



Education Politics

Journal of the Socialist Educational Association

Spring 2014, № 119

Free to members

£1 non-members

**EVERYONE IS
KNEADED OUT
OF THE SAME
DOUGH, BUT NOT
BAKED IN THE
SAME OVEN**

**And not all ovens are
the same.**
**The state schools and
the private schools
are now joined by the
schools for the elite...
the "Tatler Schools"...**
**what the smart set
really think are the
options to get ahead
in life....**

FACING THE FUTURE

- School exams • Free Schools • Tristram Hunt
- the Classroom Teacher • election 2015 preparation
- Labour Policy • the Westminster Village • Co-operative Schools • School meals • Compass • Divided education
- London Challenge • Pay and Conditions for Teachers
- Independents top and bottom • What the Tatler saw.

It's education Jim, but not as you know it

When Enact lost the contract for 10 free schools, the DFE response was to give it to other chains, not to give the schools back to the Local Authority. These of course officially tolerate failing schools. The interviewer on Channel 4 was clearly non plussed at Gove blithely accepting that some academies will fail, but did not ask him why. Querying a 'Superman' (as the Times called Gove) is a hard ask. But it is now common practice of academy supporters to accept failure. Fraser Nelson of the Spectator is quoted by the Anti-Academies Alliance as saying "There will be almost 300 free schools in England.... if 300 new businesses were to start, you'd expect a degree of trouble in at least 30 of them". So the Free Schools like academies were a magic bullet for failing local authority schools.... but we can expect at least 10% to be in trouble". Failure is expected.

The ultimate success of the academy/free schools movement is to get us used to failure – which is how the independent system runs. The back cover shows my local independent school, as was. It went bust and as long as the state run schools locally can pick up the pieces, nothing is said. The myth of the superiority of independents remains unchallenged

This casts a shadow over Labour's parent run schools, since schools run by inexperienced people are more likely to fail. However it is not just parent run schools that fail, we highlight the failure of the Phoenix Free School. Run by a Conservative ally of Michael Gove active in his Centre for Policy Studies think tank. Astonishing how little critical press comment there has been inside or outside the Westminster Village.

Failure is the real story of the Free Schools movement, but the media are trapped in the old state bad/private good mind set which is at the heart of the academy project.

This is the key to the politics of the media from the New Statesman rightwards. It is years out of date. As the *Tatler* and others point out, there is a third option, the elite state school. Which makes paying fees for privileged education so 1930s. The *Tatler* is right to point out that the smart people don't go private nowadays – they go to the elite state sector, if they can work out the rules. This can save them up to £600,000 paid for by the taxpayer.

AND MEANWHILE THERE IS LABOUR

Labour's policy process grinds on, and as Martin Dore and David Pavett say, without casting much light. Martin rightly points out that Labour conference had only 36 minutes on education, and no educationalists or teachers spoke. Its a party now light on expertise with serious consequences.

Labour has become an empty shell on education, the outcome of a well organised attack by political forces for twenty years. While the SEA remains and will remain an affiliated organisation, another organisation, perhaps not even affiliated, has real influence. This is a problem that has to be addressed. The dominance of the neo paradigm is the challenge which organisations in the new Reclaim Education have to come to grips with, at events like that on 8th April (see page 8).

But the urgent need is for tackling Goveism. Andy Slaughter draws attention to the destruction of a good local school and says that Gove invests in the myth that the Free schools are replicating Independent success. The Gove agenda is certainly that State Schools always fail, academies-free schools-independents are always successful. This rigid belief in the state/failure-independent/success model is dominant in the Westminster Village, preventing reality breaking in. How to create a Reality Check is the big issue.

ACTION ON SWEAT SHOP SCHOOLS

As we were going to press, the news of decisions on Teacher work load was announced. The DFE Teacher work load survey shows schooling such a sweat shop that it is impossible to see 'world class teachers' as a viable slogan, and Tristram Hunt should stop saying it. The big issue is going to be recruitment and retention. The front bench should be saying the sweat shop staffroom (where there are staffrooms) is a disaster, and make this a major anti Gove issue. It is not just a question of QTS. Its a question of tackling the crisis of staff shortages. Martin Johnson notes (page 19) that these may not be imminent. But the attack on pay and conditions makes shortages inevitable.

The shortage of places is also critical, but badly understood. The implication of extending the freedoms of academies, which is Labour's current policy, would be massive. If extended to admissions, the kids who are costly or difficult would be excluded. No head wants expensive or difficult pupils. The law says kids must go to school... but no powers would exist to compel schools to take the expensive or difficult kids. Certainly councils would not. Has Labour realised that the Right to a School Place is as important as the Right to a Qualified Teacher? It is not rocket science.

The debates will continue. For Education Politics it will continue without me as editor, though I will remain active. After five years, I will be stepping down after the next edition to allow fresh thinking to come into play. We need a new editor. Please let us know if you are interested.

Trevor Fisher

NUS Warns Gove on School Exams

An open letter was sent to Michael Gove from Joe Vinson, Vice President (Further Education) on 4th October last year. Gove did not reply. The following are the sections dealing with the response to proposed exam reforms after the National Union of Students had surveyed its members.

Dear Mr Gove,

"We believe the move to linear examinations and assessment is in no way preparing most students for employment. The ability to produce coursework and undertake controlled assessment develop research and presentation skills, which are much more useful in the workplace than the ability to sit exams. In a survey of over 500 students conducted with our members, over 80% believed that coursework should remain as part of the student's overall assessment.

...."In your response to one of our members on 1 July you state '*even students with good A Level qualifications can start undergraduate courses without the extended writing and research skills that are, among others, necessary to succeed at university*'. By completing rigorous and in depth coursework which is both supported and self directed, surely students are much more likely to develop these missing skills than by learning to regurgitate dates, quotes and other people's opinions in an exam paper.

"Again, large numbers of our survey respondents (almost three quarters) expressed disagreement with exams taking place only at the end of the course. By holding all the exams at the end of the two year period, students are exposed to a highly pressurised and stressful environment which leaves them vulnerable to external factors and unable to perform to their best abilities....

"Although you've stated that there will be more involvement by universities in A Level design, you are only including the Russell Group of Universities, which assumes there is only one type of desirable university experience young people should aspire to.... Even the Russell Group argued that your changes to A levels themselves will act as a barrier to students wanting to access this group of universities."

"Students are opposed to a changes to a numerical grading structure as it is a completely unnecessary move which will only lead to confusion regarding parity of grades from students, institutions, and employers. Carrying on

from this, the proposed reforms will lead to a break up of 'three country regulation' making it much harder for students from England, Wales and Northern Ireland to move easily from nations for work and study".

"Decoupling the A Level and AS Level prevents students from determining how far they want to take a subject during their first year. This means that at age 16 students are going to have a much stronger notion of what they see themselves doing after the A level period as opposed to being able to be more flexible and exploratory. This may produce a higher level of students dropping off courses because the flexibility to change doesn't exist. It will also be harder for universities to make admission offers to students without the AS Level grades to go from".

"We also believe that year 10 students should be able to sit GCSEs early if they themselves and the schools deem them to be ready for the exam as this frees up time in Year 11 for them to concentrate on their other subjects. Also, as we believe that resits are a positive thing, if a student fails an early entry GCSE in Year 10, schools should be encouraged to re-enter and support those students for end of year 11 exams".

" 90 per cent of our respondents believe that students should be given the opportunity to resit exams. There are many reasons for this, but the overriding value is that of access. If a student suffers from mental health problems, has a debilitating illness, 'comes out' to less than sympathetic parents, has to move school, suffers a personal loss, their ability to perform during the exam period is greatly reduced..."

"I would like to invite you to respond to our membership either in person at one of our events during the academic year, or through a communication to our membership addressing some of the points raised. We are naturally very happy to discuss ways in which this may be done most effectively"

yours sincerely

Joe Vinson

It is an insight into Gove's mind that in July he replied to a single student but by October does not reply to the National Union of Students. In his mind, to quote one of his favourite sayings "the train has left the station". Much like the train in the famous poem by William McGonnagall "The Tay Bridge Disaster". Editor

“Phoenix Free School Fails to Rise in Oldham”

Richard Harris

The Department of Education has withdrawn approval for a Free School in Oldham due to open in September 2014 which was planned to operate with teachers who were all “veterans of the armed forces” and which would “embody the Army’s core values”. The prospectus decries teachers who are “conventionally trained” and states the most effective teaching is direct instruction. Instructors would teach basic skills.

