Schools at Risk!

£1.50

Gove's School Revolution Scrutinised

The reality behind the rhetoric

Essays on the current crisis

Greta Akpenye
on Comprehensive ideals
Tim Brighouse
discusses a crisis in teacher training
Geoff Whitty
outlines thinking on training teachers
Michael Bassey
on Academy fact and fiction
David Pavett
analyses Lessons from Finland
Richard Hatcher
uncovers the For Profit agenda
Trevor Fisher
scrutinises the Westminster Consensus

An SEA publication - June 2013

The Gove Revolution Scrutinised

Since May 2010 English schools have been subjected to what the *Spectator* admiringly calls the "Schools Revolution". Constant change was already the bane of English schools, but the pace accelerated. But there is very little scrutiny of the fundamentals issues and as Estelle Morris, herself an ex-Education Secretary, argued after Gove's failed attempt to impose the English Baccalaureate Certificate (EBC), the Media are so besotted with Gove's radical agenda they hardly question what is happening.

A MEDIA BLACK OUT

She wrote in the Guardian of 26th February of her surprise that "you'd be forgiven for thinking that the government had discarded a couple of inconsequential policy ideas... (but) the implications are far from minor... so why so little political damage to the government?" It is a fair question, and not just on exam reform. As this pamphlet will demonstrate, there is much to scrutinise.

Exams are not examined here, as the changes are still in the pipeline. There was a feeling of relief when the EBC was shelved, one reason why comment was muted. But only one. Morris rightly argued "huge sections of the media - most of whom probably had a similar education to Michael Gove – also share his interpretations of what constitutes educational rigour". There are wider issues here than this essay collection can examine, but there is no doubt there is a broad consensus underpinning Gove's radical agenda.

Neal Lawson, Chair of Compass, recently argued that "there is a coalition born of the 1980s and today it is represented by Michael Gove, Andrew Adonis and David Laws". This is true. However it is not set in stone and the behaviour of Gove underlines fundamental contradictions. In this pamphlet we look at some of the immediate issues posed by the course Gove has set.

ROOTS IN THE BLACK PAPERS

It is rooted in the anti-comprehensive movement of the last half century. As Greta Akpenye points out, the Black Papers from 1969-76 set an agenda which remains dominant today. The comprehensive school is a community facility, responsive to all the needs of its pupils and community. It is democratically controlled, unlike the academy system now favoured in Westminster. The threat to community cohesion touched on is only one issue needing focussed and rigorous debate.

The most immediate threat is to teacher training. Professors Brighouse

Continued on page 31

The Comprehensive Ideal

Dr Greta C Akpenye

It is time to revisit the achievements of the comprehensive school project and challenge its opponents. It is an ideal worth fighting for because only by raising the consciousness of our children, beyond narrow academic and economic achievement within a nationalistic discourse, can we hope to be effective in countering the worst excesses of global competition in all its forms.

Comprehensive – including all, covering many eventualities, inclusive – is an ideal. The ideal was to promote good social care and understanding in a diverse pupil population, a high level of skills, curricula that focussed on the world as our environment (rather than the nationalistic mantras of the past) and promote understanding of one another in local, national and global contexts. Contrary to popular propaganda, the comprehensive ideal was being developed to include academic excellence.

The comprehensive project replaced a system heavily underpinned by privilege. The 'elite' was selected at 11 years old, leaving the unselected to live with the burden of failure. The tripartite system, introduced by the 1944 Education Act, was supposed to provide for three types of schools - grammar, technical and secondary modern - a clumsy attempt to classify children at 11 into academically gifted (grammar), technically inclined (technical or central) and others (secondary modern). Primaries had always been comprehensive.

In 1965 when the Labour Government issued Circular 10/65 requesting Local Education Authorities (LEA) to submit proposals for the comprehensivisation of schools, only 172 (3%) of the 5446 secondary maintained schools in England and Wales were called technical schools as compared with 24% grammar, 69% secondary modern and 5% comprehensive. Then, as now, any attempt to give a higher profile to technical and vocational education floundered.

The LEA grammar schools flourished, safe in their elite bubble alongside private and direct grant schools. Prestigious schools such as Dulwich College, benefited in the mid 20th century from the direct grant system. These, mainly private establishments, were financed by the state for a large part of their income. When the state ended the direct grant system in 1976, these schools were given the choice of becoming state schools or being completely independent. More than 70% chose to be independent. Now, however, through the academies programme, they can

advance their empires by sponsoring state school academies. Dulwich College for example, now controls the Isle of Sheppey Academy, a fully funded state independent school.

The progressive Alternative

Secondary modern schools struggled to find a purpose. With their pupils already devastated by failure they had little to motivate them in the academic and classical curricula presented in traditional ways. But a progressive education discourse had been in process as far back as the 18th century with Rousseau's belief in freedom of expression against Locke's more traditional carrot and stick approach.

In the late 19th century others such as Dewey, Montesorri, Pestalozzi, advanced the arguments for progressive education and a plethora of other psychologists, philosophers and educationists added their voices throughout the 20th century - Piaget, Vygotsky, Donaldson and Bruner for example.

Progressive education encouraged experiential learning, acknowledged the importance of social interaction, promoted child centred approaches to learning and recognised the importance of giving children freedom to develop their own ideas through active involvement in the learning process. Difficulties of educating severely disappointed children after the age of 11 in secondary modern schools, gave impetus to research into the way children learn and by the time of circular 10/65, education practitioners were ready for the change.

Here was an initiative to educate all the state's pupils in order to minimise differences and cater for all sections of the community without divisive selection. It would include all abilities, social backgrounds, religious beliefs, heritages and a broad curriculum that was decided through understanding of pupil needs and which also, sought to harness the skills and abilities of parents and the wider community. With LEAs, in charge, there was built in accountability. Equal status for all maintained schools was a key move for the promotion of equality. The stigma of failure, which blighted the expectations of many pupils, could be eventually eliminated.

The Black Papers and the counter attack

But there were many anomalies. The presence of the religious establishments, fully funded by the state, as well as the tendency for some authorities to maintain girls' and boys' schools separately, meant that the comprehensive ideal was a work in progress. The Christian establishments were regarded by many parents as elite schools in the state system as were many of the foundation schools such as

Haberdasher's Askes. These still functioned with a grammar school ethos, following classical curricula. In addition special schools for different physical and mental abilities still existed. So the achievement of the ideal would take time, resources, research and creative flair and effort.

It needed courage and tenacity to maintain the momentum because the campaign against the comprehensive school was virulent. It was re-launched in 1969 with the publication of the Black papers (written by Cox, Dyson and Boyson), whose advocates, with the support of the right wing press, continued over the ensuing years to attack the concepts of comprehensive education, equality and progressive teaching. The Black Papers lauded grammar schools and proposed re-focusing on 'academic' students.

In 1970 the incoming conservative government withdrew Circular 10/65, but four years later in 1974 another Labour government re-instated it. But even the Labour party held back on full support and never legislated for the change. In 1976 it appeared the Labour party had begun to renege as James Callaghan's Ruskin speech 'Towards a National Debate" was interpreted as support for the Black Paper advocates. That was the time for a strong input to the National debate from those in favour of progressive Education. But that input was somewhat sidelined by the intensity of the development of the project.

