



Education Politics

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Too much?
Wrong kind?

Editorial

EP 125 warned that the Labour Party was entering a difficult and dangerous time. Now we begin to see how difficult. Let us settle on our agreement: that the present government is a deep threat to the security, prosperity and happiness of the British people, and that the first tasks of the Labour Party are to oppose government policy and to campaign to expose its attack, to coin a phrase, on fundamental British values – which are the attitudes of the many, not the few, the ordinary people of this country, not the nonsense dished out to our educators.

Osborne's deep and disgusting adherence to the small state, laid out in disguise in the Comprehensive Spending Review, gives new attendees at local Labour Party meetings more than enough to talk about. In the recent Caroline Benn Memorial Lecture, Professor Susan Robertson amply described the 'weak state' model we now suffer (see p14) and the need to rebuild a 'strong state' with adherence to collective rights and responsibilities. And the SEA exists to argue that inclusive comprehensive state supported education and training from cradle to grave is a vital component of a wealthy civilised society and must be given more priority in the big picture of Labour policy.

There is more than enough in the present education policy landscape for Labour to oppose. The supine yet inappropriately ambitious Secretary of State is throwing too many bones at dogs who may not come back to bite her, but who certainly intend to bite the disadvantaged in this divided society. First, the elitists who don't believe that sorting youngsters into sheep and goats will make a pig's ear of schooling for all. Then, the Tories in the shires who don't believe that the oiks should have more funding allocated to them than their own offspring. What grates the most is the outrage of these people if they are quite rightly charged with waging class war. The Secretary of State did try a rethink on testing, but was immediately put back in her box by Downing Street at the suggestion of the Minister for Schools; the losers in this spat are England's children.

Over-testing is one of the features of our crazily unbalanced accountability system for schools and colleges. This edition looks at some of the varieties of thinking on this topic (p3). It is clear that the government is open to attack on this issue too, not least because it is becoming clear that the kinds and amounts of work being required of the workforce for accountability purposes are a factor in the declining attractiveness of the profession. A government which cannot provide as many teachers as we need, or as many school places as we need, is falling down on the basics – and that is exactly the charge being faced by the Secretary of State. We do not know who floated the recent stories like the possibility of a four day week for schools, or maybe double shifts in school buildings, but we do know that this government is in a hole.

Recently we have been spun again, with the story that a Green Paper next year will propose the conversion of all schools to academy status. Although the first reaction on the left is bound to be to oppose, it might be worth thinking through the ramifications. No more stupid academy versus local authority school comparisons; no national curriculum; no support for 15,000 primary schools; only three effective academy trusts and few sponsors keen to set up more. By 2020 we would have all schools on a level playing field – but a muddy and unplayable field. Perfect opportunity for system reform.

And from the middle of all this, a possible gem appears. The House of Commons Education Select Committee is to investigate the purpose of education. As Professor Robertson pointed out, the neo-liberal answer, to serve the labour market, is impoverished, but how often do we have the opportunity to challenge it? The left now has its moment: its task is to lift the hearts and clear the minds of the Select Committee by explaining the higher aims of educators, and in so doing to strike at a narrow curriculum, over-testing, worn out exams, and the rest. SEA members can do this – so go to it! You have until 25th January to look up to the stars and tell the Select Committee what you see.

To contribute to the Select Committee, see: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/education-committee/purpose-quality-education-forum-15-16/>

Towards rational accountability

The following pages contain four contributions on school accountability. Make no mistake, reform of accountability could have a far greater impact on pupils' learning, achievement, and well-being than any structural change to school administration. Combined with comprehensive change to curriculum and assessment, a more rational accountability regime could transform schooling.

Too often, discussion about accountability is limited to the work of Ofsted. Sean Harford, its National Director for Education, makes the standard case for it (p7). Little is said about Estyn because in Wales inspection has been far less controversial. Most European and OECD nations have similar inspection agencies, although the tendency is for inspectors to be civil servants appointed by competitive processes, and many countries have requirements to match inspectors' experience and knowledge to what they are inspecting. Ofsted has finally moved to in-house inspectors, but has some way to go on the rest. Apparently ministers have now lost confidence in it.

The question is, what is inspection for? It is no accident that Ofsted was founded coincidentally with other mechanisms designed to create a market in schools: local management, national tests, and so on. Its purpose was to provide data on school quality for both parents and the state. This creates the problem that a complex series of judgements has to be reduced to a number to enable (over) simple comparisons. Few countries adopt this approach to reporting inspections and the economist Simon Burgess tells us (p4) that the market does not work well as an improvement mechanism – the whole rationale for school marketisation.