The problem was that they could not get the staff. Despite initial indications all was well – on May 22nd the school Director Tom Burkard told the BBC “Virtually all the people who have applied to us have qualifications and experience in education”, but subsequently the DFE withdrew approval, Burkard told the BBC “One of the major problems we faced was that despite intensive efforts to recruit a principal, we were unable to find anyone with suitable experience and qualifications who had also served in the armed forces”. Heads – or principals in this case – are essential and it is clear that there is no magic bullet to get good staff. This lesson is not the only key lesson to be drawn from this story.

Leading proposer of the Phoenix Free School, Professor Tom Burkard, is Visiting Professor of Education Policy at the University of Derby. He was reported by the BBC as saying that the school was needed because of “the poor quality of central Oldham’s secondary schools”. An Oldham councillor said that the 780 place institution would “upset the delicate balance of Oldham’s mix of schools”. She continued that Oldham had 1,108 surplus places mainly in three sponsored Academy Schools. The recent Ofsted reports for the academies put one as “Inadequate”, one as “Requiring Improvement” and one as “Good”.

This story has a number of interesting issues linked to it. First, and most striking, is that a “Govian” Free School was proposed because neighbouring “Govian” Academies were deemed not good enough. You could not make it up!

Next, is that this proposal went a long way, almost to opening, before it was refused. What might be considered concerning is that Professor Tom

Burkard is an “expert” for the right wing think tank The Centre for Policy Studies. In the proposal for its “ethos” it is stated, “Phoenix will offer pupils in an ethnically mixed community a grammar school standard of education designed to forge a common British identity”. In the section on Special Educational Needs it rubbishes proven practice contending that, even with open admissions, few, if any, of its pupils would have special educational needs. Professor Burkard’s profile on the Centre for Policy Studies website states that his teaching background is 3 years teaching basic literacy in a Norwich Comprehensive and 9 years as an instructor in the Territorial Army. Michael Gove says, “Tom Burkard has done more than anyone living in the fight against illiteracy in this country”.

Given the comment on poor schools in Oldham, further research on Ofsted reports for the secondary schools was interesting. There are 5 academies of which 1, a Church of England school in a prosperous area, was given “Outstanding”. Of the others, one was “Inadequate”, two were “Requiring Improvement” and one was “Good”. There was a faith school deemed “Inadequate” and another, on below average free school meals, was “Good”. Of the Local Authority Community Schools, three were “Needing Improvement” and two were “Good” of which one was in the top 100 most improved schools in the country. Oldham already has a new Free School but with no Ofsted report. “Poor quality” might seem a reasonable way to describe this situation until you read the detail of the reports which show some harsh judgements and that much good is happening with improvements noted, including in schools in tough areas. However it is reasonable to conclude that “academisation” here has not been the great success as is claimed by Michael Gove. Incidentally this is mirrored in South Hampshire where a sponsored academy “Requires improvement” and two converter academies have recently been put in “special measures”.

For how long can Michael Gove ignore the evidence that neither academisation nor free schools are the answer and diversity of provision does not drive up standards?

Alas the examples of failure are not enough to stop the Free School programme. The Tories continue to claim results in Free Schools outstrip those in the rest - the usual Academies claim - and the next story tells the political story. When Andy Slaughter asked a pointed question about the planned destruction of a successful local school, to build a free school, (Hansard 10th February Col 553), Gove responded by calling him a hypocrite - like Tristram Hunt, Slaughter is held to be denying local children the education he had himself: the education of a "free school". Editor

A Successful School is to be destroyed

Andy Slaughter MP

On February 10th in the Commons I had the opportunity to ask the Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove if he would use the powers of his office to save the Sulivan Primary School in Hammersmith & Fulham. For background Sulivan is currently rated to be the 233rd best primary school in the country which comfortably places it in the top two per cent in the country. The school holds over 300 pupils, from diverse and different social backgrounds, with over 30 different languages spoken. It is a model example of a modern inclusive community primary in our state system.

Recent accolades include a letter from Education Minister David Laws praising the school and even close ally and enabler of Hammersmith & Fulham Boris Johnson selected the school in his prestigious list of 'Gold Club' schools. Despite all this the school finds itself threatened with closure. One of the schools few remaining hopes lay in the hands of Michael Gove.

So what was his response when I asked him to save Sulivan?

First he praised Hammersmith & Fulham Council. Then he noted that Sulivan is outside my constituency, perhaps implying I should not be taking an interest. Then he went for an attack on my own background dismissing the campaign.

Why should a former public schoolboy such as the hon. Gentleman, who benefited from the independence of a great school such as Latymer Upper, wish to deny such high standards to others? Is it that the hypocrisy—forgive me, the double standards—of the Labour Front-Bench team now extends to the Back Benchers, too?

Looking at Gove's response to Hammersmith & Fulham Conservatives' plot to close Sulivan School, we should not be put off by ad hominem attacks. This is just the way he operates, and shows—as did his recent attempt to politicise the First World War commemoration—he is still more of a yellow press journalist than a cabinet minister. He has used the same response to me—about my own education at a direct grant school in the 1970s—when he wanted to avoid answering inconvenient questions before. It was just as relevant then.

But what his answer says about his own conduct in office is more revealing. Firstly, he—like the leader of Hammersmith & Fulham—thinks a good

school must be a free school or academy, or an independent. Thus he disparages the majority of excellent schools in the country. Secondly, he prejudgets the decision on Sulivan—he will adopt unquestioningly the decision of H&F to close Sulivan rather than doing his job in considering its serious application for academy status. Thirdly, he shows contempt for the hundreds of children, parents, staff and supporters of Sulivan by turning a reasonable request into a bit of silly political sparring.

He correctly points out that Sulivan School is not in my constituency, rather in the neighbouring constituency of Tory Whip Greg Hands. He fails to note that my main concern is not with the geographical location of the school but rather with the rationale behind the decision. If Tory-led councils can close a fine school here in Hammersmith & Fulham, then they can close them anywhere including in my own patch.

In his conference speech in 2013, Gove said that Labour championed mediocrity and that the Tories were now the party of social justice, fighting for poor children to have the same excellent education opportunities as rich. His endorsement of Hammersmith & Fulham's behaviour over Sulivan completely contradicts that belief.

Here the Tories' proposal is to close and demolish Sulivan in order that a Church of England Free School can be built on its site. Unlike Gove, the Sulivan campaigners are not prejudiced. They do not attack free schools, church schools or this school in particular. Indeed Sulivan's application to remain in business as an academy is sponsored by the London Diocesan Board. They do object to the personal and political ties between the senior local Tories and some of the free school's sponsors. But this is something on which the Tories have form. It is only a few years since Peterborough Primary—Sulivan's neighbour—was closed to provide accommodation for a private French school. I should declare an interest—I went to Peterborough too.

The Sulivan case is compelling and is receiving a lot of public attention for one reason only. The Conservatives are trying to close an excellent school for ideological and partisan reasons. No one should defend that, least of all the Secretary of State for Education.

I support good schools. That includes Peterborough. And Latymer. And Sulivan.

Meeting Tristram Hunt

Martin Dore

Being wedded more to pragmatism than paradigms, I attended the first SEA meeting with Tristram Hunt embracing a spirit of positive thinking. Education had received short shrift at the 2013 Labour Party conference, with a debate lasting only 36 minutes and without a single contribution from an educationalist, let alone a teacher. As the new Shadow Education Secretary, Tristram had certainly gained a higher profile than his ineffectual predecessor Stephen Twigg and had gained more positive media coverage by going on the front foot against Michael Gove. He scored highly by exposing the 'flawed ideological nature' of a policy which allowed free schools to be established in areas where there was no real demand and by, in some cases, religious fundamentalists with an agenda of their own.