1976-1990 saw great achievement in the advancement of the comprehensive principles even though this coincided with the long period of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative administrations. It took some time for the Conservative education agenda to come to fruition, but eventually, the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) set about dismantling the comprehensive system of education.

Secondary Comprehensives brought greater choices for both boys and girls. By the time of the ERA, not only were the number of co-education schools far outstripping single sex, but the curriculum in many had also broadened choices. The traditional subjects (English, Mathematics, Science, History, Geography, Art, Music, PE, Modern Languages) and PE remained the basis for curricula in general. Although RE was legally the only compulsory subject before the Enactment of the ERA, English, Maths and Science were deemed the major subjects as judged by the generous time, 36- 40% of the weekly timetable, devoted to these subjects in the majority of secondary schools.

At its best the comprehensive school achieved:

- Complete mix of pupils from all backgrounds and abilities – a means of levelling the social make up of the country.
- A broad and interesting curriculum – by the time of the ERA schools

were offering a wide mix of subjects, engaging positively with the world of work through work experience while links with FE colleges and universities meant that the breadth of subjects for the pupils was extended in creative ways. Lessons in aviation and vehicle maintenance as well as other unusual subjects were now possible. Pupils taught off site in community schools could enter national examinations in their mother tongues at many schools. The traditional idea of boys' and girls' subjects was slowly being eroded as girls and boys mixed together for Technology which embraced the old needlework, cookery and woodwork in textiles, resistant materials and food.

- Mode 3 Examinations, set and marked by schools, to cater for the specific needs of their pupils were gaining prominence.
- Course work and practical examinations were *de rigueur* and the partnership between exam boards and schools helped make even the mode one exams (set and marked by Boards) more pupil friendly.
- GCSE had been introduced so that all pupils could now be entered for the same examination.

The biggest and most important aspect of the comprehensive project was the impetus for change and development. LEAs used the opportunities to help their schools share expertise while the dedication of many educationists in addressing the problems of classism, racism, sexism and other prejudices, became an essential part of the education agenda. The triumph of the comprehensive system was to be found in the greater mix of students in these schools and the fact that despite the rapid rise of different religions, cultures, and heritages in this country, the transition from apparent mono-culturalism to acknowledged multi-culturalism was, despite some traumas, relatively smooth.

The threat from Academies

The academy project is set to change all that. Academisation (conferring autonomous powers) takes away the accountability to the community exercised through the LEAs. This means that one of the most important elements of a comprehensive school - the involvement of parents, families and the community, plus the duty of the school to respond to local needs through the offices of locally elected officials – is no longer possible. Parents have no recourse to appeal beyond the school if their children are excluded, for example. Similarly they have little right to challenge the curriculum or any prejudices that they find in these independent state schools. Already it has been noted that permanent exclusions in academies are 4 times as high as in maintained schools and other exclusions are 3 times as high.

The strategy used by the Labour Government of 1965, to 'persuade' the County Councils to adopt the comprehensive system, was a promise of money for development of comprehensive schools - a strategy also exploited by Tony Blair's 21st century Labour government. The essential difference between comprehensivisation and academisation is, that, within the period 1965 -1975 some 90% of schools in England were comprehensive with only a few county councils like Buckinghamshire and Kent maintaining Grammar schools. Now, more than 10 years since the start of the academies project there are just over 50% of conversions and new academies in the secondary sector. The comprehensivisation project was a change desired by professionals, parents and politicians. Academies are a construct of the political right, a method of sustaining elitism and discrimination and of privatising our schools, ultimately creating moneymaking instruments for greedy capitalist investors.

The comprehensive project was based on need and a desire to make schools more friendly and productive places for children. It succeeded in creating a country where children learnt to understand and celebrate the differences that exist in a multi-cultural world. Comprehensive schools with their emphasis on equality, arguably, ensured that there were no 'Rivers of Blood'. Now more than ever, the world needs such understanding. The country needs an education system that can lead the way in minimising the risks of our children relying on the teachings of either jihadists or red top journals. We cannot revert to a status quo that promotes the elite concepts of top universities and top grades above all else and promotes league table competition as if schools can be run like football clubs or banks.

We need education that attacks inequality in all its forms, deepens awareness of social and political issues, encourages creativity and above all opens up the mind to the importance of social action for change. We need to continue the development of the comprehensive project and maintain our struggle for that ideal.

A Better Future For Our Schools

The **Socialist Education Association**, the **Campaign for the Advancement of State Education** and others set out the top ten priorities for an incoming Labour government. Download the statement from **www.socialisteducation.org.uk**

Government induced crisis in Initial Teacher Education

A statement from the Chair of the New Visions for Education Group, Professor Sir Tim Brighouse

The provision of teacher education is undergoing an unpublicised crisis. This statement looks at two issues to do with the initial training of teachers in England. The first is the Government's ambivalence towards the initial training of teachers and the second is the effect of the introduction of School Direct.

Responsibility for initial training of teachers & qualified teacher status

The first and most alarming issue is that the need to train teachers at all has come into question. Michael Gove has said that neither Academies nor free schools are required to have teachers trained to the Qualified Teacher Status standard. Given that he wants most schools to be either one of these, it is clear that he does not prioritise the need for teacher training. The number of academies has increased dramatically so that now over half the secondary schools in England have Academy or free school status and if Gove has his way this number will continue to grow. Coupled with this, Gove has given up the need to plan teacher training places nationally.

We have now reached a position where:

- no-one person or agency has the duty to ensure a sufficient supply of trained teachers nationally, or an efficient local distribution of training places covering all subject areas; and
- qualified teacher status is no longer seen as a necessary requirement for teachers in the English public education system, unless they are in LEA maintained schools.

This is very disturbing.

School Direct and the initial training of teachers

The second issue is the introduction of School Direct, which is a new school-based employment route into teaching which does not necessarily involve higher education and the award of Qualified Teacher Status, and an academic qualification in education. This should alarm parents of school-aged children.

The 2010-11 Ofsted annual report found that Higher Education (HE) routes into teaching were more effective than employment based routes. Ofsted evidence:

> *'shows that there is proportionately less outstanding provision in employment-based routes than in HEI-led partnerships'* (The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2010/11, HC 1633, page 76).

The numbers are quite telling: 65 (47%) HEI-based courses gained outstanding whereas only 19 (19%) employment-based providers were found to be outstanding.

Charlie Taylor, the Chief Executive of the Teaching Agency, claimed, however, on 18 January this year while referring to improving the quality of teachers,

> *'I think things can get better and the introduction of School Direct last summer will change things significantly'* (DfE In the News Speeches, 2013).

So, Taylor is overseeing the introduction a system that Ofsted believes produces significantly fewer outstanding courses in teacher education. He is right, however, when he says that it will change things significantly.

Postgraduate teacher training places

In November 2012, the placements for postgraduate teacher training were announced for September 2013 starts. Without any notice at all the numbers were cut by a third. The situation was particularly bad in the arts and humanities.