Inspection should change from offering spurious market data to an aspect of school improvement. Nansi Ellis (p11) proposes local teams who would rarely do full inspections but regularly check on areas of concern within schools, and advise on change. Their reports should be directed at local communities, to give assurance that issues within schools are being recognised.

Pupil tests have also been perverted to provide market data. There is no educational case for such frequent summative assessment, which has led to a reduction of real learning and contributes to the very

poor well-being of English young people. We need to detach individual pupil performance from school accountability.

It is impossible to think through the future of accountability without considering not only what it is for but also to whom schools should be accountable. As Colin Richards (p9) and others point out, schools should be accountable to the state and parents, but also to other stakeholders. It is patently ridiculous for a central government to think that it could oversee over 20,000 schools and no other government believes it. Our government should be responsible for the school *system*; the overall performance of the nation's pupils, the national allocation of funding and oversight of more local administration, and a national curriculum and assessment framework. The state is far too busy to concern itself with the performance of individual schools. It needs only sample data on pupil performance, and the forthcoming national reference test, although intended for another and ignoble purpose, paves the way.

At the other end of the spectrum, parents need only local information, mainly about their own schools, and indeed mostly about their own children. On the whole, schools can best be accountable for these things to parents through informal communication: the chat at the school gate, the phone call, and the various events laid on by all schools. This kind of accountability does not provide data, nor should it.

And there are other deserving stakeholders. Most important is the local community. A school should be seen as a community resource, because the community will outlast any cohort of parents. The long-term quality of the local schools is a matter for the community and its local administration. School inspection should be a matter for the community; it should be about whether each school is doing all it can to provide an appropriate foundation for local young people, including working together to provide a full range of opportunities.

It's not so long ago that Ofsted seemed to have the motto, 'Never apologise, never explain'. Those days are gone, but it would still take a brave government to put the beleaguered agency out of its misery and introduce rational accountability. We have four years to build for a brave Labour government.

The importance of public accountability

Simon Burgess

Schools are given two highly valuable resources: the potential of the nation’s children and a lot of public money. While £40bn sounds like a lot of money, it pales into insignificance compared to the value of improving skills and knowledge.

Schools should be accountable for how they deal with these: accountable to parents for their children’s progress and to the taxpayer via central government for their use of public money. In addition, there is a broader accountability to a school’s local area – to the future parents and to the community.

of raising class size from 30 to 38 pupils. Although our results are based on a study of the GCSE scores school-by-school, this figure gives a very stark impression of the overall effect. Students in England and Wales were performing very similarly up to 2001, but thereafter the fraction gaining five good passes strongly diverged.

We looked at each secondary school in Wales, and matched it up to a very similar school in England. This “matching” is based on pupils’ prior attainment, neighbourhood poverty and school funding among

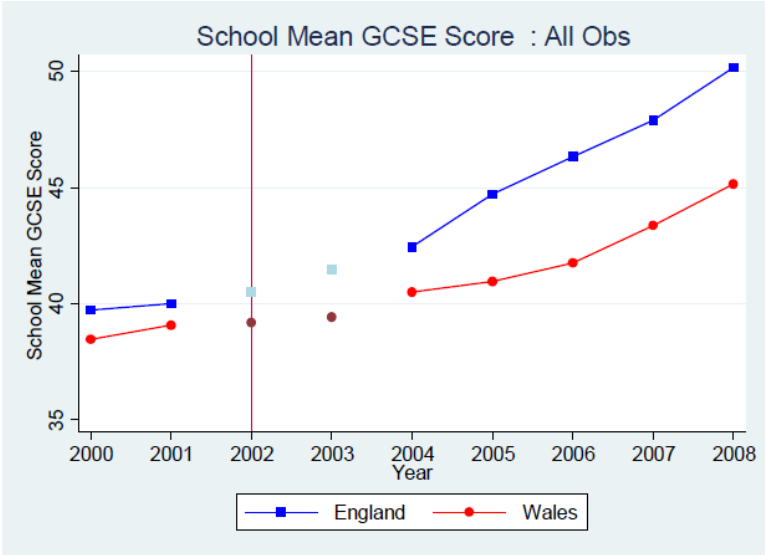


Table 1: School mean GCSE points score over time, England and Wales

Taken from ‘A natural experiment in school accountability: the impact of school performance information on pupil progress’ Burgess, S.M; Wilson, D.J; Worth, J: Journal of Public Economics, Vol. 106, 10.2013, p.57-67.