When Tristram spoke he asserted that his three priorities were 'wraparound childcare (announced previously); the 'forgotten fifty per cent' (announced previously) and further education (no elaboration). In terms of schooling he wanted a relentless focus on teacher quality. He stated that improving and enhancing the quality of teachers would lead inevitably to the raising of educational standards. He did not, as far as I recall, actually utter the phrase 'standards not structures', a mantra which was even renounced by Tony Blair in his autobiography, but the implication was clear. We should not get bogged down by campaigning against free schools per se, although there are to be no new ones in areas where there is no shortage of places. There are however going to be 'parent led academies' a distinction which eludes me.

Tristram rightly pointed out that Labour will inherit an atomised educational landscape and he wanted to foster interdependency and collaboration rather than competition between schools. As far as the curriculum was concerned he called for a halt to the relentless change and a period of bedding down of any reforms already in the pipeline*.

The meeting I am pleased to report, was well attended by both NEC colleagues and Parliamentarians, including all three Labour members of the education select committee. The questions raised were polite but incisive. After a question about restoring the role of Local Authorities Tristram responded by saying we 'shouldn't make a fetish of democracy'. Ian Mearns MP made several excellent points about the vital role a Local Authority can play in enhancing the quality of education in local schools. He did not deny the reality of poor past performance in some LAs but provided solid evidence of how they can be an effective force in monitoring the quality of

education on offer locally and intervening when necessary. The results from Gateshead demonstrated how an effective council can work in partnership with its local schools to improve the standard of education in a given area.

Bruce Grocott spoke eloquently about the corrosive effect of pitting school against school in the febrile and competitive environment that is so prevalent nowadays, as opposed to the earlier collaborative incarnations of the London and Manchester Challenges.

I believe that we cannot accept status quo in education. The 'revolution' instigated by Gove and now disintegrating to an extent, will still have huge ramifications for any new government. His free market solutions will have left the fabric of a public education service in tatters. The corruption surrounding several of the free schools, the £1 billion overspend on Academies who are answerable to no one but their aptly named 'chains', and the uncertain position of community schools all leave primary and secondary education in a state of ongoing confusion and, in increasing numbers, paralysis.

So Tristram Hunt must grasp the nettle and pledge that he will restore some sanity to the system. Perhaps he could start with these suggestions:

- 1. Single status for all schools** - All schools to have the same freedoms (and constraints) e.g. re the curriculum;
- 2. All initiatives to be driven by educational imperative not political calendar** - Subject new ideas to academic scrutiny and trial;
- 3. Restore the concept of education provision being a public and accountable service** - Stop scandalous waste of taxpayers' money on ideological experiments and revitalise the role of LAs in monitoring standards in local schools and
- 4. Fair Rules for All Schools** - All schools required to follow agreed procedures re SEN, exclusions and appeals. Admissions criteria to be fairly applied to all schools, including those which are selective.

The SEA is Labour's only educational affiliate, so it must engage constructively with the Labour education team. We have established good relations with a number of parliamentary colleagues but we must attempt to wrest the educational agenda away from one of subservience to laissez faire market solutions. We must convince Tristram Hunt and his team that acquiescence is no substitute for shrewd analysis, action where appropriate and a commitment to education that matches the Labour commitment to the NHS. I fear we have a long way to go and very little time.

Why 'you're not here to enjoy yourself' endangers learning

Teachers are often told that we have a 'very demanding job,' (as if we needed to be told) but as the years go by I'm beginning to understand why teachers have so much stacked against them, and why often it feels like an uphill struggle to feel good about the job.

The greatest of the burdens upon us though is simply history, for teachers must teach under the weight of their own and everyone else's personal experiences of education. Consequently, we are quite literally set up to fail because (and this is a very sad fact) **most people didn't enjoy their education and didn't like their teachers.** Ouch!

David Spendlove claimed there are only two questions needed to be asked of pupils:

1. **Have you enjoyed your education so far?**
2. **Do you want to carry on learning when you leave school?**

It saddens me (very deeply in fact) that if you asked children about education most, and especially the 11-16 year olds, would give you an emphatic NO! to both questions.

The trouble is that many of the people who would have angrily answered no to these questions say twenty years ago, now consider these questions as being the province of wet liberals who want to let the 'chimps take over the zoo.' I mean, *enjoy* education? What are you thinking? That's not the point is it? Enjoy? The philosophy of most anti-progressive people especially those writing for the Tory press, view education and enjoyment as the antithesis of each other. You are not supposed to enjoy education, if you do, then it's not really authentic. 'You're not here to enjoy yourself, you're here to learn!' is a mantra the anti-progressives seem committed to.

Herein lies the vicious cycle: **pupils will learn twice as much, twice as fast if they enjoy, and therefore are engaged in, their learning.** But establishing this kind of learning, consistently and routinely, means many of the old ways of teaching that teachers, senior leaders, parents and policy makers hang on to need be hung out to dry once and for all. Silent classrooms, books and books of ticked, graded work with no hint of how to improve, children who know the answers being heard, those who don't fall silent, children with high marks getting the stars, clever children leading, not so clever children feeling not so clever, teacher knowing everything, children waiting to be told and teacher being the one and only source of knowledge...all this needs to be made into a pyre and set light to. It's time teachers danced around

this pile of rotten wood and started over.

Contrary to popular belief the alternative to traditional teaching does not mean pupils running wild, hurling things around the classroom and an 'anything goes' anarchy enfolding before open mouthed on-lookers. What it does mean is all children feeling part of something, being worth something because their teacher has cultivated a learning environment where learning and dialogue are clearly on the table, if not exuding from the walls and dripping off the ceiling.

Teachers and schools should be inspiring, they should inspire children to learn, to wonder, to be curious and want to talk about...everything. Classrooms should be places where it's OK to be wrong and talk about it, it's OK not to understand at first, but be guided towards understanding with your peers and by your peers too. Pupils are one of the greatest source of learning for each other, but no one likes to say it, because then the spotlight might come off the teacher for a while, and we can't have that!

A classroom can no longer be a place where it's OK to get by being silently confused and stifled by imminent failure. Teachers and schools should be the very last people and places on earth to cause children to withdraw from learning and harbour a lifelong dislike of education. How long would we accept the same from any other profession? How long would we allow most sick people to walk away from hospitals saying 'I don't want to feel well and I hate feeling well.' How long would we last as a species anyway?

It takes more than a smart piece of paper to be a teacher, more than a smooth talking graduate or a city high flyer wanting 'a change of scene.' It takes someone who understands learning and understands that the 'sit, down shut up,' method of teaching never worked and still doesn't work. The brain isn't an empty cup waiting to be filled, it's a communication device and needs connecting to experiences and dialogues in order to make meaning out of all those inputs.

About a quarter of pupils can bear the old, one dimensional, transmission style teaching and manage to sit down and shut up quite well, but the other three-quarters either switch off and slip into being passive observers (and then passive adults) or they find other avenues of stimulation by behaving like bored chimps at a zoo...because it is boring having to 'sit down and shut up'. Poor behaviour is the result. 25% do pretty well with the system, some get creamed off into selective

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Election 2015 – The Education Agenda

John Bolt

For the past three years, SEA has been working in partnership with other campaigning organisations to develop a comprehensive critique of this government's education policies. Three conferences - successively titled "Caught in the Act, Picking up the Pieces and Reclaiming Education" – have helped us to develop a radical manifesto for the future of English schools.

In this process SEA has worked with the Campaign for State Education, Comprehensive Future, the Anti Academies Alliance, Information for School and College Governors and all the teacher unions. We were delighted that our policy statement "A Better Future for our Schools" was published in the journal Forum (Vol 55 No 2).

On the website <http://www.pickingupthepieces.org.uk> can be found not just the policy statement but a range of material including the presentations from the last conference and commentaries from experts on different areas of policy. The grouping will be operating in the Spring under the title "Reclaiming Education Alliance".

We know that a year from now, the General Election campaign will be in full swing. This will be a critical election for the future of education – and indeed for all our other public services. Another

Tory led government would see the privatisation agenda firmly embedded together with the implementation of thoroughly reactionary approaches to the curriculum and assessment and an increase in both overt and covert selection.

So attention is now turning to the identification of the key themes and policies that we want to see included in Labour's election programme – and indeed in that of any other party willing to listen. We know the policy process is somewhat opaque and hard to influence. But the pressure needs to be kept up in every way possible.