It appears that anyone without an 'outstanding' in their last Ofsted inspection lost their provision to train teachers, again, particularly in the arts. This left strange regional variations.

Places in English

London, for example, with a population of 8 million had only 163 places left to train teachers, in English, for HE providers for 2013 starts, a reduction of 27%. The number of providers was cut from seven providers to just three – The Institute of Education, King's College London and Roehampton University. Roehampton has just been Ofsteded again and this time they only received a good which may mean that next year their provision may go.

In Leeds (36 places to zero) and Sheffield (23 places to zero), too, for example, they have no more English places. The situation has changed

slightly in some places. Recently, for example, we have heard that Goldsmith's, in London, were offered some of their places back as was Leicester, but the picture has changed little. Oxford-Brookes which had all their places in English taken away only to have ten of them returned is not going to pursue a PGCE for English in 2014 as the landscape looks uncertain.

And this is part of the problem. Apart from making the distribution of teacher training places in England startlingly haphazard, with no serious calculation of teacher need, the difficulty of transferring the number of places in HE to schools is that HE providers cannot guarantee jobs for trainers if they are unclear how many students they will need to support through School Direct. There are departments that have transferred all their work to School Direct provision – Reading University being one such an example. They too lost all their HE provision for English but have 18 School Direct places. They are still, however, in the hands of the schools. It is schools which decide whether or not they are going to have a student, and thus determine whether university provision is required. It is quite possible that a school will decide that they do not want a student in a given year.

HE school partnership in teacher training

The other problem with the introduction of School Direct is that Charlie Taylor appears to think that HE providers do not use schools in their teacher training. In his North of England speech, he said *'In the past teachers were often parachuted into schools from on high without any direct school involvement in the content or the focus of their training course'*. Although he does add *'that there are many examples of excellent partnerships between schools and providers of teacher training',* he downplays the role of this partnership so much as to distort the truth of the relationship between schools and HE.

Trainee teachers spend 60% of their time in school and only a third of their time in college. That means that the bulk of their training is school-based. Much of their time in college is spent on subject work at the very beginning of the course by teachers preparing for secondary teaching. In that subject work, they explore ways of turning what they have learned in college into work that can be tackled by teenagers. They look at, for example, how you plan lessons and schemes of work, differentiate the work for pupils of various abilities, and how you assess pupils both formatively and summatively. This is a very cost effective way of doing it because it means that students are trained together en masse. There is also time for students to reflect on what they are doing and time too for students who are in different schools to talk about how their school tackles

the subject. Ofsted, in the 2010-11 report adds that,

> *'The ability of trainees to reflect critically on their practice is a significant factor in promoting their progress, particularly in HEI-led partnerships where staff use their own research activity to promote critical thinking and link the development of subject knowledge with underpinning theory of how children learn'* (Ibid, page 77)

School teachers or mentors do not have the time for this and soon university departments may not be able to employ trainer to do this type of research. One good thing about the Post Graduate Certificate of Education is that it keeps both sides – the academic and the school teacher – in touch with one another so that they can learn how children learn.

Conclusions

The question of the partnership between schools and universities is ever changeable but to divorce them completely is a mistake and to suggest that teachers need no training at all is a grave error. Teaching is a complicated business and you must have time to reflect on the pedagogical processes involved. It appears that Michael Gove considers subject knowledge enough. What he appears to fail to see is that you need far more than subject knowledge if you are going to stand up in front of thirty children and teach them stuff that they do not already know and inspire them to want to learn more. You need time – mostly at school but in college too – to learn to do this. For this to continue HE must have a more of a guarantee than School Direct can offer. As it stands at the moment the offer of places is too ephemeral for university departments to continue to employ people. Oxford Brookes may well be just the first of many universities to decide that it is no longer economic in such uncertain times to continue to run strands of PGCE – or perhaps PGCE courses at all.

This paper has focused on the initial education and training of teachers in just one, albeit vital, secondary subject (English) but as we suggest the same problem applies across all subjects and in the primary sector too where there is an imminent need for many more teachers as the pupil population rapidly expands over the present decade. To leave the training of teachers to the market with no attempt to plan places is a dereliction of duty and will accelerate the realisation of the present Secretary of State's belief that no training is required to teach. All the research and evidence of other successful systems elsewhere in the world suggests otherwise. We wonder too how many parents really want their children taught by unqualified teachers. Unless something is done, we shall soon find out

Further Background

Under section 62 of the Education Act 1944, the Secretary of State had a duty to secure sufficient facilities were available for the training of teachers and a power to direct LEAs to give whatever assistance was needed to ensure the presence of sufficient Initial Teacher Training (ITT) in their areas. The Secretary of State was responsible for awarding Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), the main function being the awarding of ITT courses to higher education institutions. Under the Education Act 1994, these duties (and responsibility for funding courses from HEFCE), went to a quango the Teacher Training Agency, latterly the Training and Development Agency (TDA), and the standard for the QTS went to the General Teaching Council England (GTCE) following the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998. Following the abolition of the TDA and GTCE on 1 April 2012 under the Education Act 2011 the duty on the TDA to secure sufficient ITT was repealed and not passed to the Secretary of State. A few functions relating to the management of the teaching workforce, such as induction for teachers who have gone down the QTS route, funding of initial training, and banning individuals from teaching have passed to the Secretary of State, and these are exercised through an executive arm of the DFE called the Teaching Agency (TA). This is headed by Charlie Taylor. The TA was merged with the respected National College for School Leadership (NCSL) on 1st April 2013 with Charlie Taylor in charge.

Teacher training - behind the headlines

Geoff Whitty considers recent attacks on university education departments

Michael Gove wrote an article in the Daily Mail of March 23rd attacking so-called Marxist teachers and teacher educators, who he characterises as ‘the enemies of promise’:

Reading this extraordinary outburst against the educational establishment made we wonder what year we were actually in. It all sounded so very familiar. So I sought out a copy of my inaugural lecture at Goldsmiths College in May 1991 and this is what I had written in ‘Next in line for the treatment: Education Reform and Teacher Education in the 1990s’:

“A recurring theme in the pamphlets of the New Right pressure groups is the need to rid the system of the liberal or left educational establishment…There is general agreement amongst [the New Right] that, say, two or three years of subject study in a conventional vein is sufficient academic preparation for would-be teachers and any training necessary can be done on an apprenticeship basis in schools…One of the reasons why some members of the New Right can believe, at one and the same time, in permitting the entry into teaching of people with little or no training, while imposing increasingly stringent criteria upon the content of established routes into teacher training, lies in its belief that there are ‘enemies within’. At one level this is a general argument about producer interests, but it is also a more specific attack on the alleged ideological bias of teacher educators…”

Twenty years later, of course, the attack has come not from New Right think tanks but from a government minister who appears to have read the script.