In England, the accountability system has two components: performance information in the league tables and Ofsted reports. This accountability matters. Research undertaken with CMPO colleagues showed that the decision in 2001 by the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) to stop the publication of school performance tables or ‘league tables’ resulted in a significant deterioration in GCSE performance in Wales. The effect is sizeable and statistically significant (see Table 1). It amounts to around two GCSE grades per pupil per year; that is, achieving a grade D rather than a B in one subject. This is a substantial effect, equivalent to the impact

of raising class size from 30 to 38 pupils. Although our results are based on a study of the GCSE scores school-by-school, this figure gives a very stark impression of the overall effect. Students in England and Wales were performing very similarly up to 2001, but thereafter the fraction gaining five good passes strongly diverged.

Why should the removal of school league tables lead to a fall in school performance? Part of the effect is though the removal of information to support parental choice of school. The performance tables allow parents to identify and then apply to the

Simon Burgess (cont)

higher scoring schools, and to identify and perhaps avoid the low scoring schools. This lack of applications puts pressure on the latter schools to improve. But this is not all of the story. Perhaps as important is the simple public scrutiny of performance, and in particular the public identification of the low scoring schools. This means that low scoring schools in England are under great pressure to improve, whereas the same schools in Wales are more able to hide and to coast.



There is similar evidence from elsewhere on the importance of accountability. For example, recent studies have evaluated the introduction of school accountability in Portugal and the Netherlands. They show that the publication of school performance information affects parents' choice of schools, schools' enrolment, and school performance. More broadly, international comparative studies also suggest that enabling school accountability and autonomy is important for student performance.

The important policy issue now is about beefing up the link between the information provided by the accountability system and action to turn low-performing schools around. There are plenty of examples of individual schools experiencing a dramatic turnaround, but the policy goal is to make this systematic rather than serendipitous.

The current bottom-up system for school turnaround relies on pressure from parents choosing schools. Parents scrutinise the school league tables and decide which schools to apply to; low-performing schools get fewer applicants and so come under pressure to raise their game. It works to a degree, but is not very strong or very quick. The substantial attainment gap that opened up between England and Wales after the latter abolished school tables was due in part to that mechanism.

So a 'middle layer' is needed to make a stronger link from information to action. It is also proposed because of the craziness of having central government be directly responsible for over half the secondary schools in the country. What should this be like? One option is for it to be left to academy chains to fulfil this role. While these groups are growing significantly, they nevertheless account for around half of academies and obviously no non-academies. Their regulation is an important issue for the next parliament.

So a comprehensive statutory body is better. The Coalition set up Regional Schools Commissioners to fulfil this role for academies. Their role is precisely to intervene to deal with poor performance, but is limited to academies and free schools: "Regional schools commissioners are responsible for ... intervening in underperforming academies and free schools in their area." They are required to monitor academy performance and take action when required. The Commissioners are supported by a small number of experienced local academy headteachers.

An alternative is the proposal from Labour for Directors of School Standards (DSS). There are similarities but also a number of important differences. Similarities: the number one remit of a DSS is school turnaround: "facilitate intervention to drive up performance – including in coasting and 'fragile' schools". The mechanisms for turnaround are pretty similar, though emphases and language differs. The DSS document emphasises a

Simon Burgess (cont)

requirement to engage in 'collaboration'. It's possible that this may become something closer to academisation of a school including acquiring a sponsor in extreme circumstances.

The first and most important difference is that a DSS would cover all schools in her/his area. This will be achieved by essentially turning all schools into academies. It seems much more sensible, coherent and efficient to take all schools under a single umbrella. A second difference is that there will be many more DSSs than RSCs: there are eight RSCs and suggestions of perhaps ten times that many DSSs. This is also an improvement – if taken seriously, this is a big job.

I think that the DSS proposal was very positive. Two issues with it were about scale and scope. First, the DSSs are responsible for more or less everything to do with schools: attainment obviously; but also financial probity (very specialist skills needed), and then also "British values"; obesity; personal, social and health education; and so on. Arguably, they should be asked to focus solely on attainment and school turnaround. Second, they were to have little support, 'a small back-up secretariat providing only the most essential administrative support'.