To this end the Alliance is planning a public meeting to focus on identifying the five most important policy proposals that we want to push for. They will be based around the twin themes of entitlement and accountability and we'll be asking participants to help to identify the key things that a new government should do and that we should focus our campaigns on.

The meeting will be in the House of Commons and we're hoping for a good attendance of parliamentarians as well as members and supporters of SEA and other partners. The more people who are there, the more weight our ideas will have!

Election 2015 – The Priorities for Education

Keynote speaker – Peter Mortimore

Wednesday 8th April at 6.15 pm in Committee Room 14 of the House of Commons.

Reclaiming Education Alliance/Picking up the Pieces

Book your place now by emailing booking@pickingupthepieces.org.uk with the full names and contact details of those attending.

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education or put into the 'top stream,' but 75% don't do as well as they could at all, even that top 25% would have had a better time, may have reached even greater heights if it hadn't been so dull.

It's time for teachers to be cleverer than at any

other time in the history of education. We need to rediscover the teacher, and the authentic teacher, and not the impostor who has been hiding for too long behind those lonely monologues, wretched power points, prescriptive frameworks and endless ticks and crosses.

The Classroom Teacher is a science specialist teaching in a London primary school.

Education for a One Nation Society

David Pavett

Labour's recently issued **One Nation Society**, along with its **One Nation Economy**, provides the background thinking for discussion of Labour's draft 2015 election manifesto ideas, also now published.

In the second paragraph we read "One Nation Labour will put raising the quality of teaching at the heart of its mission to reform the education system." This has an apple pie and motherhood ring to it, but its real meaning is not so banal. It is as if there was a great national debate about the poor state of the mines and the inadequate nature of its many disparate management regimes and we were to be told that a one-nation response is to focus on the quality of miners. The quality of teachers line has become, for Labour, a monumental distraction from the great structural problems of English education.

The document, joins with the rest of the political and journalistic world in the uncritical use of PISA statistics. It thereby adds international league tables to our existing school league tables taking both to be "drivers" of improvement. This is a big mistake **as Peter Wilby and other have warned**. Labour's education team has so far not given no indication of having examined the value of the PISA tables. The avoidance of such an obviously necessary task contributes to the reduction of education debate to the task of headline grabbing.

It is claimed that "Standards tend to improve when parents demand more from their local schools." without the slightest evidence (the case relies on this being "obvious") and without no examination of what other factors might contribute as much as, or more, than parental pressure. It was not parental pressure brought citizenship into the curriculum.

One Nation Labour rightly criticises the viability of running over half the nations secondary schools directly from Westminster, but I doubt that Gove ever thought that was a long-term solution. It was a medium-term solution to carrying out a dramatic reform of the system. In the absence of any substantial political opposition it has achieved its objectives. Everyone knows that some sort of middle tier is required between central government and schools. Local government is an obvious base for this tier. This, however, is does not come within Gove's field of vision. Disconcertingly, the same is true of Labour. **As David Blunkett made clear in a Guardian interview** in which he announced before the completion of his report into middle tiers that Labour would not countenance local authorities forming the core of the middle tier..

Labour rightly rejects the Coalition's sink or swim approach to school management but it is a matter

of real concern that we are still waiting for Labour's proposals for local oversight and involvement in schools (responses to the draft manifesto proposals are required by June 16th).

It is even more worrying that Labour's solution to the divide set up by Gove between local authority schools and the new academies is by "extending to all schools the freedoms academies currently enjoy ...". In other words these "freedoms" which were based on the idea of schools as individual units competing for custom in an educational market will be extended to all schools. As if this were not already bad enough Tristram Hunt has called for "performance-related pay" for teachers. That's as clear an example as any of the continued hold of right-wing educational nostrums on Labour thinking. We should note too that among the academy "freedoms" is the freedom for each school to set its own salaries and conditions of service for teachers. Does Labour really want this?

Labour is right to criticise the Coalition for approving free schools in areas with a surplus of school places but this must not hide Labour's cave-in on free schools. By the simple device of a change of name Labour now clearly supports free schools under the title of "parent-led academies".

Similarly Labour is right to demand high quality vocational qualifications for the "forgotten fifty per cent". The third and final report from the Inquiry led by Chris Husbands has only just been released and on a first reading seems remarkably vague about implementation which it wants to be "employer led".

The world of **One Nation Society** is that of "responsible capitalism". It is one which class division remains integral to social organisation. The rich will continue to obtain a separate education for their children through private schools. That is the first great fracture in the notion of one-nation education. This fracture is so far from being questioned that it is not even mentioned.

Secondly, the fragmentation of our already disparate school system by the Coalition under the energetic leadership of Michael Gove (in the virtual absence of opposition from Labour) will be accepted as a new baseline by Labour. As Tristram Hunt put it in his **Institute of Education speech** last month: "*we are not overly interested in passing judgement on different school types*". The "one nation society" therefore will accept not only that children are divided into different schools on the basis of their parent's wealth but also on the basis of their (alleged) religious beliefs. *

Is this really the best we can do for education in a "one-nation society"?

Inside the Westminster Village...

Trevor Fisher

Politics in England is best seen as a consensus in the Westminster Village, divided largely on marginal issues between the three major parties. The Village is not a place, it is a blend of politicians and media people operating in interlinked social networks. The networks are key to their behaviour. On Education it has been increasingly clear over the last couple of decades that personnel are largely drawn from the public schools and Oxbridge, as in the 1930s. The 7% problem is real. Most top jobs are occupied by people who went to the fee paying schools that educate only 7% of children. It has become controversial, and the New Statesman was justified in running an article on it in February.

However the Statesman also illustrated the current Westminster consensus solution, that Academies (and other non democratically run schools) will overcome the state-private divide. Of the half dozen essays the paper ran, only the articles by Andrew Adonis and Anthony Seldon were flagged up on the cover. And they are committed to the

dogma. To round off the Staggers commitment to dogma, it then ran an article by Michael Gove, which argued that his Academisation of state schools would raise them to the level of the Independents. On no other issue would a hard core right wing minister be putting down the line for a centrist weekly. This is the Westminster Village in action.

However the world moves on. The old rigid division between (Failing) state education and (successful) independent education has broken down. Meanwhile academy and free schools as a magic solution is starting to look as dodgy in practice as it has always been in theory. There is no rigid division, and it is not dissolving because of the academy programme, seductive to the voters though independent schools in the state sector may be as a sweetener. The reality of the Westminster consensus and the actual practice of the Westminster elite is explored in the following articles, focussing on the key issue for many politicians with children

...The Rise of the “Tatler School”

At the start of March, Michael Gove announced that his daughter would be admitted to a state secondary school, with David Cameron suggesting he would follow suit for his children. Gove's statement that he had got his daughter into the Grey Coat Hospital School, like Cameron's, was seen as positive in the media. Sharper minds however saw this a part of a wider and damaging trend involving leading politicians and elite state schools.

It is of course not the job of politicians or political commentators to tell parents to which schools they should send their children. But it is of public interest when they are accused of using the system to gain privileges which other parents cannot get. Some schools give virtually guaranteed exam and thus career success for their children. The whole area of admission to schools is becoming what Peter Hitchens described as “filtering” in a piece in the Mail on Sunday of 9th March*, particularly the school Gove had chosen. Though Peter Hitchens was a voice from the right, there is now growing agreement across the board that the Westminster Village is moving in on elite state schools. The old tired cliché of state bad – private good is now out of date.

The road map is not the old problem of the rich going private. Certainly it is true that traditionally Westminster's elite has sent its children to private schools charging fees that the majority of the population cannot afford. This has been even true of Labour. However some New Labour politicians who came to prominence in the 1980s turned to a new solution, sending their children to a new breed of high performing state schools – which are high performing – with socially selective rules deciding who can get in. While selection by ability – the old eleven plus – is illegal, selection by rules and criteria, especially religious rules, is legal. And the elite, across all three major parties, know the rules,

As Peter Hitchens writes, those for the Grey Coat School are so complex that “You would have to be a mixture of Albert Einstein and St Thomas Aquinas to work out what they actually mean in practice”. The parallel practice of social selection based on high house prices which only rich people can afford and which keep ordinary people out of the catchment area has already gained critics. For the latter, the practice of admission lotteries so that parents are unable to buy their way into high performing schools is spreading..

