Before the 1870 Education Act the state did not run schools. Nevertheless, most children did attend schools of one sort or another. The sons of the well-to-do attended the expensive independent schools; their daughters were educated at home until the last part of the nineteenth century. Governesses and home tutors were common in middle and upper-class households, but the private sector of both day and boarding schools was also large. For the children of the working and middle classes, there were many different types of school. Grammar schools educated bright, working-class (and increasingly middle-class) boys. Most parishes had their church schools; the National Schools catered for the children of members of the established church, and the British and Foreign Schools Society for the nonconformists. There were infant schools, Sunday schools and dame schools. Most of these establishments made charges, although they were kept low to enable the poor to have their children educated.

But what of the very poorest children, whose parents could not afford or did not care about education? And what of the children with no

Ragged Schools Revived
Robert Whelan

Before the 1870 Education Act the state did not run schools. Nevertheless, most children did attend schools of one sort or another. The sons of the well-to-do attended the expensive independent schools; their daughters were educated at home until the last part of the nineteenth century. Governesses and home tutors were common in middle and upper-class households, but the private sector of both day and boarding schools was also large. For the children of the working and middle classes, there were many different types of school. Grammar schools educated bright, working-class (and increasingly middle-class) boys. Most parishes had their church schools; the National Schools catered for the children of members of the established church, and the British and Foreign Schools Society for the nonconformists. There were infant schools, Sunday schools and dame schools. Most of these establishments made charges, although they were kept low to enable the poor to have their children educated.

But what of the very poorest children, whose parents could not afford or did not care about education? And what of the children with no

This cartoon by Charles Griffin appeared in the Sun on 6 November 2006, accompanying an article by Trevor Kavanagh about the Civitas supplementary schools. The article was entitled ‘£52bn and education is like days of Dickens’. Reproduced by kind permission of Charles Griffin.
parents, who lived on the streets? In her recently published book *Newcastle Ragged and Industrial School*, Wendy Prahms explains the emergence of the new type of school that would cater for these neglected children – the ragged school:

At the turn of the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century all towns swarmed with neglected, criminal and exploited children… Schools for poor children did exist but they had the right to refuse admission; wild, semi-criminal street children, some of whom had been in prison, most of whom never washed and would not sit still, were not admitted. Parish and charity schools were for the respectable working class… Moreover, all schools charged fees: those for the poor kept their fees within the means of working parents, but nevertheless they had to be paid. But street children’s parents would certainly not pay to send them to school; indeed, it was in their interests to keep them on the streets. John Pounds [a London shoemaker who started the first ragged school] started by taking some of these children into his house for a few hours each day and teaching them the three Rs. As an inducement to come and learn each child was given a hot potato. Crucially, Pound did not expect the parents to pay anything; in this he was as much realist as philanthropist.1

John Pounds’s school was soon followed by others. The ragged schools taught basic literacy and numeracy, with an emphasis on the Bible. They provided a lunch and tried to teach the children some discipline. They were highly regarded by their contemporaries, and widely credited with helping towards the steep fall in the crime rate in the last part of the nineteenth century.

In 1844 the Ragged Schools Union (RSU) was formed, with the Earl of Shaftesbury as president. Lord Shaftesbury, who was known as the poor man’s earl, was the patron of almost 200 charities at the time of his death, but the ragged schools were always close to his heart, and the annual meeting of the RSU at Exeter Hall in the Strand was one of the highlights of his year. Before a packed audience of teachers and subscribers, Shaftesbury would award good conduct prizes to nearly one thousand pupils. ‘If the ragged school system were to fail,’ he once

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**Civitas Supplementary Schools**
Civitas supporters have enabled us to teach maths and English to dozens of children – and we still haven’t scratched the surface of demand. page 15
wrote, ‘I should not die in the course of nature, I should die of a broken heart.’

Whatever appeared on his death certificate, the Earl did live to see the ragged schools fail as a direct result of government action. The 1870 Education Act gave the state overall responsibility for elementary education. It was not intended to replace the voluntary schools, but to fill in the gaps where not enough schools existed. However, its supporters did not allow for the displacement effect of political action. When donors found that the government was going to pay for schools, they stopped giving. ‘Ragged schools fell rapidly and like ninepins’, Shaftesbury later recalled, ‘the very instant it was declared that the state intended to meddle with education and substitute the compulsory for the voluntary principle.’

But now, over a century later, it looks as if the ragged schools are back, in a new form. As the report in this Civitas Review shows, there is now a sizeable sector of supplementary schools to help children whose needs are not being met by the state schools that owe their existence to that 1870 Act. The children are no longer in rags, and they are not starving or destitute, but they still need to learn more than they are currently being taught. Supplementary schools come in different forms. Some of them are attached to full-time maintained schools and are run by teachers from those schools to assist pupils who need some extra help. Some are run by ethnic minority groups wishing to preserve their own language and culture. Some are run for children who are attending seriously failing schools, where even basic skills in reading and maths are not being communicated.

The diversity and informality of the supplementary schools sector is a source of strength. It allows men and women of good will to use their initiative and skills to address the problems of the children they are assisting in ways appropriate to their own situation. Whilst co-operation and sharing of experiences is always helpful, the regulation of the supplementary sector by the state through one of its quangos would be the kiss of death.

In 1872 the Earl of Shaftesbury called a meeting of leaders of charitable organisations working in the East End. He thought it would be good if they knew of each other’s work, but he did not want any sort of organisation to regulate them. ‘Possibly something should be done to tighten the bands that bind you, but I should be sorry for anything to hinder your individual and independent action.’