Research shows that publicly provided, properly comparative, school performance information is very important in supporting school performance. While there is always scope to discuss the appropriate content of the performance tables, they seem to be a settled feature of schools' environment in England. The next step is to build a coherent and effective 'middle tier' of oversight to focus its effort specifically on working with struggling schools.

Simon Burgess is a Professor of Economics in the Department of Economics, University of Bristol. He was Director of the Centre for Market and Public Organisation (CMPO) 2004 - 2015

Robust accountability makes a difference

Sean Harford

We have seen tremendous improvement in the education system with the majority of schools and colleges now far better places than they were 20 years ago. Political focus and greater autonomy matched by robust accountability has made a difference across the country. There is much to celebrate. The progress we have seen over the past two decades is down to the fact that we have the best generation of committed leaders working in our schools and colleges, leading a cohort of teachers dedicated to improving outcomes for our children and young people.

Ofsted is working with the government and with the profession to do all we can to alleviate unnecessary burdens on school leaders and classroom teachers. However, we should not lose sight of the fact that Ofsted exists principally to champion the right of every child and every parent to a good standard of education. Tens of thousands of children across the country are getting a better deal.

As Ofsted's National Director for Education, I want to make sure we listen and take notice of what the profession is telling us. Following wide consultation last year, we began implementing a far-reaching set of reforms to our inspection of early years settings, schools and colleges this academic year to further improve the quality of inspection and, just as importantly, instil greater confidence and credibility in the process.

First, we introduced a new common inspection framework for these sectors with a single overarching set of judgements that apply to each remit. For example, school sixth form provision is now inspected under the same framework as general further education colleges, and independent learning providers. Similarly, registered early years settings are inspected under the same inspection framework as maintained schools and nurseries. This enables us to provide comparable and accurate reports that are meaningful for providers and clearer for parents, carers, learners and employers.

Sean Harford (cont)

Second, we have started short inspections for schools and further education and skills providers that were judged good at their previous inspection. These inspections are carried out for one day by one or two Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI). Conducted a bit more frequently, these inspections help us to identify decline early or give good schools and colleges the opportunity to demonstrate improvement sooner.



This, coupled with the fact that outstanding schools are exempt from routine inspection, means that over 80 per cent of all schools will no longer undergo a full section five inspection. The inspection methodology allows honest, professional dialogue to take place between inspectors and school leaders, allowing good leaders to demonstrate the degree to which they know their own schools. The principal task of Her Majesty's Inspectors who lead these inspections is to determine whether the leadership team, including governors, has the capacity not only to maintain existing standards but to improve them further. Inspectors also check whether leaders have in place a credible plan to address any areas of concern.

Third, we have ended Ofsted's outsourcing arrangements and the use of commercial third-party providers for inspection. Since September, we have

a new team of directly contracted and trained Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have passed our tightened selection criteria and stringent assessment process. We have also made every effort to ensure that an ever greater number of serving practitioners are involved in inspection; I am pleased that seven out of 10 of our OIs are from good and outstanding schools and colleges. Working closely with our directly employed Her Majesty's Inspectors, they'll be able to use their experiences and skills gained on inspection to improve their own, and in some cases, other institutions. In turn, the Ofsted Inspectors who are serving practitioners act as a direct link to the sectors and communities that we serve and will constantly refresh Ofsted's working knowledge of what it's like to lead improvement at the chalk face.

We are also – through our 'mythbusting' document and better clarification in our inspection handbooks – trying to curb unnecessary workload pressures on teachers by dispelling some of the common misconceptions about what Ofsted requires or expects to see when we inspect a school or college. Leadership teams need to justify, for example, their practices around marking, pupil feedback and lesson planning, observation and grading on their own merits rather than erroneously citing Ofsted as the reason for doing these things.

So Ofsted has reformed, is reforming and will continue to reform. We will always do our best to adapt to a changing educational landscape. What we haven't changed, however, is the rigour of our inspections and our determination to tackle underperformance and help ensure every child is given the very best start in life.

Sean Harford is National Director for Education, Ofsted

Towards new-style accountability

Colin Richards

Schools accept the necessity for accountability. The issue is what form that accountability should take and in particular the place (if any) of inspection. Teachers' professional associations have canvassed their ideas – the NUT with its *Stand Up for Education* campaign, the ATL with its proposal for its *New Vision of Inspection in Education* and ASCL with its *Leading the Way: blue-print for a self-improving system*. While commendable in many ways such proposals for accountability are running too far ahead of current political and educational reality. New-style, trusted accountability is required but needs to be developed incrementally and cautiously from where we are without alienating political and parental opinion. Nirvana-type accountability will have to wait – at least until after the next election!

