

e academy programme makes no economic sense unless p

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I have not commented on the government's plans for turning every school into an academy, announced last week, and feel it remiss of me not to have done so.

I know something about schools. I was a school governor for more than 15 years, was heavily involved in the management of an undergraduate and postgraduate theatre school for some years and am now employed part time by a university, but it is on schools that I wish to focus.

When a governor, usually as chair or vice chair and invariably responsible for finance, I always enormously valued the role of the local education authorities I worked with and usually greatly resented it when I had to undertake tasks that I thought it wholly inappropriate should be passed on by them when they should and could have been done so much more efficiently centrally. My reason for that irritation was that, as I can remember often having to remind meetings, our real job was to ensure people who were by and large shorter than those making the decisions got the education that they needed, despite which we were forced to spend far too much time thinking about other issues.

So too were the people who had chosen to go into teaching - and were frequently gifted at it - when they had to undertake activities, like accounting, admin, basic HR, contract management and myriad other things - for which they had received very little training, had not chosen to do and had no special skill to undertake. It was absurd.

And yet it has been announced that every school should now be out on its own.

Let me assure you that there is no hint of economic logic to this, at all. If it were true that it is really appropriate that the people who know local need best in the communities in which they serve should be in charge of running all aspects of local organisations then the entire economic rationale of our supermarket chains would have collapsed long ago. Local managers of Sainsbury's should, using this logic, long ago have had the right to put their own name over the store, change store layouts from the formula we see repeated throughout a chain, set their own accounting systems, create

their own quite distinct HR and pay policies and so much more, but that's precisely not how it works, and for very good reason.

Some skills are limited in supply and best managed centrally: that was the reason why some degree of national curriculum was needed.

Some tasks are best done once. It galls me that thousands of schools will now have to spend hours creating policies on issues where one central edict would solve issues once and for all.

And some matters, like accounting, need to be standardised to ensure that necessary information is supplied.

Whilst centralised support services simply save money and reduce the chance of mistakes. Which is precisely why supermarkets have them.

None of which is to say that local store managers should have no power: their role is to optimise the system in the local context using the skills they are best endowed with. That should also be the case with headteachers, whose job should be to tailor the education they provide to best suit the needs of the children entrusted to their care, which is the skill they should really have.

Liberating teachers to teach enhances education. Imposing on teachers the duty to run the whole of a school's admin without sufficient resource to do it well is simply dumping on them tasks that can be guaranteed to reduce educational focus in the schools for which they are responsible.

So why is this being done? Look at the supermarkets, I suggest. No one thinks stand alone academies can work. The economics of them just do not make sense. So all this is really about is creating the opportunity for academy chains to be created from which in due course profit can be extracted. But as there is no profit extraction now that must eventually be at cost to our children.

The [attack on those least able to defend themselves](#) continues.