I also drew attention to some flaws in the New Right argument even from their own position, pointing out that, if their critique of teacher training was right, schools surely needed to be purged of teachers who had ‘suffered’ from teacher training before they could themselves be entrusted with teacher training. Furthermore, I pointed to the practical problems of handing all initial teacher training over to the schools, arguing that such a shift would involve significant changes in the structure of the teaching profession and the culture of schooling at a time when schools were already having difficulty coping with existing educational reforms.

Although some might argue that these considerations still apply today, a lot has changed in teacher education in the last twenty years. Many of the more legitimate criticisms of university led teacher training have already been addressed through constructive engagement between government,

universities and schools. In that same 1991 lecture, I argued that higher education institutions should actively embrace school-based training and partnership working, and most have subsequently welcomed multiple training routes and worked ever more closely with schools. And inconvenient a truth as it may be, some of us in university departments of education were involved right from the start in the development of Teach First, one of the teacher training routes consistently praised by government ministers including Michael Gove.

All this, according to Ofsted under its previous HMCI and a report last year by the House of Commons Education Committee, has had positive effects on the quality of new teachers entering the profession. Yet current policies are being rolled out in a manner that risks losing from the system some of the best University based practice that has developed in recent years. School Direct, for example, just does not seem to have been thought through properly - as is clear from a report in the Times Educational Supplement on March 29th – and too many of the official pronouncements about it misrepresent the nature of existing University-school partnerships. So much for the evidence informed approach to education policy and practice that the DfE is promoting through Ben Goldacre's recent paper and the subsequent DFE initiative.

Similarly, I was disappointed by the way in which the first inspection results under the new inspection framework for teacher training were described in an Ofsted press release in March. In its original form, it included spurious interpretations of limited data and at least one factual error and it omitted to mention anything that reflected well on HEIs or badly on school-led teacher training schemes. Two highly respected former HMIs have now written to the Guardian to point out just how flimsy Ofsted's evidence base was.

Whether or not Ofsted's stance was politically motivated, as implied by the Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers, a report in the The Times in March which responded to the 100 Profesors letter published on March 20th in two national papers suggested that Chief Inspector Sir Michael Wilshaw saw a connection between the allegedly inferior teacher training inspection results from university based training and the letter from 100 education academics attacking the government's National Curriculum proposals, which had provoked Michael Gove's article in the Daily Mail. Regardless of the strength of their arguments, many of the signatories to that letter are retired and very few are involved in the design or delivery of initial teacher training, so the Chief Inspector was hardly setting a good example to the teaching profession in terms of evidence-informed practice!

The Gove attack on the 100 professors can be found at:

www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2298146/

ACADEMIES: THE WILLING, THE PRESSURED AND THE FORCED

Michael Bassey

LABOUR'S ACADEMIES

Andrew Adonis, in the foreword to his *Education, Education, Education* (2012) wrote: "There is so much more we can and must do together to build schools fit for our children and for our future as a society"(i). On that we can agree. But his advice as Education minister under Blair to replace low-achieving comprehensive schools by academies, independent of local authorities and linked to financial/ managerial sponsors, is another matter. Perhaps he should have put his energy into raising the game of the local authorities. His denigration of LAs, teacher unions and many comprehensives was certainly counter-productive.

GOVE'S ACADEMIES

Labour created 203 academies. Under Michael Gove, by April 2013, the number had risen to 2,619. Nearly all are secondary schools and present a bewildering array of 'non-local authority' arrangements: philanthropic start-up sponsored, charity/university sponsored, converter, multi-academy-chain. ('Sponsored' academies are mainly under-performing schools supported by a sponsor. 'Converter' academies are schools rated as 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted and which have chosen to become academies.)

What they have in common is: a contract with the secretary of state releasing them from local authority 'control' (a non-existent phenomenon); "the ability to set their own pay and conditions for staff; freedoms around the delivery of the curriculum; the ability to change the lengths of terms and school days" (ii); slightly enhanced state funding (to enable purchase of services no longer provided by the local authority and for legal fees of conversion: in many cases this has exceeded requirements and has been a 'bonus' for conversion welcomed by governors and heads but denied by the DfE – "there should be no financial advantage or disadvantage for a school converting to academy status" (iii). David Wolfe, speaking to the 'Picking Up the Pieces' conference last November described the schools 'converting' to academies as "the willing, the pressured, and the forced". Downhills primary school in Haringey and Roke primary in Croydon are

examples of the latter: forced to join the Harris Federation of academies against the wishes of governors, staff and the majority of parents.

WHY ACADEMIES? "THERE IS A LARGE BODY OF EVIDENCE …"

Why is the Coalition government trying to turn every school into an academy? Lord Nash, one of Gove's education ministers, told Neil Moffat in a letter earlier this year:

> "there is a large body of evidence, both from pupil performance and independent reports, that shows Academy status is the best way to transform chronically underperforming schools and bring about rapid and sustainable improvement." (iv)

Should we believe this? No. Read what the Royal Society of Arts/Pearson Commission Report on Academies said:

> "The introduction of academies has provided much-needed vitality to the school system. At the same time, the evidence considered by the Commission does not suggest that improvement across all academies has been strong enough to transform the life chances of children from the poorest families. There have been some stunning successes among individual sponsored academies and academy chains, and these have raised expectations of what can be achieved even in the most deprived areas. But it is increasingly clear that academy status alone is not a panacea for improvement." (v)

This report is entitled 'Unleashing Greatness': there is a clear contradiction here.

Henry Stewart has carefully analysed the 2012 school-by-school GCSE data from the DfE in January 2013 (vi). (It covers 246 sponsored academies and 2027 non-academies. Converter academies, which were not given in the DfE press release, are excluded). Stewart examined how schools GCSE benchmark changed from 2011 to 2012. He noted – and challenged – the DfE claim 'that sponsored academies were improving at five times the rate of all state-funded schools'. This is what he said:

> "How much a school's GCSEs increase is related to its previous results. Those with previously low results tend to see large increases and those with previously high results tend to see only small increases or falls. The best way to judge how one set of schools performs is to compare like-with-like.
>
> "For those schools whose GCSE benchmark was in the 20-40% range in 2011, academies increased by 7.8% and maintained schools by 7.7%. Both are impressive results and these schools should be praised for their improvement. …

> "In the other bands, non-academies did slightly better in the 40-60% and 80-100% bands and academies did slightly better in the 60-80% band.
>
> "This backs up our research on the 2011 data, which showed that – when compared to similar schools – academies did no better (and sometimes worse).
>
> "Again we find that previously under-performing schools who chose to stay with local authorities did as well as those which found a sponsor and became an academy."

Stewart added:

> "It is technically true that the benchmark GCSE results for academies grew, on average, by 3.1% compared to 0.6% for all state schools. However this is not comparing like-with-like and simply reflects the tendency of results for more successful schools to grow at a slower rate (or fall). It is a gross distortion of the data to claim this as a conclusion from them."

Stewart is a critic of the Academy programme. Nevertheless his data analysis follows the rules of statistical evidence, and his conclusions are sound.

AUTONOMY OVER THE CURRICULUM?