I believe that this new-style, more trustful accountability needs to be rendered at three levels: national, school and individual levels.

In order to secure accountability **at national level** and to inform national policy related to raising standards the government needs to work with professional associations to devise a non-intrusive system for assessing pupils' performance over time. This would require the setting up of an independent national body to oversee annual or biannual national surveys of children's performance across *all* areas of the curriculum at age 11 and possibly 14 - based on sampling of assessment items and samples of pupils. With results published periodically this would answer the legitimate accountability question: 'Are national standards, rising or falling?'

At the individual level parents need to be assured that their children are making appropriate progress. To provide this information without excessive workload teachers need to engage in ongoing, level-less assessment against a *limited* number of assessment criteria per year and to report its results. This would require more valid and reliable forms of teacher assessment than in the past to judge and promote learning- some of these are being developed currently as a result of the 'beyond-levels'

initiative but would need some sort of external evaluation as to their reliability and reliability.

More controversially, while this work is being undertaken, there would be a political (though not necessarily educational) imperative to retain some *limited* form of national testing of primary pupils focussing on parents' main concern: their child's performance in reading, mathematics and basic writing skills. Such national tests might be administered twice in a child's primary career, certainly *not* on entry to school but once on a one-to-one basis at the end of year one and once collectively at the end of year five (followed where



necessary in both cases by more remedial or more challenging work within the same school). The assessments and test results would be reported to parents and to schools to which their children transfer but ideally (and this may well be a pipe-dream!) would not be collated as a 'measure' of school effectiveness nor issued in the form of performance tables – thereby hopefully doing much to eliminate 'teaching to the test' and a narrowing of the school curriculum. This system would, however, answer a parent's legitimate accountability question: 'How is my child progressing?'

Colin Richards (cont)

It is **at the school level** where controversy is most likely. In order to secure school accountability to parents the government needs a system which assures that individual schools are providing a suitable quality of education and which triggers action should that quality not be evident. The most obvious and longstanding way of judging school quality is inspection by suitably qualified and experienced inspectors – the Ofsted model currently under severe criticism from professional associations and questioned by a large number of other critics.

It is clear that Ofsted methodology, its multifarious impossible-to-implement inspection criteria, and its recruitment, training and monitoring of inspectors need to be kept under review, and not just by Ofsted itself, to make inspection 'fit for purpose' and therefore more valid and reliable as a medium for school accountability. There are encouraging signs that Ofsted senior managers recognise the need for reform but they are not moving far or fast enough. Whatever the strongly held views of professional associations, almost certainly it would not be politically realistic to press for Ofsted's abolition – certainly in the short- and medium-term. However, change is in the air and lighter-touch inspections of good schools have been introduced. Why not lighter-touch inspections of outstanding schools also?

Arguably teachers' professional associations should get behind, or at least not discourage, these recently introduced reforms and provide public feedback on their effectiveness. However, alternatives to Ofsted inspection need to be explored - albeit cautiously and without claiming too much initially for their effectiveness. For example, it would be important to complement the new lighter-touch inspection regime with piloted schemes of externally moderated school self-evaluation in the hope that in due course they might eventually be trusted to provide robust accountability of schools by schools without the need

for old-style formal inspections. But that prospect is a way off. In the meantime, parents will expect a reliable answer to their legitimate accountability question 'How good is my child's school?'

This proposed three-level system would provide government, schools and parents with appropriate but not overpowering information about progress and performance of the system as a whole, of individual schools and of individual pupils. It is offered as a possible way of reconciling teacher professionalism with reasonable accountability to parents, politicians and the wider public.

Colin Richards is a former HMI and a critic of Ofsted



RESEARCH AND INFORMATION ON STATE EDUCATION

The **Research and Information on State Education Trust** (known as RISE) was set up to assist public understanding of education issues by maintaining an educational information service and to promote and encourage research. It was set up in 1981.

RISE Trustees are looking for someone active in social media and with an interest in and experience of state education to help them publicise more widely the On-line Information Centre available on their website. If you would like to help, please email [Libby Goldby](mailto:LibbyGoldby@risetrust.org.uk) (libby.goldby@risetrust.org.uk) for further details.

Taming the accountability werewolf

Nansi Ellis

When I first started in teaching, we used to worry that the assessment tail was too often wagging the curriculum dog. Although that concern hasn't really gone away, it is now somewhat overshadowed by the accountability werewolf! This beast rules everything that schools do - teachers and leaders live or die by data. But it doesn't have to be this way.