But admission manipulation is made worse by academy and free schools controlling admissions. Even before academies, the Westminster Village, notably the politicians, knew how to get their children into schools they had chosen in ways not easily available to other parents.

Harriett Harman, Labour deputy leader, was accused of ignoring local comprehensives in selecting a school, and Tony Blair's family drove past half a dozen Catholic comprehensives to get to the Catholic Oratory school while Nick Clegg chose the same Catholic school for his eldest child. These practices earn the politicians brownie points nowadays as they are "going to the state school". In practice this actually means a highly selective school that does not accept a wide range of pupils.

This is clearly the problem at Grey Coat. John Bolt published on the Educforeveryone site** the following information. The school was identified by the Fair Admissions Campaign as being in the 1% least inclusive schools in the country. 52% of pupils have high key stage 2 results – 28% for Westminster overall, 32% in the country overall. Only 9% have SEN compared with 22% in the borough overall. The pattern is clear..

The problem of elite state schools is partly down to the school admissions policy, and will increase as Academies spread and control their own admissions. The middle classes increasingly find that house prices are becoming a real nightmare, hence admission lotteries. As Fraser Nelson of the Spectator pointed out (on his Spectator blog)***. it is clear house prices in the elite state school areas are rocketing. House hunting led him to one which was £150,000 over the norm. But, said the estate agent, "It is in the catchment area for Tiffin School", Those with The Knowledge recognise this as a prominent elite state school. The high price is cheap for a family with 3 kids, who could save well over £150,000 in school fees. Why pay independent fees when the state can give your child a good education?

THE RISE OF THE TATLER SCHOOLS

This was confirmed by the Tatler magazine, the elite Conde Nast coffee table magazine for the rich. Their January survey on state schools headlined "More bang for no bucks: the smarter side of the fee free system". They made the point very clearly, - "to put two children through the private system costs around £600,000 – that's 1.2 million before tax. And is private really superior? Not always, not any more... and when you do

finally get into the cabinet, everyone will love you because you didn't get to Eton".***This is the smart money talking. Top class education and you don't have to pay through your nose for it. Best of all for the rich, the taxpayer is paying for these good schools. It is Robin Hood in reverse.

And it is legal and politically correct. Tony Blair gained from putting his son through the Oratory Elite School as this was technically a state school. . And technically parents don't select, the school does. But those who know the code get into the pool. At the Grey Coat School there is a language test. Which does not involve knowing a language!

This is now a three track system, but understandably Gove sticks with the rhetoric of the old two phase system. Gove was still using the old State Bad Private Good model in the New Statesman of 14th

February, in a journal which still plugs the Adonis – Gove line on academies as the magic bullet for state schools, Gove had full reign. He argued the tired old case that academy conversion will make state schools as good as the private ones. But the elite state schools are already as good as all but the best Head Masters Conference schools, and they don't cost fees.

So why not go for the Greycoats School rather than, say, Burlington Danes Academy, which Hitchens' argued is near Gove's house and Gove praised as a school in which "excellence is becoming a universal expectation". Hitchens suggested that this indicated the improvements of the Academy programme were "a mass of froth, oversold and boosted by dubious statistics". Well, that is another story and it is one which is going to have to be told in the new era of the Third Way – the Tatler School.

* Hitchens is on <http://hitchensblog.mailonsunday.co.uk>. Check March 9th 2014 but also February 2008 for an earlier blog on Cameron,.

**the full article is at <http://www.educevery.wordpress.com/2014/03/04/goves-new-school-not-your-bog-standard-competences-why>

*** Nelson <http://blogs.spectator.co.uk/coffeeshouse/2014/03/gove-cameron-and-the-myth-of-state-vs-private-schools>

**** the Tatler Guide to State Schools is at <http://www.tatler.com/news/articles/january-2014/the-tatler-guide-to-state-schools-part-one>

CO-OPERATIVE SCHOOLS A quiet revolution

Mervyn Wilson, Principal, the Co-operative College

A quiet revolution is how Kevin Brennan, Shadow Schools Minister, described the rapid growth of co-operative schools when speaking in a recent adjournment debate called by Steve Baker, Conservative MP for High Wycombe on *Co-operatives in Education* last Autumn. Kevin emphasised that “*The Labour frontbench is strongly supportive of the rapid development and spread of co-operative schools that had happened in recent years*”. He went onto contrast the enormous resources that had gone into the Government’s flagship free schools policy, siting that over 100 civil servants are engaged on it, with “*very little in the way of resources that are devoted to helping co-operative schools to develop*”.

It is worth reflecting on this quiet little revolution and why, in the face of the acceleration of the forced academisation strategy, the number of co-operative schools has almost doubled in the past year with numbers topping 700 by the end of January 2014 and many more consulting.

Co-operative schools followed the 2006 Education and Inspections Act. With the support of the then Schools Minister, Jim Knight, the Co-operative College, a long established educational charity based in Manchester, worked with a number of schools to develop a multi-stakeholder co-operative model. A co-operative trust gives parents/carers, staff, learners and the local community a direct engagement in the governance of the trust through membership, alongside institutional partners, typically drawn from the Higher Education and public sectors, often including the local authority.

Geographically based shared trusts have proved particularly attractive in rural areas, often building on well-established collaborative clusters, providing a legal framework through which deeper collaboration can develop.

Co-operative trusts have been effective in engaging other strategic partners. In the adjournment debate Steve Baker MP highlighted the progress made at Cressex Community School in High Wycombe. This was one of a small number of National Challenge Trusts using a co-operative model established under the last Government. Its partner organisations include Wycombe Abbey Girls School, one of the highest performing independent girls schools in the country. Working in a challenging area with a high proportion of learners drawn from ethnic minorities, the school has transformed achievement, with record results

in 2013.

Steve Baker highlighted the importance of values, “*The community’s values were naturally aligned to those of the co-operative movement, and particularly the notion of being values-driven and faith-neutral, which, in my constituency is highly relevant*”.

At the heart of co-operative trusts is the concept of schools improvement through co-operation. In the West Midlands, the Wednesbury Trust, one of the country’s earliest co-operative trusts has established its own teaching school alliance. Its focus on improvement is shared by more and more trusts. In Staffordshire around 40 co-operative schools have combined to develop and strengthen their schools improvement and teaching and learning capacity. With a number of outstanding schools and local leaders of education (LLEs) within the group they are exploring the development of a sub-regional teaching schools alliance.

“*The co-operative school improvement model is very different from the strong school led model often put forward as part of the sponsor academy agenda*” said the Co-operative College’s Lead on Trust Schools, Sean Rogers, adding “*Co-operative trusts are the opposite of the hostile takeover model that many view the forced academisation programme to be. It is not about ‘doing to’, the perceived strong school dictating to the perceived weak school. Rather it is about ‘working with’, recognising the school being supported has strengths and weaknesses, as indeed generally so will the supporting schools.*”

The co-operative schools model fits well with the main conclusions and recommendations of last year’s House of Commons Education Committee Report on School Partnerships and Co-operation. It emphasised the importance of a diversity of models of collaboration stating “*Schools should be able to adopt models of partnership and co-operation that suit their needs within a legislative and policy framework that is as non-prescriptive as possible*”.

The report emphasised the importance of geographic coherence, exactly what is happening with the rapid expansion of co-operative trusts, and called for a more level playing field, stating “*We are concerned that the existing funding incentives are concentrated too narrowly on the academy sponsorship route*”.

The growth of co-operative schools is a

remarkable achievement considering current Government policy. In replying to the adjournment debate the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Education, Mr Edward Timpson stated that his “strong message of support on behalf of Government, demonstrates our desire to see a diversity in the education system that meets the need of individual communities”. He also talked about how the Government was “doing nothing to prevent schools from starting to form trust and

relationships”.

That is a long way from a level playing field. He stated “We do not however have anything to fear from co-operatives”, but just think what size and scale co-operatives schools could achieve if they received the sort of funding that had been given to Free schools, or if the financial incentives to becoming a co-operative school were on a par with that of the academy programme!