Academies do not have to follow the national curriculum but it is doubtful whether the much vaunted autonomy of the academies liberates the creativity of teachers to respond to the educational needs of their pupils. Since GCSE and A-level syllabuses are set by exam boards external to schools the secondary school curriculum is more or less determined. But what part do the sponsors play? A DfE website says:

> "Sponsors are held accountable for improving the performance of their schools. They do this by challenging traditional thinking on how schools are run and what they should be like for students." (vii)

It is likely that sponsors, particularly ones from business, see 'performance' in terms of exam results and ignore the wider aims of education for worthwhile lives. It is doubtful how much say teachers have in some of the academy chain schools. For example, if you are one of the 9000 pupils in the 18 Ark academies this is what you can expect.

> "The ARK curriculum includes 12 hours of literacy a week in Key Stage 1, 10 in KS2 and 5 in KS3. Our primary literacy curriculum includes discrete spelling and handwriting lessons and at least 45 minutes of synthetic phonics a day until mastered, as well as regular out-loud class story reading … All secondary pupils study

> mathematics for at last five hours per week. ARK's Mathematical Mastery curriculum teaches fewer topics in greater depth to ensure that no child falls behind. Every concept or skill that is introduced is taught so that it is mastered by every child. ... By operating a longer school day (typically 8.30 am to 4 pm in our primary schools and 8.30 am to 4.30 pm in our secondary schools) Ark academies are able to make time for catch-up while still providing a broad subject offer." (viii)

As a second example, the Aurora Academies Trust currently runs four primary schools in East Sussex. Who decides what is taught? An American company called Mosaica - who receive £100 per pupil annually in royalties for the use of their patented Paragon curriculum (ix).

AUTONOMY OVER TEACHERS' PAY

To date there has been more concern about the likely consequences of governing bodies exercising this 'freedom' than evidence that it is happening. The Academies Commission relayed the warnings of a primary head of the risk of "a highly marketised education system where 'dog eats dog'" and of a secondary head that "the freedoms around the employment of staff will lead to the situation … where successful schools will recruit more strongly than weaker schools" (x).

Since one of the main reasons for the Academy Programme is the claim they improve chances for underperforming schools and pupils – the "Tail" of underachievement which is rightly seen as a major problem for the English educational system – the dangers here of underperforming schools being damaged by the dog eat dog nature of the policy indicates a serious contradiction.

ADMISSIONS AND EXCLUSIONS

The DfE asserts that:

> "Academies are required to follow the law and guidance on admissions, special educational needs and exclusions as if they were maintained schools." (xi)

Francis Beckett, commenting on this in his review of the RSA/Pearsons Commission Report, writes:

> "The abuses it mentions are well-known to teachers. … Many academies have covertly selected pupils for years … and then trumpeted improved results … They have to abide by an admissions code, but everyone in the trade knows ways round it. Others have been using their greater power to exclude pupils as a way of clearing out difficult children." (xii)

There can be little doubt that in a system ruled by exam results and

performance targets, fairness to young people depends upon admissions and exclusions being strictly controlled by local authorities and not by individual academies.

DfE £1 BILLION ACADEMIES OVERSPEND: VALUE FOR MONEY?

In April 2013 the Public Accounts Committee castigated the DfE

> "The Department has incurred significant costs from the complex and inefficient system it has used for funding the Academies Programme … In the two years from April 2010 to March 2012, the Department spent £8.3 billion on Academies; £1 billion of this was an additional cost to the Department not originally budgeted for this purpose. …
>
> "What will determine whether the Department ultimately achieves value for money is academies' impact on educational performance relative to the investment from the taxpayer. … The Department must insist that every Academy Trust provides it with data showing school-level expenditure, including per-pupil costs, and with a level of detail comparable to that available for maintained schools." (xiii)

CONCLUSION

The most worrying question posed by the Academies programme is whether it achieves success for the poorest students. Here the evidence points to an alarming conclusion. It is true the early academies had some success as researcher Stephen Machin reported in 2012:

> "Our findings painted a reasonably optimistic picture of Labour academies. Over an eight-year period, we found improvement in the quality of the intake and in GCSE performance in the academies that had converted in the first five years of the programme relative to the comparison group." (xiv)

But Machin's contribution to The Tail (2013) noted that

> "The effects of academy conversion are insignificantly different from zero – and possibly negative for later conversions – in the bottom 10% and 20% of the ability distribution, suggesting no beneficial effects on tail students in academies." (xv)

Machin is the best researcher in the field. His conclusion suggests we have to ask not only whether Academies benefit the pupils they were set up to assist, but who in reality they are benefitting?

References

i. Adonis A, *Education, Education, Education: reforming England's schools*, Biteback Publishing (2012)

ii. DfE, dated 15 January2013 http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/academies/b00205692/whatisanacademy

iii. Downes, P, *Education Politics*, Summer 2013, 116, 13

iv. Moffat N, *Education Politics*, Summer 2013, 116, 13

v. RSA/Pearson Commission Report on Academies, *Unleashing Greatness,* (2013)

vi. Stewart H, http://www.localschoolsnetwork.org.uk/2013/01/2012-gcse-data-non-academies-do-as-well-as-academies/

vii. DfE *idem*

viii. Blakeway S, Chapter 9 in The Tail, Profile Books (2013)

ix. Doward J, Observer 18 May 2013

x. RSA/Pearson Commission Report on Academies, Unleashing Greatness, (2013) p55

xi. DfE idem

xii. Beckett F, Guardian 10 January 2013

xiii. *Public Accounts Cttee:* www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmpubacc/787/78703.htm

xiv. Machin S, Guardian 10 April 2012

xv. Marshall P (ed) The Tail: how England's schools fail one child in five – and what can be done, Profile Books (2013)

Continued from page 25 (Finnish Education)

- required consensus reached over a long period;
- is not a party political football;
- is based on trusting teachers;
- rejects quasi-market models based on choice and competition;
- has removed nearly all high-stakes examinations;
- has no need for a national inspection system;
- extends special needs support to 50% of the cohort;
- emphasises teaching for understanding not teaching to the test;
- rejects league tables and payment by results.

Equality in education is linked to equality in society. Making sustainable changes in education requires deep and long-term involvement of all interested groups not party political diktats. In recent decades UK reforms have been based on top-down measures in a context of high social inequality. We have a lot to learn from the Finns.

What We Are Not Told About Finnish Education

David Pavett

Everyone acknowledges the success of the Finnish education system and its top-scoring in such international benchmark as the PISA and TIMMS tests.

Our politicians acknowledge the Finnish achievement and try to link it to their own policies. In so doing they have tended to focus strongly on one aspect of Finnish education: the high status and high level of qualification of teachers.

Michael Gove told the **Education World Forum** in January 2012

> *We have learnt from Finland - a consistently strong performer in PISA studies - about the importance of attracting the very best graduates into teaching, which is why we are expanding our principal elite route into teaching, Teach First, as well as providing extra support for top graduates in maths and science to enter teaching.*

Stephen Twigg told the **Labour Party Conference** in October 2012

> *In England we consider it a success when we fill every vacancy. But in Finland and South Korea, there are 10 applicants for every place. ... Labour supported Teach First to bring top graduates into teaching. I want the number of Teach First recruits to double from 1,000 a year to 2,000 and then further still, so it becomes one of the main routes into teaching.*

Both have also spoken of of "breaking the link" between social deprivation and educational achievement. Michael Gove said "*But there is a problem at the heart of English education, a problem that has plagued this country for decades...Inequality"* and Stephen Twigg explained "*... countries such as Finland and Japan have reformed their education systems to reduce selection and narrow educational divides*".