Before we go any further let's clear up one important point - nobody is arguing against accountability. Teachers are fulfilling a vital role in and for society in educating children and young people, engaging their thinking and their creativity now and developing the citizens, the workforce, the parents and the inventors of tomorrow. Schools spend public money, they hold children's safety and welfare, and they occupy buildings, grounds and facilities in the public domain. Of course they should be accountable for those things. ATL argues that our current accountability system, based as it is on exam outcomes and inspection judgements, doesn't actually hold them to account for the things that matter.

ATL has a longstanding commitment to reforming the accountability system. To do this we need to ask those fundamental questions - not just what should schools, teachers and school leaders be accountable for, but also to whom?

Currently the werewolf is obsessed by accountability for pupil outcomes - mainly their exam and test scores but also, increasingly, the progress pupils make. Everything hangs on this - whether you meet floor targets and therefore can remain as you are, whether you climb the league tables and therefore become more attractive to parents (or at least not pilloried in the press), whether you can be judged good or outstanding or whether your data will let you down.

Why is this a problem? Because it leads to a number of unhelpful consequences: pupils are pushed to qualifications in order to boost the overall

scores of the school; teaching is focussed on tests rather than on broad and deep learning; pupils are taught to pass tests rather than a full range of learning skills; learning becomes instrumental rather than an intrinsic good. And teachers' skills suffer too. They become instruments of delivery, moving pupils rapidly to cover a syllabus; administering tests rather than developing skills of assessment and feedback; analysing gaps in pupils' knowledge rather than understanding their learning. For teachers who want to improve pupils' lives and share their passions for particular subjects, this is demoralising and deprofessionalising, leading quickly to crises in teacher retention.



And nowhere in this do we find the accountability to parents for their child's learning; to the community for improvements in learning across the board. Nor is there a place to hold governments to account for the impact of their own policies on children's education.

We argue that there are different levels of accountability - to parents and pupils, to fellow professionals, to governors and the community. Governors are also accountable for the success of schools, as are locally elected councillors and nationally elected MPs and ministers. When we talk about accountability we should be talking about all of these aspects as part of a multi-level system.

Nansi Ellis (cont)

We know a lot about what makes effective accountability. It should:

- ♦ Support and challenge teachers and leaders, assisting improvement.
- ♦ Encourage teacher creativity and agency, and local innovation.
- ♦ Be founded on a shared understanding of effective practices in teaching, recognising that evidence will continue to develop and be interpreted.
- ♦ Reflect the complexity of teachers' professional understanding and practice and not be driven by summative performance measures
- ♦ Support teaching quality not by increasing bureaucracy but by making best use of sustainably generated information – and avoiding duplication and conflict in accountability processes.
- ♦ Be conducted by well-trained, properly monitored evaluators who are accountable for their contribution to quality education.
- ♦ Support the development of schools as professional learning institutions with collegiate relations and professional dialogue between teachers and leaders.

Looking at this list, it's obvious to me that there is much that needs to change in order to tame the accountability werewolf. But in order to make the biggest impact on teachers' working lives and on the quality of learning that pupils undertake, we need to tackle the biggest driver in the system and that is Ofsted. As a model of inspection, Ofsted is broken. Inspection is not reliable nor is it consistent, Ofsted has never had a robust system of quality assurance, it places immense pressure on schools and leads to the implementation of fads like triple marking 'because that's what the inspectors told the school down the road'. But even more damaging, it doesn't improve the learning experience of pupils, nor support the professional development of teachers – it is a tick-box exercise that involves too many schools in reams of paperwork for no good reason.

That's why we've developed our vision for school inspection in England which puts the features of effective accountability into practice: a professional model with national quality assurance. Our vision for inspection is based on five key principles.

1. High quality education would be defined by what is right for pupils in a given school, not by centrally determined criteria chosen because they are easy to measure, nor by a focus on short term political or media appeasement.
2. Inspection would be supportive not adversarial; advisory not dictatorial; empowering not punitive.
3. Self-assessment and professional dialogue would be central. Data would be used to guide, not decide.
4. Inspection teams would have a continual relationship with schools, supporting improvement and constituting a type of formative assessment. It would not be necessary to look at all provision on each visit.
5. Full inspections, as a summative assessment, would take place only occasionally, triggered by particular circumstances.

What would this mean in practice?