We at Civitas would like to tighten the bands that bind us together in this common endeavour, and to let more people know about this large and almost unacknowledged part of the education sector. There are many children whose needs are being met by supplementary schools, but there are probably many more who require help. Starting a supplementary school is not prohibitively expensive or complicated at this stage, and we have found people to be astonishingly generous in their support. We hope this report will encourage more people to exert themselves to help children who, if not in rags, are still in need.

Notes
Coming to a community hall near you

It’s a warm Saturday afternoon. Two teachers, an assisting parent and an organiser await the arrival of their pupils. They’re nervous: it is the first day of term and just a week until the fast of Ramadan begins. Some of the students in the area are Muslims. It isn’t yet known whether their parents will think it’s worthwhile for their children to attend during the holy month. On this first day, they will be expected to pay for six weeks of lessons – half a term. The fees are nominal, to encourage child and family to commit fully to the whole course. The rest of the funding – for teachers’ salaries, resources, and the small community hall that doubles up as their school – is supplied by a combination of mainly private donations and charitable grants.

A steady trickle of primary school pupils arrive accompanied by parents, all of whom pay the token fee. Speaking English doesn’t come easily to some of them, but they’re all committed to giving their children’s education a boost.

Several features mark these classes out from the standard format. The classroom setting, with the desks facing the teacher, is unlike most state primary schools which normally arrange desks so that children are facing each other in workgroups. There are no calculators, nor are there any computers in the room, and the walls are sparsely decorated. The emphasis is on pencils and workbooks. Added to which, discipline is regarded as important: the atmosphere is formal enough to be conducive to work, without being too strict. The classes are streamed, not by age but by ability. The sets are small, limited to 15 students, which means that each child enjoys a greater share of the teacher’s attention, particularly those struggling to keep up.

Today there is a maths class and an English class. The teaching methods are traditional. There are no magic ingredients. A volunteer, a physics undergraduate, hands out some textbooks and exercise books, puts some simple arithmetic problems on the board and begins teaching the maths class. The pupils are all concentration. The English lesson begins by looking at a vocabulary based around the Latin root ‘aqua-’. Then the English teacher asks one of her students to read to the class. He’s shy and starts reading too quickly and too quietly. Patiently, she asks him to begin again and try to stress each word when reading aloud. This time his enunciation is clearer, and he sounds altogether more confident. The teacher, impressed, congratulates him. ‘You all have to learn to speak loudly and clearly’, she announces.

The emergence of a trend

With variations on the theme, such schools are popping up all over the country, and together they make up what has come to be known as the supplementary school sector. Supplementary schools are, simply, schools supplementary to, or outside, the mainstream educational provision of the state, and though they are generally private, they differ from the traditional private sector in important ways too. As a whole the sector has not yet been studied in much depth, and there don’t seem to have been any serious attempts to establish the size, function or performance of these schools, although the DfES has estimated that ‘there are at least 5,000 supplementary schools operating nationally’.1 But on contacting the administrators of the government’s database, it became clear that they don’t even have a clear definition of supplementary schools, much less an accurate measure of how many of them there are.2

Supplementary schools: civil society strikes back

Nick Seddon, Nick Cowen and Oliver Tree
This is not necessarily a bad thing. Indeed, the very characteristics of the sector that make it attractive may militate against an accurate audit of its dimensions. The only unifying theme seems to be its diversity, a diversity missing in the broader education sector, in terms of the pupils, the funding mechanisms and the forms that the institutions take. The sector appears to be mostly composed of non-profit voluntary organisations, but contains profit-making bodies as well. So at one end of the scale there are successful social enterprises – dynamic commercial businesses with a social purpose – such as the international Kumon franchise, which supports a network of 550 supplementary schools. Together, Kumon schools cater for 48,000 students in the UK, teaching the fundamentals of maths and English. Their fees, £85 a month for tuition in both subjects, represent a competitive rate when compared against private tutors, although at a cost that is still unsuitable for the poorest members of society.

The provision for the poor, largely by voluntary and charitable organisations, represents a fascinating development. These organisations tend to have arisen to target particular challenges in specific communities.

In the London borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, Wendell Park Primary School has faced a significant influx of Somali refugees into the local community. The children this community brought with them began school at different ages and with markedly different standards of English. No extra government funding was made available to the school despite this sudden demographic shift. A solution to this challenge was to set up a Saturday school affiliated to Wendell Park, using the same facilities. The Saturday school prioritises pupils aged 8-11 years old whose first language is not English and who have been found to struggle in the school during the week. Its lessons include maths, science and IT, but it places special emphasis on English taught using the acclaimed synthetic-phonics method. A limited amount of history, both English and Somali, is also taught. Socially and academically it has proved to be an effective venture – and all without government funding or intervention.

A similar project, the Birmingham Cultural Education Centre, has helped Bangladeshi students in Birmingham’s Small Heath suburb. Teaching maths and English, amongst other subjects, the school has tackled some of the cultural challenges specific to the local community. According to the school’s teachers, traditional Bangladeshi family life left little room for parental engagement with their children’s education – mothers were often not meant to leave the family home without a male relative present, which cut down communication between school and family – nor much time for children to work at home. The school’s approach to this problem was to encourage pupils to do 15 minutes of simple work every evening at home, and keep a homework diary that was signed by parents and checked by the teacher each weekend. Progress has been dramatic. A number of students have gained places at local grammar schools, an achievement previously unheard of in this particular community.

