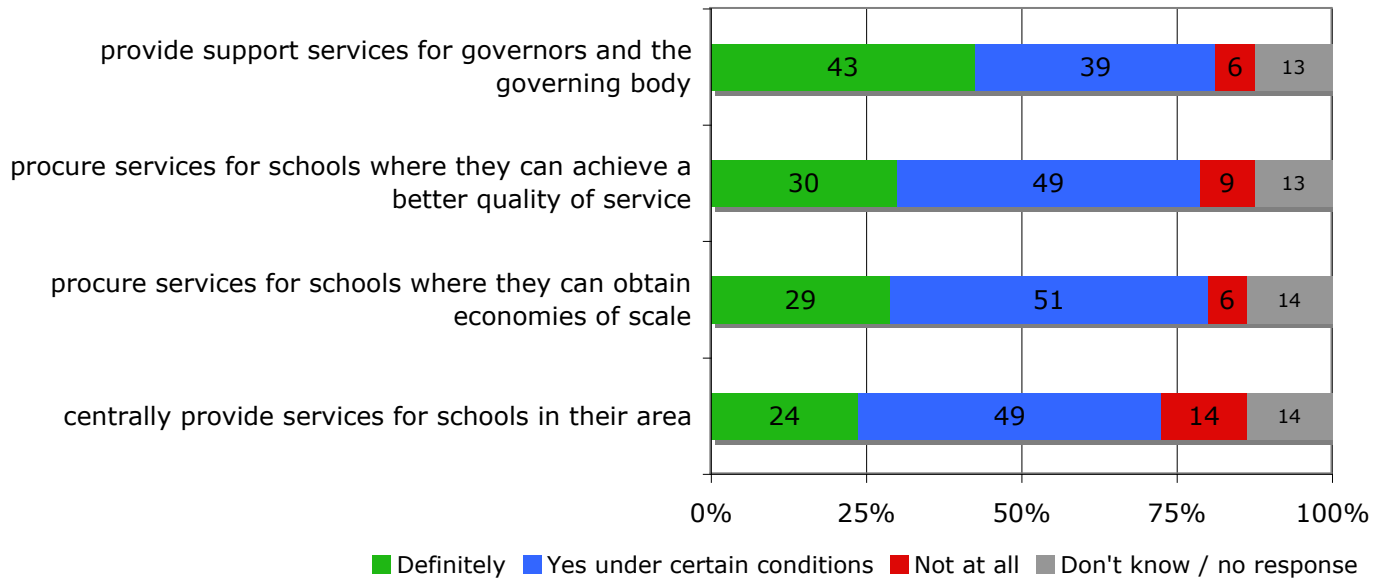


Championing / scrutiny: The local authority should

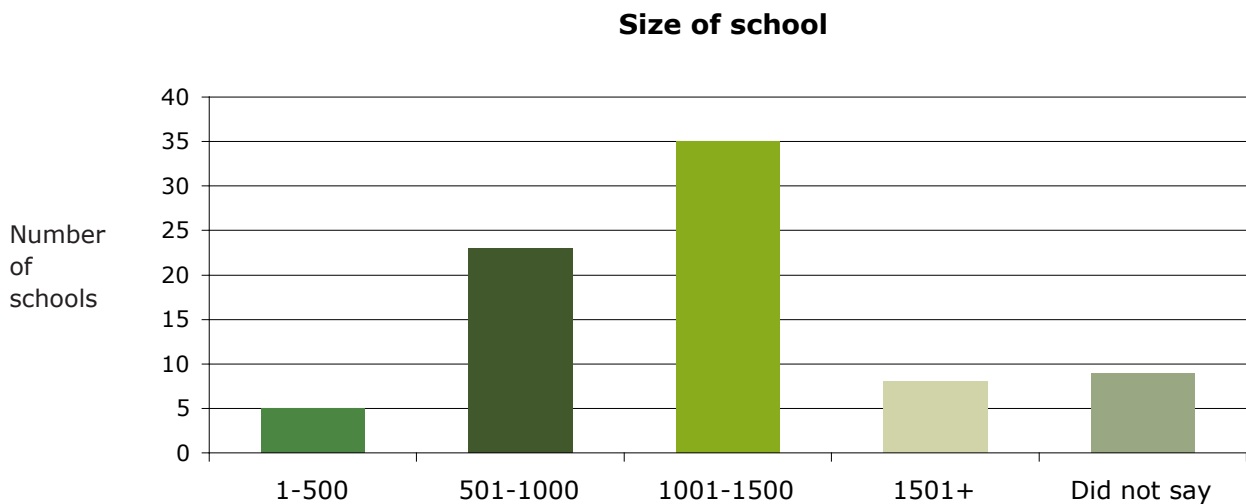
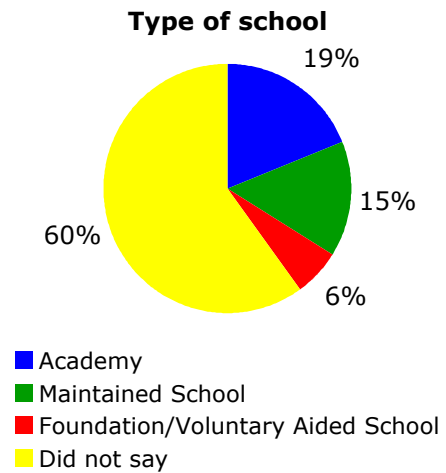
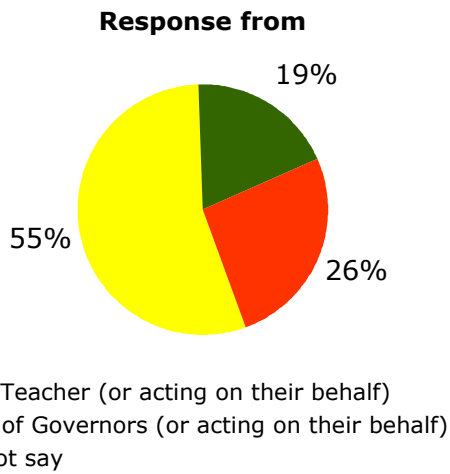


■ Definitely
 ■ Yes under certain conditions
 ■ Not at all
 ■ Don't know / no response

Service provision: The local authority should



About the respondents



TAMARIND CHAMBERS

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Tamarind Chambers was established by Mike Cooper and Diana Coman in 2010.

Through Tamarind, individual practitioners share experience and knowledge which enables them to deliver high quality and creative strategies and programmes. Challenging existing thinking and experimenting with new ideas puts innovation central to the Tamarind offer.

Tamarind consultants work in the areas of engagement, marketing and communications, consultation, scrutiny, accountability and governance, with a specific focus on public bodies, schools, voluntary / third sector organisations and private businesses engaged in corporate social responsibility programmes or working on the delivery of public services.

We provide support and development for individuals and organisations, volunteer engagement, facilitation and mentoring, events management, relationship and reputation management, strategy and policy formulation, review and evaluation.

Written by Diana Coman and Mike Cooper.

May 2012

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