The inspection and improvement process would prioritise professional dialogue between inspectors and the inspected; data would be used to ask questions and the identified priorities for evaluation would determine the make-up of the local inspection and improvement team.

That would ensure that inspectors had the expertise and recent experience to evaluate and develop plans for the areas identified, while every member would also have evidence-based training in effective evaluation and in equality and diversity for education. The whole team would have strong professional knowledge of the area and be able to call on experts across subjects, age-phases or particular needs.

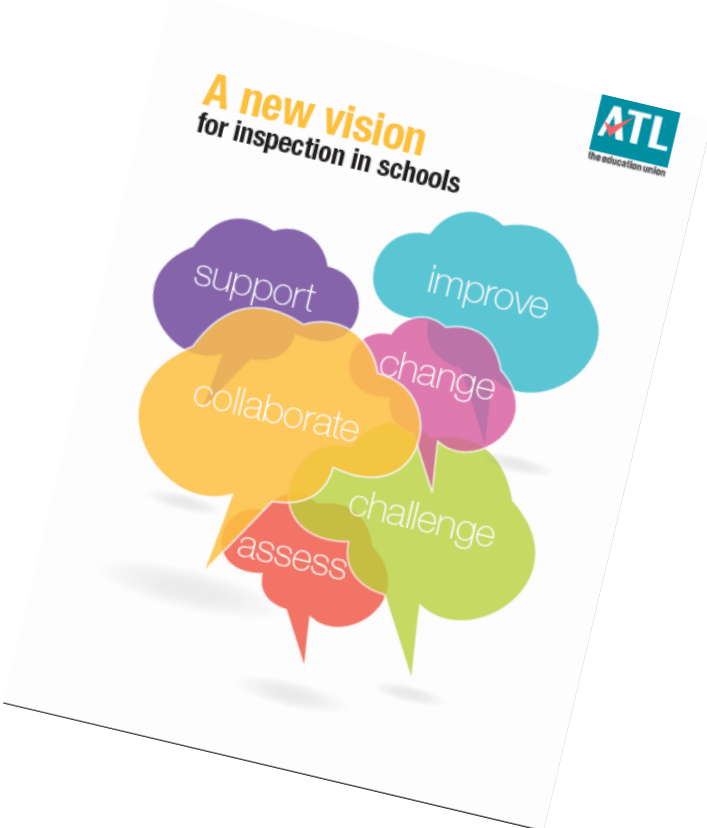
Nansi Ellis (cont)

'A new vision for inspection in schools' at

<https://www.atl.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/campaigns/a-vision-for-inspection.asp>

For teaching, learning and leadership, the inspection process would begin with professional discussions led by relevant school staff outlining strengths, weaknesses, and external contexts that impact on teaching and learning. Because this is no longer a punitive process, schools would be able to highlight areas where it would like specific help to evaluate and improve.

There would be no single inspection grade.



Evidence shows us that the variability within schools is far greater than that between schools. The maths department may have some weaknesses, while the history department has great strengths; teaching in the foundation stage may be addressing boys' learning in ways that key stage 2 teaching could share. Rather than being celebrated or shamed locally and nationally with a particular overall grade, schools can learn from their own good practice, developing an action plan which properly addresses in-school variation, and works collaboratively with

other schools both to address its own improvement needs and to share its successful practices.

Following the inspection, the school and the inspection team would develop a mutually agreed action plan, including identification of where collaboration and outside help could be sought. The inspection team would produce a report which would help to monitor progress against the agreed action plan, along with a short executive summary – both of which would be publically available.

It is also important to ensure that this kind of inspection doesn't become (or be perceived to be) a cosy cartel of local professionals inspecting their own. In order to guard against this, ATL argues for a national system of quality assurance. For example, a national body, led by HMI, independent of government but reporting to Parliament would have the role of evaluating local inspection arrangements, considering how well concerns are raised during inspection and the impact on raising quality. But that's not all. Parents and the community need to be able to request a review of inspection if they have concerns, with local authorities providing the contact point for those requests, and held democratically accountable for its decisions and its role in school improvement.

Many people have raised concerns about Ofsted over recent times. And the arguments are well-made and often rehearsed. Recent reports that parents would like schools to be inspected more frequently suggest that schools are still seen to be closed to scrutiny in some quarters. There is obviously still work to do be done in exploring how schools can be better accountable to parents in ways that are also, vitally, supportive of pupil learning. We're up for that challenge. After all, it's better than waiting in fear for the next full moon.