Some supplementary schools have been created to concentrate on community language learning. Founded six years ago specifically for London’s Latin American community, the Esforal Saturday Supplementary School sprung up as a reaction to gathering concern about the widening inter-generational language gap within families. Although the general objective was to offer Spanish language speakers better academic opportunities, the specific objective was to ensure that the children of immigrant parents remained bi-lingual so that they could still converse with their parents in their native tongue.
Based in North London, it is now open to any student who is eager to learn in a Spanish environment – all classes are conducted in Spanish – and it runs lessons in maths, history, music and drama. Such schools can be found in all parts of the country where there are minority language communities, and especially in London.

If the formats of supplementary schools and the communities they cater to are broad and varied, so too are the funding streams. Some receive funding from local authorities, usually to cover some of the rent of the properties where the teaching takes place. Some attract grants from other state agencies, departments and quangos: the Croydon Supplementary Education Project, for instance, is partly supported by the government’s Connexions scheme. Some are self-financing: again, the Croydon Project is partly funded with the rent it collects from leasing out its building to other community ventures. Some are both self-financing and profit-making: this category would include social enterprises like Kumon. Some rely on independent charitable grants and fundraising activities: Wendell Park’s Saturday school was founded by the SHINE Trust, and Esforal received a grant for a drama course from the BBC’s Children in Need. Most of them also draw on the resources and the goodwill of local community volunteers. In addition, the vast majority charge parents some sort of fee – while at Wendell Park lessons are free for all pupils, and Esforal charges just £1 an hour, the cost rises to £300 a year for the Croydon Project and around £1,000 a year at Kumon – although the purpose of the charge varies from financing the running costs to acting as a nominal way to ensure parental commitment.

Besides schools that are large enough to register on local authority radars, there are many smaller transient groups that are intimately connected with their local neighbourhoods – religious associations, social clubs and the like – all involved in this movement. People of all political hues tend to have at least a vague notion of the voluntary and charitable sector being distinct from the state on one hand and the commercial sector on the other; belonging, that is, to civil society. These supplementary schools, or many of them at any rate, nestle neatly into this social space. Engaging in what the political theorist Alexis de Tocqueville called ‘the habit of association’, citizens are coming together in a common cause to deal with the things that bother them – such as, in this case, the education of the poor, the marginalised and the disadvantaged. And this form of participatory citizenship, fostering cohesion and a sense of belonging in community, free in the main from the interventions of the state, is what a vibrant and dynamic civil society is all about.

A response to a need: falling social mobility

We need to take a step back and look at why this teeming supplementary sector has come into being. Notwithstanding the rosy promise of John Major to build a classless society by 2000, and the earnest New Labour Manifesto pledges to continue ‘breaking down the barriers that stop people fulfilling their talent’, it appears that those from less privileged backgrounds are now even more likely to continue facing disadvantage into adulthood, while the wealthy continue to benefit disproportionately.

One finding emerges fairly clearly from the literature on the subject: levels of mobility are low compared to ideals of equality of opportunity. It does not follow that those at the top are to blame. A 2005 study conducted by the LSE compared the life chances of British children with those in the US, Canada, Germany, Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Finland. It examined the extent to which a person’s childhood circumstances influenced their later economic success as adults. The four Scandinavian countries performed best, with social mobility being greatest in Norway. Canada was also found to be a highly mobile society. Germany was placed close to
the middle while Britain and America trailed well behind. The gap in opportunities between the rich and poor in the US is at least static. In Britain it is getting wider: intergenerational mobility fell markedly in Britain, with less recorded for a cohort born in 1970 than for a cohort born in 1958.

Even in a perfectly mobile society, in which everyone had an exactly equal chance of reaching the highest positions, only a small minority would do so, since there are only relatively few positions of power, status or wealth at the top. Nevertheless, the amount of intergenerational mobility in a society is a major index of the degree of its ‘openness’, and many commentators and political parties link mobility and the education system. Confirming studies such as that by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, which have shown that the expansion of higher education in the UK has benefited those from richer backgrounds far more than those from poorer backgrounds, the LSE report found that while the proportion of people from the poorest fifth of families obtaining a degree has increased from six per cent to nine per cent, the graduation rates from the richest fifth have risen from 20 per cent to 47 per cent. ‘The strength of the relationship between educational attainment and family income,’ it says, ‘is at the heart of Britain’s low mobility culture.’

What’s not clear, of course, is the extent to which this gap is caused by the money or what comes with the money – such as parental education, motivation and other aspects of family culture – and this complicates the causality. So it is still reasonable to ask what is going on in British schools.

**Education standards: a closer inspection**

Tony Blair is keen to tell us that he wants to provide ‘as good an education in the state sector as anyone can buy in the private school system’, and he claims that the government is well on the way, reporting in 2005 ‘that standards in teaching had significantly improved – good or better teaching in primary schools rising from 45 per cent in 1997 to 74 per cent last year and from 59 per cent to 78 per cent in secondary schools’. The government has relied on A-level and GCSE results to back up this claim and, at first glance, there have been dramatic improvements. The number of 11 year-olds passing their Key Stage 2 tests in English at the expected Level 4 – which is supposed to represent a reasonable level for that age group – rocketed from 57 per cent in 1995/96 to 77 per cent in 2003/04, and this trend was paralleled in numeracy. GCSE results have also shown a remarkable rise in recent years. At 16, the number achieving five or more A*-C grades has risen from 44.5 per cent in 1995/96 to 53.4 per cent in 2003/04, with the 2005 figure leaping to 55.7 per cent; while at 18, the number gaining A-C at A-level has risen from 46.4 per cent in 1992 to 69.9 per cent in 2004/05.