There is thus wide agreement that (1) Finland provides high quality education to all children and (2) English education, despite achievements, suffers from a problem of inequality.

Some questions arise from this: (a) Can the Finnish achievement be explained in terms of its highly qualified teachers? (b) to what extent can their achievements be copied elsewhere? (c) can the reforms favoured by

our main political parties emulate Finnish success?

To answer these questions we need to know something about how the Finns brought their education to the status of world leader.

(1) The Finns sought to change through consensus

In the 1950s the Finns had a diverse educational system of public and private provision which distributed educational opportunity very unequally both socially and geographically. Most young Finns left school after 6 or 7 years of basic education. Where grammar schools were available pupils could enrol for education to a higher level but in 1950, for example, only 27% of 11-year-old Finns enrolled in such schools, the majority of which were privately run. The alternative was a further 2 or 3 years of technical and vocational training in municipal *civic schools.*

The transformation of the Finnish education system took place in three main phases extending over more than twenty years. That's a clue to the first lesson from the Finnish experience: *sustainable changes to something as complex as education can only be achieved by reforms which command general assent*.

The details of this process are given in Pasi Sahlberg's book **Finnish Lessons** (Teachers College Press, 2011). It explains the cultural, political and social cross-currents involved and merits close reading.

(2) Finnish society is relatively egalitarian

The case of Finnish education does *not* show that schools can break the link between social deprivation and educational achievement. It certainly shows that that link can be attenuated *not* that it can be broken. It should be no surprise that the effects of family, social background and status cannot be reduced to mere background noise.

The Finnish case shows rather that if a universal education system is to succeed then everyone needs to feel part of the same society. Extreme inequality militates against that. Finland succeeded in creating an education for all its children because of its low level of social inequality.

Inequality is measured in various ways. On any measure Finland is seen to have low inequality.

	Finland	Germany	France	UK	USA
(Top 10%)/(bottom 10%) (UN, 2009)	5.6	6.9	9.1	13.8	15.9
Gini Coefficient (World Bank, 2011)	26.9	28.3	32.7	34	45

(Gini Coefficient: 0 = perfect equality, 100 = perfect inequality)

This suggests that *if you would reduce inequality in education then you must reduce it in society also*. In England despite the talk of creating a good education for all it is accepted without question that the wealthy will secure a privileged education for their children in private schools. In the state supported sector faith schools further divide our children.

(3) The Finns rejected neo-liberal models

Pasi Sahlberg describes the dominant model for educational change with the acronym GERM (Global Educational Reform). This model, he explains, is based on neo-liberal thinking and within its framework certain ideas have come to have such a hold on thinking that to challenge them seems to many to be out of the question. And yet, as he shows in his book, Finland succeeded by rejecting all the main ideas of this model.

The central dogmas of GERM are: (1) Parental choice between schools drives up standards; (2) schools and teachers should be held to account by means of high-stakes standardised testing; (3) when set standards are not reached (as measured by standardised tests) consider increasing teaching time (school days and school years); (4) determine teachers pay by exam results; (5) Impose onerous inspection regimes to check on teachers and schools.

The Finns worked hard not to be infected by GERM. They believed that, despite the superficial attractiveness of some of the points, the consequences of implementing would in every case result in a 'cure' that is far worse then the condition it was designed to remedy. The Finns have succeeded without these nostrums which are so popular with so many of our politicians.

(4) A fully comprehensive system working through local authorities

The most striking feature of the Finnish system is rarely mentioned by our politicians. It is *a fully comprehensive system working through local authorities*. There are no private schools and the great majority of children simply go to their local school. Where particular requirements exist they are dealt with within the local authority framework.

The point is that the Finnish comprehensive system has been able to work with a genuinely balanced intake because of the lack of a private school system and the lack of competing selective schools. This makes its conditions fundamentally different from the never-completed introduction of comprehensive schools in England (and the UK more widely).

Another notable feature of the Finnish system is their approach to Special Needs. Their view of special needs is very broad and 50% of children can be expected to have had special needs support at sometime in their

school career. All schools have fully trained special needs specialists. All this means that special needs are taken care of by such generous provision that there is no longer anything particularly special about special needs.

(5) Teacher education is research-based

Hannele Niemi of the University of Helsinki says “It took more that 20 years to build a common understanding among teacher educators, university professors and practioners about the complexity of the teaching profession”. The result was research-based teacher education requiring teachers to have a deep knowledge of educational research in their subject areas and who know how to conduct research themselves.

All teachers must hold a masters degree. The focus of the degrees is different for the different sector of education (primary, general secondary, vocational secondary) but in all cases involves studying for a bachelor's degree and then a research-based master's degree. The whole process takes five to seven years. There is no other route to teaching. Qualified teachers have the right to start a doctorate if they so choose. The Finns do not favour crash programmes to get graduates into teaching nor the use of unqualified staff.

Finland's almost complete absence of high-stake exams means that teachers can teach for understanding and creativity rather than teaching to the test. This produces higher level of students engagement and understanding obviating the need for information drilling with no other purpose than meeting the needs of high-stake tests. Finally teachers have a relatively light class-contact time of 600 hours per year - less than in the UK. This corresponds roughly to teaching four 45 minute periods per day. Teachers have time to engage with colleagues, design their materials and assessments and engage in research to overcome problems.

(6) What the Finnish case shows

The Finnish achievement involves methods that are ruled out by the neo-liberal competitive model. Some commentators argue that it has few lessons for us because it is based on Finnish peculiarities. It is true that direct transplants are rarely possible but there are a series of general similarities between the educational problems the Finns had to solve and those we face in the UK.

The first objection is that Finland is a small country. This is true but one can only wonder why being smaller gives rise to greater educational opportunities. That sounds like an argument for the dismemberment of Britain! Besides a population of 5.5 million is of the same order as that of

most US states. If that really were a problem there is a simple solution: decentralise.

The second argument is that Finland is ethnically homogeneous. There is some truth in this but it is overstated and has little to do with the issue. Finland has three official languages (Finnish, Swedish and Sámi). It has significant Russian, Estonian and Somali minorities. Moreover since joining the EU there has been a significant inflow of new minorities. Thus Sahlberg reports urban schools with as many as 40% of children with non-Finnish born parents. Despite this Finland's record of dealing with children of immigrants is much above the OECD norm.

The third argument is that Finland is a much more egalitarian society and that its people are much more prepared to pay high taxes for public purpose. Valid points. The question is only what conclusion one should draw from them.