REVIEW

THE PRIVATE ABUSE of the PUBLIC INTEREST - MARKET MYTHS and POLICY MUDDLES By Lawrence D. Brown & Lawrence R. Jacobs

Cliff Jones

Delusion can be comforting, for a while. David Cameron, George Osborne and Michael Gove share a dangerous delusion. It is that Big Society and Small Government (BSSG) go together. They see symmetry in simultaneous expansion and contraction. As, for example, Free Schools grow in number we can reduce the need for local government. It is a simple equation and very easily sloganised in a party manifesto.

Two things are wrong with BSSG. Writing mostly about the administration of George W Bush, Brown and Jacobs show that the more initiatives devised to set the people free the more regulatory oversight was needed. For example, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) sounded good as a slogan but it encouraged more private schools. The old structures holding public schools to account and maintaining quality did not reach the private ones so new structures had to be devised and staffed and new regulations drawn up. Children now travelled to a greater variety of schools so more pressure on transport systems. There was, the authors point out, more governmental activity under Bush than under Clinton from the attempt to shrink government.

The second negative consequence is what Brown and Jacobs call a ‘democratic disconnect’. When holes in roads are not repaired or when there is a lack of flood defence there is pressure on government. People demand the good quality services that the ‘free market’ promised them they would get. Responding to unpredictable pressure produces more short-term policy making and regulation. And regulators. I would like them to have developed this point because complaining

and pressurising is not the same as democratic engagement and that kind of politics is hardly an inclusive and consensual arrival at values prior to policy making.

The authors do not merely list, describe and analyse the factors that grow government as a consequence of attempts to reduce it; they give us Adam Smith, David Hume and lots more while dismantling the arguments of neo-cons and free marketeers. It is not a book that Alan Greenspan would wish to read. And that, surely, is the point: that in order to maintain delusion ignorance is essential.

Brown and Jacobs want pragmatic economics and see public and private sectors as complementary. Socialists they are not. What they have given us is a demonstration that when politicians choose to avoid discomforting evidence their

delusions can endanger even what they claim to want. BSSG not only does the opposite of what it is intended to do but it subcontracts democratically accountable government to companies able to claim commercial confidentiality who then have to be supervised when things go wrong. Subcontracting the supervision then makes things worse.

More than five years have passed since the Chicago University Press published the book. It is a pity that it was not on sale here. It remains essential reading for policy makers. It might disperse their delusions.

The Private Abuse of the Public Interest, Market Myths and Policy Muddles . Lawrence D Brown and Lawrence R Jacobs. University of Chicago Press, 2008.

The Great School Meals Debate, A Welsh perspective

Chris Newman SEA Cymru

We learnt in January that as from 2015 children in Scotland, will get a free school meal in years 1 to 3. At their summer 2013 conference, the Liberal Democrats promised that all English infant school pupils would receive free school lunches, as from this September. They claim that 1.5m children will benefit from this reform. However, why did they rejected a similar scheme by the Labour Party, when they came into office, so what is actually happening in England?

It is worth reminding ourselves briefly of the history of school meal provision. Back in Victorian times, poverty and malnutrition was wide spread and social reformers such as Fred Jowett and Margaret McMillan, lobbied for government legislation to encourage all education authorities to provide school meals. Parliamentarians began to see the importance of state provision rather than patchy private/charitable provision of meals, as being essential in the feeding of poor children.

This welcome consensus broke down under the Thatcherite Tories. Their 1980 Education Act, 'abolished the minimum nutritional standards for school meals and removed the statutory obligation on LEA's to provide a meal service, requiring them only to provide free school meals for children of families on supplementary benefits or family income support', [Derek Gillard 2003, 'Food for Thought, child nutrition, the school dinner and the food industry'].

The school meals situation became worse when the Tories privatised the service by introducing Commercial Competitive Tendering; forcing LEA's to choose the 'cheapest' catering tender. This led to many school kitchens being taken over by private companies and offering a cafeteria service based on often unhealthy fast food. As a result of the publicity generated by the campaigning celebrity chef, Jamie Oliver and the public interest in his 2005 TV programme on the need to produce healthy lunches in schools for children, the last Labour Government gave their support to this new campaign. School meals were made healthier, with the spending of £280m towards the much needed canteens and kitchen-provision. Children were given the opportunity to consume much less sugar, salt and saturated fat and the selling of sweet treats, chips and high-sugar drinks were restricted or banned.

The Current Situation

The Labour improvements in school meals have been watered down by the present coalition government's Education Secretary Michael Gove. He no longer allows the School Lunch Grant,

[which helped pay for the above mentioned reform] to be ring fenced. In addition, local councils no longer have to monitor the take up of free school meals, although this data is a useful indicator of social deprivation. Gove also decided that free school and academies are except from any regulation on nutritional standards for school meals. We learn that 'nine out of ten academies are selling pupils junk food such as crisps, chocolate and cereal bars that are banned in maintained schools to protect children's health' [Denis Campbell 15/5/13, Guardian].

We now have a serious obesity problem especially among the young. Perhaps concerned by this increase in child obesity as about 20% of children on leaving primary school are overweight and their ideological drive to promote private enterprise, the Department of Education published last July a School Food Plan, commissioned by Michael Gove.

Henry Dimbleby and John Vincent, founders of the Leon restaurant chain, have worked with a panel of experts which include head teachers, teachers, cooks, caterers, nutritionists, parents, charities, volunteers and government', on this plan. Out of a panel of 22 members only 2 represented Local Authorities, in this case Leeds City Council. Clearly this government doesn't concede that it is the job of LA's to provide school meals or provide appropriate training anymore!

This panel looked at the issue of low take up of school meals, as it is estimated that 57% of children are not eating school meals. The report is full of quite sensible ideas on how to support head teachers in improving the situation, making meals more 'appetising and nutritious, making the dining room a welcoming place, keeping queues down, getting the price right, allowing children to eat with their friends, getting them interested in cooking and growing.'

The government has agreed to allocate money to help schools in social deprived areas to establish breakfast clubs. There was a call for a return of cookery lessons being part of the national curriculum for all up to the age of 14. Lovely idea but the National Curriculum does not apply to most schools and where are the specialised teachers coming from?

They are also looking into nutritional standards of school meals which is sensible but if private companies are to run school meals service how will the government ensure they do serve healthy meals?

The Welsh Example

Here in Wales, the Labour government and the LEA's are aware of the need to provide nutritional school meals. Estyn's chief inspector Ann Keane reported that 'research shows that socio-economic disadvantage is the biggest obstacle to achieving a good education'. As unemployment and under-employment have risen in Wales, we have seen a steep increase in the number of children on free school meals. It has been estimated that 20.7 % of primary school children and 17.4 % of secondary school students are now eligible for free meals, compared with 2008, when the percentage was 17.9 % and 15.6 % respectively [Darren Evans, Times Educational Supplement 15/7/11]. Concerned by low academic attainment, an obesity epidemic and high truancy among some young people in many socially deprived areas, the Welsh government has ensured that school meals maintain high nutritional standards. They are enforcing regulations that stipulate the balance of the level of vitamins and minerals and the maximum levels of fat, salt and sugar allowed in dinners at maintained Welsh schools. In addition, over the last eight years the Welsh government

has funded a free breakfast scheme in all primary schools, in order to help address these social, health and educational issues. Here in Cardiff, the local council, now operate a cashless school meals system thus removing the stigma associated with free school meals.

One has to admire the Welsh government for upholding such useful reforms while trying to fend off central governments 'austerity' measures. It is interesting to note in the Guardian, 10/9/13, that some English LA's especially in the deprived areas of London are funding universal free school meals for primary children. They quote a primary head teacher from Newham, where such a scheme has been operating for the last four years. 'Children are more attentive and less lethargic in the afternoons, behaviour is much improved and standards are going up because they are concentrating more.....There's less illness and obesity'.

It is to be hoped that the next Labour government will look at these examples of 'income redistribution' which help children in poverty and set up a universal free meals scheme.

THE GREAT DIVIDE

James Park

For the past 25 years, education policy has evolved as a sometimes messy compromise between two ways of thinking. I will call these *eduthink* and *policythink*.

In the effort to achieve compromise, we have got used to pretending that these two ways of thinking have much in common. There are, however, profound differences between them:

Policythink believes that obsessing about a narrow range of proxy targets will deliver better outcomes; *eduthink* knows that you will get better results if test scores are the by-product of a rich educational experience.