Yet there is, as it were, a slip between cup and lip. Which is to say that there is a sizeable gap between the government’s claims and actual achievements of the state sector. Ofsted, for instance, has cast doubt on the validity of claims that progress has been made. It recently found that 44 per cent of boys and 29 per cent of girls were leaving primary school unable to write properly. The regulator highlighted the danger of focusing too much on overall results for English. Doing so masks the 20 per cent gap between reading and writing. Whilst the expected standard in reading was met by 83 per cent of pupils last year, only 63 per cent met the standard in writing. Thus only two in three pupils are currently entering secondary school with the skills needed for the National Curriculum. Independent studies have tended to support this contention.

Research carried out by the Engineering Council into the achievements of students taking A-level mathematics, using a diagnostic test designed by Coventry University, concluded that there is ‘clear evidence’ of a ‘decline over time in the competency of students with the same A-level grade’. 
Some of the best research has been carried out at the Curriculum Evaluation and Management (CEM) Centre at the University of Durham. The CEM Centre provides a systematic longitudinal study, tracking the changing achievements of pupils throughout the educational system. Its Year 11 Information System (YELLIS) is a monitoring programme providing performance indicators for pupils aged 14-16 (Years 10 and 11). The Basic YELLIS test is a measure of developed abilities providing a baseline of performance, collected from over 1300 secondary schools and 200,000 pupils. The test includes compulsory verbal and maths sections, and an optional non-verbal section.

The recorded change in ability since 2001 has been minimal. Results for the test are graded from A to D. For year 10 students (age 14/15), the proportion achieving an A or B has risen from 58 per cent in 2001 to 60 per cent in 2004, while those gaining a B or C rose from 47 per cent to 49 per cent and C or D from 35 per cent to 37 per cent. For year 11 students (age 15/16), the increases are similar. Those gaining A or B increased from 70 per cent in 2001 to 72 per cent in 2004, while students achieving B or C increased from 57 per cent to 60 per cent and those awarded C or D from 44 per cent to 46 per cent. Research by Dr Robert Coe of the CEM Centre has estimated the average GCSE achievement of students with the same score on the YELLIS test. The overall trend is for the GCSE grades achieved by students of the same (YELLIS) ability to increase, inviting the conclusion that GCSE standards had been lowered.

So the government tells us that things are getting steadily better when in fact this may not be the whole story. Yet even these findings mask a starker trend, which is the widening gap between the haves and the have-nots in the education system – between, that is, the state sector and independent sectors. With half of all GCSE results in the independent sector being A or A* grades, and independent school candidates making up 37 per cent of all those who get three As or above at A-level, the government’s state provision is looking increasingly inadequate.

This, despite record levels of government spending on education that have seen a £14.7 billion increase from 2002 to 2004 to a total budget of 27.5 billion per year (by 2004). With New Labour’s additional funding, the amount spent per pupil is approximately £5,000 annually, somewhat less than the average for private schools but not by an order of magnitude required to explain how independent schools can fare consistently better. This dramatic increase in educational investment – much of it spent on computer technology in the classroom – has been accompanied by British schooling slipping down international league tables with regards to preparing students for university study.

According to the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (which at the end of last year showed that in three years UK pupils had gone from seventh to eleventh in reading, from eighth to eighteenth in maths, and from fourth to eleventh in science), in the UK, education at an
independent school offered greater advantages than anywhere else in the study apart from Brazil and Uruguay. What has proved decisive for fee-paying schools is their independence from government meddling in the forty years following the Plowden Report. Ineffective teaching strategies have dominated in state schools against all the evidence supporting such old fashioned methods as synthetic phonics.

The public’s perception matches the independent studies’ claims rather more than the claims of the government. A substantial proportion of those parents who can afford the hefty fees for an independent school choose to opt their children out of state education, and overall seven per cent of pupils in the UK are educated in the private sector.\(^\text{18}\) Compounding this, a survey by Mori suggested that half of all parents would prefer to send their children to private school if they could afford it.\(^\text{19}\) This suggests that many parents are dissatisfied with the state sector, and that it is only the prohibitive cost of the traditional alternatives that keeps their children within state education at all.

Of course, Britain did once have a bridge between the state and private sectors. The system of selection at eleven years old, virtually abolished some forty years ago, offered quality schooling that was accessible for the able rather than just the affluent. Not only has it been shown beyond doubt that when the grammar school system was fully functional the proportion of students getting the top grades and entering into Oxbridge from the state sector was significantly higher than it is now, but those grammar schools that remain today consistently outperform other schools in the state sector.\(^\text{20}\)

The throng of dissatisfied parents does not simply abate because independent day schools are too expensive. They represent a pool of demand for improved education. Many families attempt to buy houses in areas catered for by good state schools, driving up house prices in the tight catchments.\(^\text{21}\) As Stephen Machin, part of the LSE research team, has said, it is ironic that the elitism that so-called progressives attacked ‘probably got more people through from the bottom end than the system we have today’. In getting rid of grammar schools, Britain replaced academic selection with social selection. Or, as Andrew Adonis and Stephen Pollard wrote in 1997: ‘Comprehensive schools have largely replaced selection by ability with selection by class and house price.’\(^\text{22}\)

By and large the grammar school bridge has been broken, but the desire to cross the divide does not abate. Beyond moving house, those who can afford it invest in private tutoring at crucial points during their children’s academic career. It has been estimated that around a quarter of pupils taking GCSEs also have private tuition, and the figure is slightly higher when sixth-form students are included.\(^\text{23}\) Demand for good tutors is so high in London and the South East that even relatively disadvantaged families will fork out £40 an hour for individual lessons – overall, ethnic minorities are significantly more likely to have private tuition\(^\text{24}\) – and for those with money the sky’s the limit. It is by no means uncommon for experienced tutors working in privileged areas to charge £80 an hour. But many poor parents who care cannot afford such premiums.