Clouds on the Horizon

Despite its successes Finnish education is not without problems. The crises of 2008 is having serious repercussions. Increasing central and local government debts have involved public sector cuts. Small schools are being merged and efficiency measures are explored. Some municipalities have laid off teachers for periods without pay. A particularly dark cloud is Finland's increasing inequality. Sahlberg reports an increase in the income ratios of the highest and lowest quintiles from 2.7 in 1986 to 4.2 in 2008. The problems arising will inevitably spill over into education. He says

> *Therefore, the challenge for Finland is not to try to maintain high student performance but to strive to keep the country an equal society and maintain its leading position as having the the most equitable education system in the world.*

Neighbouring Sweden has embraced neo-liberal methods and is now experiencing a fall in its educational standards.

Politicians take note

The Finns have succeeded using means that we are constantly told cannot produce success. One would not be able to tell from listening to our leading politicians that Finnish school education:

- is fully comprehensive;
- is based on local authorities;
- deals with low social inequality;

Continued on page 20

Two ways to make profits: run the schools, sell the teaching

Richard Hatcher

It is widely believed that if the Tories are re-elected in 2015 they will allow schools to be owned and run by private companies for profit. In May last year Michael Gove, giving evidence to the Leveson inquiry into phone hacking, was asked whether he hoped free schools would be able to make profits in a Tory second term. He replied: "It's my belief that we could move to that situation but at the moment it's important to recognise that the free schools movement is succeeding without that element and I think we should cross that bridge when we come to it... There are some of my colleagues in the coalition who are very sceptical of the benefits of profit. I have an open mind." (Guardian 29 May 2012).

Elizabeth Truss, the Minister for Education and Childcare, is the founder of the

Free Enterprise Group. It held a fringe meeting at the Conservative Party conference in September last year to discuss its report *A Manifesto Fit for 2015: 15 Ideas to Transform Britain*. Idea 9 was:

> ***Reward our educators**. We live in a country where we allow people to make very good money for running a chain of restaurants or hotels, but not for running a chain of schools. We need to stop undervaluing those who have the skills and expertise to ensure our children are numerate, literate and ready for adult life. The free schools programme is a welcome first step, but we need to allow the profit motive to ensure real lift off.*

On 10 February this year the Independent on Sunday published details of a secret memo showing that Gove is considering outright privatisation of academies and free schools. Leaked documents of the minutes of a meeting of top Department for Education officials in October 2012 on the future of funding the academies programme show that Mr Gove's officials are considering "reclassifying academies to the private sector" because massive expansion of academies and free schools is costing government too much money.

One convincing sign that running state schools for profit is on the agenda is the arrival in England of companies which run chains of for-profit state schools in the US and Sweden. In December 2011 IES, a company which runs a chain of for-profit state-funded free schools in Sweden, was

awarded a £21million ten year contract to run Breckland Free School in Suffolk. This move was welcomed by the Daily Telegraph, which praised Mr Gove for acting “unobtrusively” in paving the way for state schools to make a profit.

Now two of the leading US have been approved by the DfE as “lead sponsors” and are running academies. One is Mosaica Education Inc, which runs four primary schools in East Sussex under the brand name Aurora Academies. John Bolt has exposed Mosaica’s sorry record on the SEA’s Education for Everyone blog (www.educevery 21 May).

The other US company is K12 Inc. In March this year North Walsall primary school became an Academy, run by a new sponsor called the Erudition Schools Trust. The Erudition Trust is a company run by four people. One is James Leroy Konantz. He is an American, living in the US, who is senior vice-president for School Services at K12. A second is Guadalupe Vanderploeg. She is the Director of the Academic Services Group at K12. She is based in the Detroit area.

The third director of Erudition Trust is Colin Hopkins. He is Director of Education of the Lichfield Diocesan Board of Education. He is also a Trustee of the Woodard Trust, which runs a chain of four academies with a Christian ethos in the south of England. The fourth director is Karen Mackay, who previously ran her own management consultancy. She is described on the Erudition website, significantly, as Head of Government Relations.

K12 is the largest for-profit Education Management Organisation in the US in terms of enrolment. It runs 49 state-funded schools for profit. But the bulk of its profits come from selling online teaching. K12 is America’s largest provider of online learning, providing much or all of the curriculum not just in its own schools but in thousands of US schools and for the growing home learning market. K12’s product line covers a huge range of courses for elementary, middle, and high school grades, with online support from ‘learning coaches’. Like Mosaica, K12 has also attracted strong criticism for its education record and business practices. (See http://pulse.ncpolicywatch.org/2013/05/03/tough-times-for-k12-inc/, May 3, 2013.)

The question is, why has K12, a company with an income last year of over $500m, come to Walsall? (And a few months ago to Foundry primary in Birmingham, which it unsuccessfully bid to take over as a forced academy conversion.) The answer is on the new Walsall academy’s website.

> *…the Erudition Schools Trust brings many years' experience in innovative technology-based education and tailored one-to-one teaching*

The EST way allows a teacher to personalise each individual pupil's education as our revolutionary online learning, combined with a holistic approach to each individual, will give many more young people a greater chance to maximise their potential.

Virtual learning can be either in the classroom or at home, with a similar structure to a traditional lesson.

At the computer screen, objectives, key concepts and ideas are introduced and modelled, using animations and videos.

Students work through interactive learning activities and receive immediate feedback. At the end of the session, their progress is reviewed and evaluated.

An individual Learning Plan is designed to fit each child's needs, strengths and learning styles.

Running schools is not the only way to make profits out of schools. The other way is to turn teaching into an online commodity. Not just changing the structure and governance of the school system so that in future state-funded schools can be run for profit but changing its labour process. And of course online learning doesn't have to take place in schools, which is why, bizarrely, on the Walsall academy's website there is an advert for home schooling.

Home Schooling

If home or distance learning is your preferred method of schooling, the K¹² Home Schooling plan offers flexibility and choice to meet you and your children's individual needs.

Working with our partners K¹² , we provide stimulating ways to learn at home, be it one course or a complete integrated curriculum.

The next step by K12 - this time operating under its own name - is to have set up a partnership with the diocese of Lichfield to open a free school in Stoke-on-Trent, an Alternative Provision School serving children from 11 - 19 years, again with a big online-teaching element. It seems likely that K12 is using the diocese as a convenient stepping stone to get a foothold in the UK market. Its long-term aim is very ambitious - the transformation of schooling in England into a profitable market through online teaching and learning. This is also the ambition of other global players, including Pearson, the largest education company in the world, and Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation.

Murdoch has embarked on what he calls a "revolutionary and profitable" move by his media companies into online education. In 2010, News Corporation paid $360 million for a 90 percent stake in Wireless Generation, a company based in Brooklyn that specialises in education

software, data systems and assessment tools. Also in 2010 he hired Joel Klein, New York City schools chancellor, as an executive vice president at *News Corporation* (1) to oversee the company's new online educational ventures. Klein's policy for New York schools focused on academy-style charter schools and developing a uniform citywide curriculum, both ideal preparation for entry into Gove's school system.

