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On the seventh day of Christmas... [1]

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My true love sent to me: seven swans a-swimming. In the song, this could refer to the seven sacraments, or the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, which include things like teaching, service, and leadership.

Teaching, of course, is another of those things where there is far too much government, and far too little service and leadership. As in health, it is not that the staff are bad - but they are just badly managed, and the sector is too centrally run. The top-down Stalinist way of running things didn't deliver in the Soviet Union, and it doesn't deliver in health, education, and other public services. So we end up with sink schools from which parents and kids - usually those in the most deprived areas - have no escape.

Now, though, the world is building up experience that decentralization actually works. Instead of the state running every school, give parents and teachers money to run their own. That has led to a flowering of new schools in poor, often black areas of America where the state schools had been overwhelmed with drugs and violence and underwhelmed with learning and achievement. Now Sweden has a similar system - the money follows the choices of parents, not bureaucrats, so it tends to be spent better: and all sorts of new education providers are springing up as a result. A model for the UK? Well, we certainly think so [3].

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