These families are forced to rely on the resources available within their communities. And these communities are proving innovative and responsive to localised needs that represent widespread problems. Civil society has come into its own. So it is social pressure, arising out of the unmet demand for better educational opportunities, that has fuelled the burgeoning sector of supplementary schooling. These are the new bridge between the prohibitively expensive elite private schools and parlous bog-standard comprehensive schools. While some supplementary schools admittedly provide for niche subjects (such as community languages) which no public education system could be expected to provide, many merely teach basic ordinary subjects. These schools represent the public’s dissatisfaction with the government’s failed education project.

**From supplementary to complementary**

Alexis de Tocqueville said that a democratically elected government works for the happiness of the citizenry, but wants to be the only agent and final arbiter of that happiness. He concluded that ‘[a]mong democratic nations it is only by association that the resistance of the people to the government can ever
display itself: hence the latter always looks with ill
favour on those associations which are not in its
power'.25 Until recently the government has failed to
notice the supplementary sector, and the schools
within it were able to operate free of state intervention.
No longer. This state of freedom appears to be
endangered now that several government officials
have expressed a desire to co-opt supplementary
education into the national framework. Andrew
Adonis, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
in the Department for Skills and Education (DfES),
author of the 1997 book which criticised
comprehensive schools, and the education mandarin
widely regarded as being behind New Labour’s
controversial City Academies, recently made this
intention clear:

The term ‘supplementary’ is misleading. All
good supplementary schools add to the work of
mainstream schools… We want to see more and
better supplementary schools, where there are
willing organisers and parental demand. There
are three particular ways in which national
policy and funding can assist – through extended
schools, specialist schools and the teaching and
learning of languages. 26

Adonis has attempted to reassure us that the
government is not planning to absorb the work of the
supplementary sector entirely: ‘It is essential not to
compromise the special ingredients of the sector
which underpin its success: self-organisation, self-
help and innovation. We want to encourage and
support supplementary schools – not nationalise
them.’ Sadly, despite all the rhetoric to the contrary,
there are few signs that the government regards the
voluntary and charitable sector as anything other
than an instrument of the state. Even assuming that
Adonis’s reassurances are well intended, there
remains a lot of damage that government intervention,
short of formal nationalisation, can do.

Enter ContinYou, the government’s embryonic
regulator of the supplementary schools sector. ContinYou
is an organisation with a broad brief
encompassing support for families, school services,
study, lifelong learning, even economic regeneration
and health improvement. From dealing with school
complaints procedures to prostate cancer in the
workplace, its remit seems limitless, and it operates
under a slew of
different names.27 Yet this clumsily
named quango is
also a charity.28

The taxpayer
funds this body through several funding streams,
including the DFES, the Welsh Assembly, the
Department of Education in Northern Ireland and
the Scottish Executive Education Department, along
with regional and local authorities and a few corporate
and trust sponsors. In 2005, the Education Extra arm
of the organisation received 100 per cent of its
restricted funds from government or organisations
affiliated to government. Apparent independence is
maintained by allowing the organisation to raise
revenue through consultancy and publications. However,
the major clients for these services are
themselves local authorities. This means that different
branches allow government to behave as both
investor and customer simultaneously. Which raises
the question of whether ContinYou has any credible
independence from government and whether it can
do anything more than carry out initiatives dictated
centrally. Does it have any incentive to do otherwise?

There has been an explosion of such bodies
under New Labour, charities established by the state
to deliver services under contract, but we would be
wise to be cautious about how they are coalescing
around narrowly accepted ways of thinking which
suit the state bureaucracies on which they depend for
funding. Besides, it is legally a hazardous area. The
Charity Commission, which regulates the charitable
sector, warns that ‘increased co-operation increases
charities’ reliance upon the state for fundraising and,
in turn, creates a potential risk to charities’
independence’.29 This is troublesome territory,
however, since government authorities are permitted
to set up charities, provided that the purposes are
exclusively charitable. It is also possible for charitable
purposes to coincide with government functions. Yet
this comes with a proviso or caveat: it is possible
that ‘a body may be created with a stated purpose
that is charitable, but with an unstated purpose that
is concerned with giving effect to the wishes and
policies of a government authority’.30 According to
the Charity Commission, in this case:
It would be difficult to avoid the conclusion that a body of that kind was not really a charity at all. Instead of being set up for the stated charitable purpose, it would exist in fact for the purpose of securing the benefits of charitable status while carrying out the wishes and policies of the governmental authority. In that case, the body would not be a charity because it would not have been established for purposes that are exclusively charitable.31

The most ominous development within ContinYou with regard to supplementary schools is the ‘Quality Framework for supplementary schools’ by the Resource Unit for Supplementary and Mother Tongue Schools. The Resource Unit exists legally as a separate charitable company although ContinYou have now taken to describing it rather possessively, suggesting it is or is becoming another branch of the same compound entity.32 The scheme piloted in six London boroughs grades participating supplementary schools against nine targets and grants awards – graded gold, silver or bronze – to each one. On the surface, this idea seems fine: it appears to offer a way for parents to judge the quality of supplementary schools they are considering sending the child to. So long as the scheme remains voluntary – merely offering the opportunity for a school to gain recognition, praise and possibly funding – little harm could come from it.