Gove of course would be a key figure in any attempt to penetrate the British schools (2) market. (Which is presumably why the Erudition Schools Trust needs a Head of Government Relations.) The Leveson inquiry revealed that Gove met Murdoch before the phone hacking scandal broke. (Gove used to be a leader writer on the Times) and is an enthusiastic backer of the ideas of Joel Klein.

In January 2011 Joel Klein visited the UK as the guest of the DfE. In June 2011 Murdoch and Klein both spoke at 'The Times CEO summit'. Klein called for all pupils to be provided with tablet computers, adding that he would be "thrilled" if 10 per cent of News Corp's revenues came from education in the next five years. The Times (June 22 2011) reported the meeting under the headline 'Education must join the digital age, says Murdoch'. It reported that 'Rupert Murdoch signalled a digital revolution in education yesterday, saying that News Corporation would help to lead the change in how children are taught by becoming one of the world's largest providers of educational material in the next five years.' The Times is owned by Rupert Murdoch's company.

On 26 June 2011 Gove was at yet another dinner with Murdoch. Three days later he gave the most explicit endorsement to date of News Corp's education project in an address to the Royal Society entitled Technology in the Classroom. He said: "We need to change curricula, tests and teaching to keep up with technology … Whitehall must enable these innovations but not seek to micromanage them. The new environment of teaching schools will be a fertile ecosystem for experimenting and spreading successful ideas rapidly through the system." (29 June 2011)

At the beginning of 2013 Rachel Wolf took up a new job in New York with News Corp's newly launched education division Amplify, whose chief executive is Joel Klein. Wolf had been appointed by Gove as director of the New Schools Network, whose function was to help set up free schools.

The direction of travel is clear. But transforming the pedagogy of the English school system, its labour process, into - at least in part - online education that can make profits - and not just profits but a higher rate of profit than big international companies can make by investing elsewhere - is a massive and uncertain task. The foundations, the preconditions, have to be put into place.

The biggest cost is salaries of teachers. For schools to be able to afford to buy online teaching they would need to significantly reduce the number of qualified teachers. But online-based education doesn't need qualified teachers. Gove has opened the door by allowing free schools to employ unqualified staff. The Observer reported on 10 March 2013 that one in ten free school teachers are unqualified.

Secondly, online education is a transmission model of teaching with a standardised curriculum (even if progress through it is individualised). This is what US and Swedish for-profit chains do. Mosaica, for example, imposes its trademarked 'Paragon' curriculum. This model is well suited to the so-called knowledge-based curriculum favoured by the Tories and drawing on the model of US educationist E D Hirsch. Thirdly, the power of the teachers' unions to resist these changes has to be broken, so academies aren't bound by national pay and conditions, and government is in the process of scrapping these for all schools. And finally teacher training has to produce new teachers with the right culture, and the best place for that is schools already operating with that culture, into which trainee teachers can be assimilated, not university departments where dominant ideologies can be questioned.

Of course, transforming the labour process of teaching into an online commodity for profit is a massive challenge. There is a huge weight of inertia in the system, and there is the risk of both professional and public opposition and resistance. But it is also the case that online teaching can be a powerful resource for teachers and pupils, and it can be developed without the need for profit-hungry private companies.

There is a revolutionary opportunity here for a Labour government to seize, taking forward the model of the Schools Council of the 1960s into the 21st century. Labour should launch a free-to-use online bank of educational resources comprising a combination of material submitted by teachers and other educationists and specific curriculum projects funded by government and developed by teams of educationists and website experts. It would be a non-profit curriculum commonwealth created by teachers and educationists themselves, with technical support as appropriate, growing and developing to meet the needs of learners, and arising organically out of and complementing, not replacing, the work of teachers in classrooms. Is Labour up to the challenge?

References

1. http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/business/companies/news_corporation/index.html?8qa

2. http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/schools

Continued from page 2 (Editorial)

and Whitty spotlght how the tried and tested university based systems are being replaced by an anarchic school based model. At a time of growing pupil numbers, there is a real danger England will run out of teachers. More alarmingly, those that are employed may not be properly trained.

The root of the current dogmatic approach to English education is an almost anarcho-syndicalist belief in school autonomy. Whether this is a reality in a highly centralised system is open to doubt, but as Michael Bassey points out, autonomy is supposed to be a magic bullet for school improvement. The evidence is otherwise. Why do media ignore it?

Meanwhile, as David Pavett contends, the Finns are certainly admired by the Westminster consensus. However their actual practice is also ignored. It is so markedly different from the neo-liberal consensus as to pose a deeply disturbing challenge. It is time the lessons were learned.

Is the Consensus unaware of the consequences of current policies, or is Westminster politics set on a course that is unchallengeable? Whatever is is the case for the Conservatives, the Labour and Lib Dems certainly differ from them on running schools for profit. Michael Gove, always media savvy, has left the issue open. However his junior, Liz Truss, is openly campaigning for just such an outcome after the next election.

TWO YEARS TO GO

There are two years to go to an election whose outcome is unpredictable. The issues discussed here are urgent and demand focussed and engaged debate. SEA offers these essays as a stimulus to active and purposive thinking.

Trevor Fisher (Editor)

THE SEA : PROGRESSIVE EDUCATIONAL POLITICS FOR LABOUR AND BRITAIN

This discussion pamphlet is published by the **Socialist Educational Association** to promote debate within a democratic and progressive educational framework in line with comprehensive school principles. Join the SEA, which is affiliated to the Labour Party, for £20. Details from the General Secretary, Martin Dore - email m.dore27@ntlworld - and visit the website www.socialisteducation.org.uk

THE AUTHORS

Dr Greta Akpenye has been a London comprehensive school headteacher, an academic and teacher trainer. A passionate believer in equal rights, she has been a political activist in the education and equalities field for many years. She is presently an educational consultant and is a member of the executive committee of the SEA.

Professor Michael Bassey is an emeritus Professor of Education at Nottingham Trent University. He argues for a teacher led National Education Service as described on his web-site www.free-school-from-government control.com

Professor Sir Tim Brighouse has been a teacher and teacher trainer as well as Chief Education Officer of Oxfordshire and Birmingham as well as Commissioner for London Schools. He has written books and articles mainly about education policy and runs workshops on both. Most recently he has been visiting professor at the Institute for Education and Chairs the independent New Visions for Education Group.

Trevor Fisher taught for 37 years from 1970 to 2009 in colleges and comprehensive schools, has BA Hons, MA and M Ed, and is a published historian on nineteenth and twentieth history. Since retiring in 2009 he has edited Education Politics, the journal of the SEA.

Professor Richard Hatcher works at Birmingham City University. He has written widely on education policy with a particular reference to issues of democracy and social justice. He is also an active campaigner on academies and other educational issues.

Professor Geoff Whitty, former Director of the Institute of Education in London, is currently Professor of Public Sector Policy and Management at the University of Bath.

David Pavett qualified in Physics, Computing Science and Philosophy. He taught in Further Education for 30 years and then in secondary sixth forms for 10 more. In FE he was very active in the lecturers' union NATFHE. He is a member of the executive committee of the SEA

Published by the SEA to inform debate: contributions reflect the views of the authors not SEA policy unless stated