Policythink believes that learning proceeds along a straight line, pretty much in the same way for all students; *eduthink* knows that different students learn different things differently at different rates.

Policythink believes that telling people how badly they are doing in comparison to their peers will inspire them to strive harder: *eduthink* knows that the best way to motivate young people is to ensure they have the confidence to respond to a challenge to go beyond where they currently are.

What has happened over the past 25 years is that the language of *policythink* has flown around the staffroom, the classroom and parent evenings, so that almost every conversation risks being coloured by concerns about how to satisfy the

demands of policy-makers.

A unique feature of the proposals for primary assessment put forward by the government in July was that they were pure *policythink*. Whether talking about baseline assessment, decile measures or the concept of 'secondary readiness', professional organisations, teacher and headteacher unions agreed that the measures proposed would demotivate large numbers of young people and actively contribute to widening the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students that policy makers say they are trying to bridge. Nobody in the profession was any longer in denial about the damage that *policythink* can do to our children's learning.

The abolition of levels was more interesting. What happened here was that education secretary Michael Gove was persuaded by an argument put forward by his expert advisers, but understood this in his own pure policy-think way – not really appreciating the subtle case being made.

Interestingly, certain elements in the profession saw this as an occasion for alarm. Without levels to navigate, how were they going to know from day to day whether they were addressing the requirements of policy makers? This was a clear indication of how far fear and anxiety percolates through the system.

At the moment, the promise of autonomy to work according to *eduthink* rules tends to be scuppered by the requirement to deliver exactly the targets that policymakers have set.

But perhaps the abolition of levels is a real opportunity to start to clear *policythink* out of our schools, and start building an unbreachable wall between these two ways of thinking.

We need to set up assessment systems that encourage much richer conversations about how engaged children are in their learning, what is

causing them to be more or less engaged, and how we can enable all children to become the best learners that they can be. Discussing about whether a child has got to 3a or 4c is never going to get us there.

And we need to show the policy makers that the best thing they can do for our children, our society and our economy is to stop to stop undermining the effectiveness of schools by trying to control everything through their management of the assessment and accountability system.

Education for the 21st Century: The Compass/NUT Inquiry into a new system of education in England

Ken Spours

The Compass/NUT Inquiry into a new system of education in England is a year-long project that will conclude its first stage in July 2014. Involving a range of stakeholders both within education and beyond, it is mapping out a new democratic model of education that seeks to go beyond the marketization and political top-down reform approach of this government and of previous ones too. It has an Advisory Council that brings together a wide range of opinion to secure the broadest possible education consensus. At the same, the Inquiry is collaborating with other bodies that are also undertaking reviews, including the ASCL's Great Education Debate and Labour's Task Force on the Middle Tier.

Its central argument is that for any society, beyond the physical survival of its members, education is probably the most important activity people can create together. Education, along with the family, is the means by which we understand and reach our full potential as human beings and the prime way of learning how to live together.

This 'relational' approach to education has special meaning in what has been termed 'New Times'. Amidst the dominant trends of globalization - worsening poverty, increased social division and the despoliation of the planet - we suggest there are emerging new potentially progressive trends. These concern the development of a more horizontal, flexible and networked society and economy and more interconnected, relational, democratic, egalitarian ways of interaction and innovation.

The Inquiry aims to catch the tide of New Times by developing a democratic model of education that is deeply imbued with the values of equality and social justice, democracy, sustainability, wellbeing and creativity. Moreover, our education system has to be more than schooling; it is a lifelong venture and this is probably where education will be at its most comprehensive and radical.

Beyond these general principles, the Inquiry is arguing for an 'open curriculum' that develops broad capabilities in learners as well as specialist knowledge and skill in order that learners of all ages can effectively collaborate to tackle our pressing societal and global issues. At the organizational roots of the system should be the democratic, co-operative and common school and college with a strong voice for students and their teachers. But we live in a diverse and fragmented institutional landscape, so the Inquiry also seeks to bind providers and social partners together in local collaborative relations. Our idea of comprehensive is not just institutional; it is also area-based.

Confident and highly capable professionals will be key to making a more devolved and democratic governance landscape work for all learners. We are, therefore, promoting the idea of an 'expansive' concept of professionalism in which teachers and lecturers develop not only expertise in their subject specialism and pedagogy, but also capabilities to collaborate beyond the their institution with a wider range of stakeholders.

While the Inquiry has, so far, established a comprehensive analysis and a set of potentially interesting proposals, it faces enormous challenges and difficult questions. These include:

- How to build a new system from good practice and not just good ideas?
- How to facilitate genuine choice and diversity within a more comprehensive system?
- How to translate democratic participation into system improvement?
- How to establish the contours and basis of a new model without imposing it? It must be organic and bottom up, but seeded and resourced from the legitimate national collective will – the state.

What works in school improvement? evidence from London

Merryn Hutchings

Conservative politicians tell us that academies have proven success in raising standards in schools. For example, Michael Gove claimed in 2012 'the Academies programme as a whole is raising standards', and supported his assertion with this evidence: 'In the 166 sponsored academies with results in both 2010 and 2011, the percentage point increase in pupils achieving five plus A*-C including English and maths was double that of maintained schools.' While the figures he used are accurate, the claim that academies raise standards more than other schools is flawed.

This is because low-attaining schools, on average, always show greater year-on-year improvement in results than high-attaining schools. Most sponsored academies are by definition among the lowest attaining schools, and so one would expect them to improve more than all schools. What is needed is a comparison of improvement in schools with similar initial attainment.

Studies taking this approach have not reported any substantial evidence that sponsored academies improve more rapidly than other schools. For example, the 2011 DfE analysis showed that results for pupils in sponsored academies were broadly the same as in a group of statistically matched schools. However, when equivalence qualifications (BTECs etc) were excluded, results in sponsored academies were slightly lower than in similar schools. Thus the Academies Commission report (2013: *Unleashing Greatness- RSA/Pearson*) concluded that 'the evidence presented to the Commission indicates that academisation alone cannot be relied on for whole-system improvement.'

However, there is one group of schools that has demonstrably improved more rapidly than equivalent schools – that is, schools in London. In 2003, far fewer Inner London secondary pupils achieved the expected level than was the case in any other region. In 2013, Inner London was the second highest attaining region, second only to Outer London, which had also improved (from 4th to 1st place). Similar improvement has taken place in London's primary schools. This achievement particularly noteworthy because London, and particularly Inner London, has a higher proportions of disadvantaged pupils (whose attainment is generally low) than any other region.

What has been responsible for this improvement? The key factor has been the London Challenge, a government initiative that ran from 2003-11. Initially led by Sir Tim Brighouse, the Challenge

aimed to improve the standards of London's secondary (and later primary) schools. A number of strategies were put in place to do this: London teachers' pay was increased, and the pay scales altered to encourage teachers to stay longer in London. Bespoke support was provided for underperforming schools, which were identified as Keys to Success schools, a name chosen deliberately to contrast with the discourse of 'failing' schools. The Challenge evaluation (Hutchings et al 2012) showed that in these schools, attainment improved by two percentage points more per year than was the case in schools with equivalent initial attainment. Specific programmes were also developed to further improve Satisfactory, Good and Outstanding schools, and a range of structures were set up to enable schools to learn from each other (teaching schools, hub schools, headteachers designated National and Local Leaders of Education, and so on). The evaluation showed that the key elements that led to the remarkable success of the Challenge were:

- adequate time: school improvement takes time, and funding was extended over eight years;
- working at area level, providing an identity and an opportunity for learning across LA boundaries;
- a strong focus on teaching, learning and use of data;
- support for schools to become more outward looking, and a range of structures through which school staff were able to learn from practice in other schools;
- the expert roles created: Challenge advisors and National and Local Leaders of Education;
- bespoke solutions which enabled the specific issues facing each school to be tackled, and gave a sense of ownership to headteachers and staff;
- the recognition that individuals and school communities tend to thrive when they feel trusted, supported and encouraged, and achievements are celebrated.

At the start, the London Challenge was run jointly by civil servants and education experts. Jon Coles led the team of civil servants, and Tim Brighouse the team of Challenge advisors. The two men worked closely together to devise the Challenge activities and put them into practice. While the

aims of the programme were clearly agreed, the working of the Challenge was more flexible, and new activities were devised when needs were identified.