A precise litany of targets – nine targets arranged into three categories – is designed to ensure objective judgements are made:

- Planning and Partnerships – Plans, Self assessment, Community Engagement
- Teaching and Learning – Teaching, Learning, Resources
- Management – Managing People, Policies, Finance

The striking thing about this quality assessment is that only one third of it is even meant to relate to ‘Teaching and Learning’ which gives some idea of the level of priority given to the essential purpose of any school. On closer inspection we find that even these targets avoid tricky evaluations such as the quality of the teaching and instead concentrate on things that are easier to measure. So targets measure things like the teaching resources available to teachers, and there are requirements to maintain records of what has been taught, along with ‘registers and records of children attending, including a record of mainstream school’. Of course, to achieve a gold standard these records have to be translated into the measures of success favoured by the government – external assessments, public examinations and the like – precisely the exam-centred approach that has proven so damaging within mainstream schools.

The concern is that the pressure on supplementary schools to succeed in public exams, which often test the ability to pass an exam rather than knowledge or learning, could be highly straitjacketing for teachers. That is not to say that it is wrong for supplementary schools to consider pursuing recognised qualifications, only that to set that as a mark of quality is to distort the purpose of supplementary education. This could disadvantage supplementary schools struggling to conduct similar lesson plans to those in mainstream schools but with fewer resources.

So much for promoting quality education; but just what, from its assessment framework, can we say ContinYou is encouraging supplementary schools to do?

For a start, it wishes to see evidence that ‘[t]he supplementary school regularly consults with parents and students and is developing its programme’. This is illuminative. In compulsory education, a system without parental choice, it is likely that children could be attending schools that fail to offer the programme that the parents want. But if a supplementary school fails to offer what the parents want they’re at liberty to remove their children. This redundant guideline shows how the state tries to apply its own paradigm to the independent sector. As for getting a gold standard in this area, the school must conduct an evaluation ‘based on best practice
in other supplementary schools’. In other words, ContinYou’s idea of best practice entails a harmonization of practice between schools. Worse still, in the ‘Community Engagement’ category, schools wishing to gain a gold standard have to demonstrate that they have ‘work[ed] with a range of partners from the statutory and voluntary sectors’.

Not surprisingly, ContinYou is also keen on the bureaucratic burdens that we have come to associate with regulation in the state system. Schools have to show that they have ‘public liability insurance, policies on Child Protection, Health and Safety and Equal Opportunities, and guidelines on Off-Site activities’. The equal opportunities criteria would be particularly onerous for schools established to focus on one particular ethnic group. Likewise, the ‘Management’ category requires that ‘[t]here is a management committee that meets at least once a term and keeps minutes’ – a particularly unnecessary burden for smaller entities. Would a supplementary school made up of two or three teachers working in a community hall really need a management committee of its own?

According to this assessment, it would be quite possible for a school to gain a gold standard without its pupils making any substantial leaps in academic achievement – so long as the few improvements that were made were fully documented, and preferably examined. However, a gold standard could certainly not be achieved without working alongside other schools and ‘statutory’ projects, and carefully providing a series of management committee minutes and reports to the inspectors. It is difficult to resist the nagging feeling that the awards are not for achievement but for the ability to fit in with other government schemes. A gold medal is not for excellence, but compliance.

Such a regulated environment could stifle the freedom and independence that we have already established is one of the hallmarks and greatest assets of the sector. The danger, as voluntary agencies grow and change to look more and more like statutory departments whose function they hope to inherit, is that they end up becoming co-conspirators with government in destroying the very attributes of the sector which were precisely the reasons for embarking on this collaborative course in the first place.

**Taking the credit**

ContinYou could therefore be seen to be grooming supplementary schools for a role that is complementary to the state sector. But what exactly does the government have to gain from co-opting the supplementary school sector? There are one or two specific objectives that supplementary schools, efficiently shackled, could contribute to attaining.

Firstly, the government has a declared intention to move parents (particularly single parents) from welfare into work. It can be difficult for single parents to gain employment when they are responsible for their children from three or four o’clock in the afternoon onwards and for the all of the weekend. Alan Johnson has already spoken about keeping ‘state schools open for longer, making them available on Saturdays, offering more catch-up and stretch lessons, as well as sport and music and drama’ and supplementary schools could be a handy aid in this expansionary vision, taking children off parents’ hands till much later in the evening or during other hours they could be working.

It just so happens that ContinYou has also been given a major role in managing the government’s Extended Schools Support Service (TESSS). An Extended School is ‘one that provides a range of services and activities often beyond the school day to help meet the needs of its pupils, their families and the wider community’, and the government ambitiously hopes that by 2010 all schools will fit this model. The obstacle, as always, is money. To provide for seven million pupils supervision and activities for at least an extra three hours a day, for approximately 40 weeks a year, would incur an exorbitant cost, one likely to dwarf the £680 million the government has currently pledged in the form of funding grants towards the scheme until 2008.