In addition, the Challenge drew on the skills and experience of the headteachers of the most successful schools, both by brokering partnerships through which they and their staff worked with weaker schools, but also, by setting up the London Leadership Strategy through which headteachers took on responsibility for the leadership and direction of much of the Challenge programme. This organisation still exists, and is a key legacy of the Challenge.

The Challenge team worked with Local Authorities (LAs) to identify the schools most in need of support (the Keys to Success schools), and the action plan for each of these schools was drawn up, agreed and monitored by a group made up of the headteacher, relevant LA officers, and the Challenge advisor. Thus it was not an imposed plan; the intention was that all concerned felt some ownership. This did not always work perfectly; some LA officers resented the intervention, but the majority of those interviewed in the course of the evaluation were extremely positive about the Challenge and how it had contributed to their own professional development.

While the approach was generally supportive and inclusive, the Challenge also had a hard edge; it was made clear to both headteachers and LA officers that expectations were high. Tim Brighouse was clear that the best approach was to publicly 'express support for ever higher expectations ... while simultaneously dealing with deficiencies, shortcomings and failures expeditiously, and as far as possible, in private and where deserved, with dignity' (Brighouse, 2007).

These aspects of the Challenge contrast strongly with the 'top-down' approach through which 'failing' schools are 'named and shamed' and are forced to take on academy status.

However, despite the detailed evidence that has been produced, politicians tend to attribute the success of the Challenge to factors that were not central elements. For example, Michael Gove, in a 2012 speech at the National College, identified Teach First and sponsored academies as key elements that led to the success of the Challenge, and more recently on BBC1 Question Time Matthew Hancock attributed the improvement of London schools entirely to the academies programme, without any mention of the London Challenge.

While some sponsored academies were created in London during the years of the London Challenge, there is no evidence that they improved more than other schools, and the numbers were relatively small; by the time the Challenge ended in 2011, only 12% of London's secondary schools were sponsored academies, and none of the primary schools. At that point convertor academies had only just come into being. So academies cannot be credited for London's high attainment.

A number of other parts of the country, including the North East and Somerset, are currently setting up Challenges similar to the London Challenge. These areas would welcome government support. It is worth noting that the total cost of improving Keys to Success secondary school on average £250k – substantially cheaper than the £2million transition funding allocated to each sponsored academy – and very much more effective.

Professor Merryn Hutchings is Emeritus Professor at the London Metropolitan University

Notes

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Seeing the World Through Gove's Eyes

From the Times, 4th February 2014: By Rachel Sylvester

"Mr Gove is convinced he is engaged in a war that is as much about social values as it is about exam results. If he has made a lot of enemies it is because he has picked a lot of fights. He sees himself as being in a battle to

the death with 'the Blob' - the education establishment - that involves defeating the 'thought world' of people who have in his view been complicit in decades of under performance in schools".

On what planet is Michael Gove living?

Editor

The Ups and Downs of the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB)

Martin Johnson

Over twenty years since a review body replaced negotiating machinery to determine teacher pay in England, the system remains controversial, with teacher unions in disagreement as to the relative merits of the two. But the STRB's 23rd report, published in February 2014, goes some way to pushing the pendulum back in favour of the STRB.

Teacher pay does matter for learners, because historically there have been crises of shortages of teachers sufficient to impact on achievement. Shortages occur particularly in certain secondary subjects and certain locations, when pay levels have become unattractive compared with other occupations. With the depressed state of the economy during the period of coalition government vacancy levels are at record lows, but in the past shortages have developed relatively quickly and all parties involved in setting teacher pay need to remain vigilant. All of this is despite the clear evidence that most teachers are not principally motivated by pay, but become teachers because of a strong vocation.

Teacher pay also matters to the Treasury, since it amounts to well over £20 billion a year. The plain fact is that under any system the Treasury will have a strong say. Within the old negotiating machinery Treasury officials were the elephant in the room; under the review body, its evidence is transparent and highly significant. Under this pressure and the weight of evidence from education ministers, a key determinant of the quality of STRB reports is its propensity to exhibit independence from government. Over the years, the record of the STRB in this regard has been mixed.

From its own point of view, its acceptance of the coalition government's pay freeze, followed by a 1% limit, is rational given buoyant teacher recruitment. However, it came badly unstuck in 2013 when it went along with the Secretary of State's ideological commitment to a pay system

The increasingly influential Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) toolkit, which judges the research evidence on effectiveness of various practices in raising achievement, rates PRP as having no impact.

more strongly related to performance. This report was of a poor quality; its use of evidence was contentious. The increasingly influential Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) toolkit, which judges the research evidence on effectiveness of various practices in raising achievement, rates PRP as having no impact. Result: another headache for hard-pressed school leaders, who need to concoct some way of justifying sensible pay increases for their staffs for September 2014.

Perhaps the flak received by the STRB influenced its much more robust resistance to the Secretary of State in its latest report published in February 2014. The arch-ideologue got it into his head that

pupils would learn better if teachers' contracts were stripped of outdated provisions on hours and days of work and their duties. To its credit the review body recognised the very long hours actually worked by teachers and declined to make changes. The rights to lesson preparation time and not to cover absent

colleagues or invigilate exams, achieved by the social partnership in the previous government, also remain unchanged, presumably to the exasperation of the minister. The STRB also confirmed that teachers should not be expected to undertake administrative or clerical tasks that do not require their professional skills or judgement.

Teacher workload remains a key issue for teacher unions, who are in negotiations with the government on the issue as Education Politics goes to press. **The solution lies not in changes to contract, since teachers routinely work far beyond it, but in dealing with the external pressures on school, such as inspection, which lead to excessive paperwork** which is just an evidence trail of what has been done – a trail which makes no contribution to pupil achievement.

Martin Johnson was formerly Deputy General Secretary of teachers union ATL

The arguments set out above gained strength from the DfE workload review showing that teachers are working in excess of 55 hours a week and during holidays". NUT General Secretary Christine Blower said "Many teachers feel totally overwhelmed and it is hardly surprising that two in five leave the profession after their first five years and morale is at an all-time low". The NUT-YouGove survey on morale in December 2013 can be found at <http://www.teachers.org.uk/node/20172>

Independent Schools are Wonderful?

Trevor Fisher



One of the key planks of the Westminster Consensus is that independent schools are superior to state schools. Andrew Adonis has implored the independent sector to sponsor academies, arguing that "we need your DNA". Adonis, along with Gove and Blair, was independently educated.

The success of independent schools as exam factories is undeniable, and a major factor in poor social mobility. As Gove said in one of his more accurate comments, the top universities are full of "rich thick kids". The floating voter likes to think that Academies can be 'independent schools in the state sector', hoping they can compete with the Etons and the Harrows by structural reform. This was much of the appeal of New Labour's commitment to academies for the inner city.

However the success of the top schools in the Head Masters Conference is bought with high fees. Parents pay over 33K per year per child for the privileges these schools offer. The average spend on a state school pupil is around 5k. Money talks. The academies and free schools cannot compete with the top public schools without similar sums. Comprehensives have to compete without

even the pretense of a level playing field.

But the independent sector is not just the top public schools and Goodbye Mr Chips. It is also the realm of Goodbye, We've Had Our Chips. Schools don't just soar like a bird, they fail like a dying duck. These pictures show the sign outside Brooklands School in Stafford, an independent primary school. Every picture tells a story, and the FOR SALE sign tells the story. Set up in 1946, the school was active until the autumn of 2013 when it suddenly closed, so it cannot have been a very good school. What happened to the pupils is unknown but even a poor school closing has bad effects on the pupils. There is nothing to gloat about at the failure of a school – any school.

The lesson is that there are no magic solutions involving structures, or even large amounts of money, though both play a part. In the independent sector schools can and do go bust. Anyone who thinks the success of the HMC schools is due to a better DNA rather than a large bank balance and rigid entry policies ignore reality. Independent schools do fail, and the children suffer. Who picks up the pieces?

News and information on SEA

Education Politics: (issn 1354-2028) The journal of the Socialist Educational Association. The articles reflect the views of their authors and not the SEA unless indicated otherwise.

The Journal is edited by Trevor Fisher, layout by David Pavett. Contributions to future editions are welcome by space is limited. Please discuss with the editor before submitting.

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