Either the government is grandstanding or it is hoping that someone else will pick up some of the costs. What is needed is a resource that’s already available but can soon become absorbed into the
government apparatus and therefore credited as a government achievement. Part of this will surely fall on professional teachers, which is why many of them have been sceptical about the scheme from the beginning. Perhaps parents will be expected to pay for some of the services, creating a disincentive for poor parents that the government most wants to help and encourage to get involved. But it seems likely, in addition, that the voluntary and charitable work of supplementary schools, fitted in a complementary position, would do the job.

A second challenge facing the government is that of improving exam results for foreign languages, and it has come in for much criticism in the past for allowing language learning to slip into desuetude. (In 2002, for example, Estelle Morris, then education secretary, announced that foreign languages were to be removed from the core curriculum for over-14s.39) This trend could cunningly be reversed (at least on paper) if supplementary schools already teaching mother-tongue community languages could be associated more closely with, if not absorbed into, local authorities and then cajoled into ensuring their pupils study for recognised qualifications.

The machinery is already in place for such a coup in the form of the ‘Languages Ladder’, which provides a comprehensive set of qualifications for students to aim for. The DfES’s diktat that ‘[e]very child should have the opportunity throughout Key Stage 2 to study a foreign language and develop their interest in the culture of other nations’40 provides ample incentive to exploit all the available resources. In Lambeth, where at least 30 supplementary schools are known to operate within the borough, the LEA has already realised ‘that supplementary schools represent a great resource that is still to be utilized’.41 By co-opting these independent supplementary schools – all that needs to be done is to take pupils already learning a ‘foreign language’ and put them forward for examinations – local authorities will be able to claim the glory for a whole new range of results that previously couldn’t be attributed to them. The supplementary schools do all the work and the state takes the credit. Who says politicians are dozy?

Perhaps it is prudent not to overstate the case against government agencies becoming involved in the supplementary sector, in general. There are already many useful links between supplementary schools and local authorities and even central government agencies, many of which provide schools with much-needed financial support. The crucial element in these relationships, however, is that they are initiated and negotiated by the supplementary school. The state has little coercive power over these schools and this means there is little chance of these institutions being forced to take part in any particular government policy drive. It should also be noted that there is no mention of making the inspection of supplementary schools compulsory – just of awarding ‘achievement’.

Nevertheless, the planned national standards would be a first for supplementary schools. ContinYou’s intention is to ‘investigate the extent to which the framework can form the basis for a set of national standards’.42 It already produces ‘info packs’ and ‘best practice’ start-up books for supplementary schools. If it were to become a government licensed provider of resource material and consultative inspection, ContinYou would start to take on a relationship similar to that which Ofsted had with independent schools a few years ago: offering optional (but highly recommended) inspections. More recently, that relationship has undergone a subtle shift to become mandatory rather than optional at great cost to educational diversity. This pattern of regulation creep, which has also been reproduced in much of the voluntary and charitable sector, could easily be repeated in the case of supplementary schools.
The state and the voluntary and charitable sector

This government, like most governments, regards the voluntary and charitable sector as something to be, if not absorbed or incorporated, at least organised. Governments look out over chaos and wish to regularise and bring order. They do not like the random, transient, associative nature of civil society. The nature of the sector means that the services covered are sporadic and unevenly spread. Their benefits are not systematically measured. Supplementary schools rely on the resourcefulness of a local community for support, and this varies from place to place and community to community. They are not rich or powerful in the main, they do not have expensive computer systems, high powered management, professional personnel, sophisticated networks or wads of procedural documentation, yet in the few hours they get with their children each week they can make a demonstrable difference.

The government sees this and seeks to bring it into line. To tidy up the loose edges. To institute proper management. To join it all up. To make it in its own image. And so supplementary schools, like so much of the rest of the voluntary and charitable sector, could come to resemble the state departments on which they rely for money, not only in size but also in structure and operations. Government regulation would bring a premature end to a new and exciting development in civil society. We should do all that we can to make sure that this does not happen.

Notes
2 http://www.edubase.gov.uk/
4 Tony Blair, speech on education at 10 Downing street, 24/10/2005 http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page8363.asp
5 ibid
6 http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rgateway/DB/SFR/s000489/index.shtml
7 http://performance.treasury.gov.uk/T004_10202.pdf
8 http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rgateway/DB/SFR/s000610/tab001a.xls
11 DfES Key Stage 2 SATs Performance Tables for 2004: http://www.dfes.gov.uk/performanceables
13 http://www.pinsproject.org/standardsovertime.asp
14 www.vellisproject.org/Newsletter.asp?n=40&d=092004
15 Dr Coe, R (1999) ‘Changes in Examination Grades over Time: Is the same worth less?’ www.cemcentre.org/research/examchanges/BFERA2.html Figure 7
16 Wilce, H., ‘State vs private – both can be winners’, The Sunday Times, 20/11/2005 http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,4386-1876716,00.html
17 Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, ‘Low educational attainments continue to penalise people in many OECD countries’, 12/09/2006 http://www.oecd.org/document/37/0,2340,en_2649_4201185_37387877_1_1_1_1,00.html
19 Mori Omnibus Wave 16 Parents Survey 2004, Ipsos Mori, 11/05/2004
21 Townsend, M. and Gibbes E., ‘Britain’s most exclusive schools (400 yards away and you’re out)’, Observer, 23/07/2003 http://observer.guardian.co.uk/education/story/0,997263,00.html
24 Ibid
26 Adonis A., ‘Supporting Role’, Education Guardian, 26/04/2006 http://education.guardian.co.uk/schools/comment/story/0,1767123,00.html
27 All taken as examples from ContinYou’s website: ContinYou Achievement, which besides conducting consultancy work, administers the Princess Diana Scheme for Young People; ContinYou Solutions, the name ContinYou publishes under; CEDC Enterprise, another consultancy; and ContinYou Achievement, a promoter of out-of-hours school learning. See also The Standard’s Site, DFES. http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/parentalinvolvment/pics/pics_code/
28 continyou.org.uk
30 RR7, section 6.
31 RR7, section 7.
33 Taken Verbatim from ‘Piloting the Quality Framework for Supplementary Schools in London’: http://www.continyou.org.uk/content.php?CategoryID=824
40 http://www.dfes.gov.uk/languages/DSP_whatson_primary.cfm
41 The Resource Unit for Supplementary and Mother Tongue Schools, ‘Community languages, supplementary schools and the National Language Strategy at KS2’, Lambeth Education, June 2005
42 http://www.continyou.org.uk/content.php?CategoryID=824
The Civitas supplementary schools project has been running successfully for two years now. We use a no-frills approach which concentrates on high quality teaching along traditional lines to enable children to master basic skills quickly.

The project started when we heard of an attempt by Bengali parents to start a Saturday school for their children, to counteract the poor performance of the local schools in Tower Hamlets. Their efforts had collapsed, owing to shortage of funds, so we took the school over in January 2005 teaching six- to fifteen-year-olds English and maths. As a result of parent satisfaction, we were asked to open another Saturday school on an estate near King’s Cross, also for Bengali children, and this has been operating since January 2006.

The first two Civitas supplementary schools were thus started for children from ethnic minorities who belong to very strong community groups. However, we would see other youngsters, almost all white, hanging around on the King’s Cross estate, often behaving in an anti-social manner. We were keen to reach out to all these children, regardless of race or religion. Most do not belong to any strong community groups so we delivered leaflets door-to-door around the estate advertising after-school lessons for six- to eleven-year-olds. We were concerned that we might get a poor response from the white working-class parents, but we were amazed by the positive reaction. At the start of the first open evening in October there was a crowd of parents at the community centre gates eager to talk to us. Nearly all expressed great anxieties about their children’s education and were very enthusiastic about the prospect of extra lessons at a low cost. Due to the popularity we now run two separate evening classes.

Most of the children attending our supplementary schools are underachieving at school. We see eight and nine-year-olds with little or no knowledge of basic multiplication or division and eleven-year-olds who struggle to read the most simple sentences. The majority of these children don’t have special needs or learning difficulties, they have just slipped through the educational net and merely require reinforcement of basic skills so they can catch up with their peers. Their parents are often not very highly educated and lack the knowledge and opportunities to help them reach their full potential. We regularly receive calls from parents who are desperately concerned about their children’s education but don’t know how to help them. These families are being let down by the state educational system but cannot afford private tutors, who can charge up to £80 an hour in London.

We strive to help children reach their full academic potential, raise their aspirations and open up opportunities to give them, and their communities, a better future. We find that a simple mix of good teachers, small class sizes and traditional teaching methods can be of enormous benefit. During the two-week King’s Cross summer school in August 2006, under the direction of Linda Webb, the reading age of the children increased by an average of eleven months. Seven-year-old Saurav Deb, who could barely read when he joined our Bethnal Green school in September, has made immense progress thanks to Irina Tyk’s Butterfly method of phonics. By the end of his first term with us, Saurav had a reading age of 7 years 6 months. We see progress not only in academic terms, but through increased confidence and
enthusiasm for learning. Eleven-year-old Rebekka was shy and functionally illiterate when she joined our King’s Cross after-school class in mid-October. When her mother attended a parent/teacher meeting in December the teacher asked her what had happened: Rebekka was making astonishing progress and had gained in confidence. This was after only a few sessions of one-on-one teaching with a teacher dedicated to the use of phonics.

The latest development in the project is an exciting partnership with the London Boxing Academy (LBA) in Tottenham to provide academic lessons for youths who have been excluded from the educational system. Many of the students have experienced a devastating drug and knife culture and have very limited skills. Some have served time in prison and repeatedly get into trouble with the police. In these circumstances, there is little chance of them integrating into mainstream society or making a positive contribution to their community.

However, at the LBA the students are motivated by the opportunity to learn boxing skills alongside their academic studies. Boxing is extremely effective in changing the attitudes of troubled youths as it emphasises respect, discipline and commitment. The project started in November and we are already seeing positive results from our English and maths lessons. The project will vastly improve their future prospects in terms of employment and everyday social interaction.

Due to generous donations from our supporters, and great demand from around the country, we are now expanding the project. An overwhelming response to an appeal earlier this year enabled us to employ Eleanor Rogerson, as our supplementary schools co-ordinator. This has taken the work to a new level and enabled us to make a significant push forward. In January 2007 we will be opening new Saturday schools on an estate in Hammersmith, and in Keighley in West Yorkshire. There are also proposed projects in Croydon, Great Yarmouth and Birmingham. We feel we are making an important contribution to these children’s education; however, there are thousands more children across the country who desperately require similar help with their basic skills. If you can help us with this work it would be deeply appreciated.

There are few charitable causes that provide more ‘bang for the buck’: teaching children to read and write opens up a completely new range of options for them.