Nansi Ellis is Assistant General Secretary (Policy) at ATL, the Association of Teachers and Lecturers

Labour Party Conference 2015 report

Emma Hardy

Despite not winning the election, and having faced crushing defeats in various parts of the country, the vibe at conference was one of 'victory.' Perhaps this is because the composition of conference has always been more 'left' than the Labour leadership and therefore Corbyn's victory gave members optimism and hope. But lingering in the air following delegates' snatched conversations between fringe events was the echo of doubt. Was Corbyn's victory just a bubble? Could we really build our hopes for a clear educational alternative on him? In short, was he going to crash and burn during the leader's speech? (Strong message here.)

In terms of education, as I attended fringe after fringe the demoralising feeling of 'business as usual' sank in. Lucy Powell had held the brief for such a short time, so from the first time I heard her speak to the last she had little option but to be vague. She spoke about being a parent of three children all in different phases in the educational system and that her family were involved in education. Hopefully by now she has a clear understanding of the demands of the job and reforms needed.

Lucy was very good on the teacher recruitment and retention crisis – she acknowledged that government could no longer afford to treat teachers badly because 'they have other places to go'. She said that teacher retention and recruitment was going to be one of her main focuses. If we can link wider issues to this crisis we might see some positive movement in other educational policy areas. But she was at pains to distance herself from a news article which gave the impression that she said all schools would be returned to 'local authority control'. She refused to debate structures.

During the educational fringe events it was good to hear from Ian Mearns MP. He made the point about having high expectations for all children, saying that when he started as a councillor in Gateshead they told him not to expect anything from the children in their area. The fact that he commented on this made

me conscious of the need to avoid the 'poverty of low expectations' trap in educational debates.

Sharon Hodgson and Nic Dakin from the shadow education team also spoke at fringes. Sharon was generally supportive of our ideals and was passionate about children having a fully rounded educational experience. She valued the arts and at each event mentioned her enjoyment at being involved in a basketball team at school. Nic Dakin was at the NUT fringe event and clearly has a good relationship with the NUT. He was also interested in children having a rounded education and the importance of the arts. As I recollect it, no one really mentioned workload unless it was so briefly mentioned that I blinked and missed it. Clive Lewis was rousing and passionate during the Anti-Academies Alliance meeting, and interested in getting more involved in the SEA; just the message we needed.

The education debate was again pushed to the last section of the last day like an embarrassing relation at a family party, given some acknowledgement but only when most people have gone home. But educational structures were mentioned in Corbyn's speech and we know from our own publication that his opinions on education closely mirror many of ours. Is this going to be the time that we start wishing that the Labour leader was less democratic and more authoritarian?

Whilst there are positives to take away from this conference the Labour leadership is still very much in embryonic form and there are many waiting on the wings to see if the momentum can be sustained. Let us all hope that Lucy Powell continues to listen sympathetically and shows the vision, principles and passion needed to reform our educational system and repair some of damage done by Gove.

Emma Hardy was the SEA delegate to Labour Conference 2015

Caroline Benn Memorial lecture

Susan Robertson

Professor Susan Robertson gave the 2015 Caroline Benn Memorial Lecture, titled 'Long Division: when private interests into public education simply do not go!' in the House of Commons on 10th November. She recalled how when first in this country in 1999, she had been enthralled by hearing Caroline at a meeting, and how her lecture was a commentary on events since the publication of her book (with Clyde Chitty) 'Half our futures'. Prof Robertson charted the struggle between the conception of education as a public good, as championed by Caroline, and markets and private interests. The lecture focussed on three components of the global privatisation of education: the penetration of the market and the profit motive into education; the ways private interests put their stamp on policy, globally and domestically; and the enclosure by private interests of political space.

The OECD and the World Bank play leading roles in supporting the neo-liberal contention that the purpose of education is to support the economy through the appropriate preparation of labour. A good example is the OECD treatment of South Korea; Andreas Schleicher recently argued that it showed 'what is possible in education'; ...it is an amazing example of how education can leverage social progress and become the key agent of change.' Such agencies present education solely as an economic investment, but Prof Robertson pointed out that highly educated workforces are found in low growth economies.

Since the 1980s many governments have adopted weak state/market models for their social welfare sectors. The logic for this is that competition will improve performance, and that the private sector can deliver services more efficiently and deliver better outcomes. The World Bank is also committed to this model and promotes 'for profit' interests. The alternative is a strong state public investment model.

Weak states promote taxation models which favour the wealthy in the expectation of 'trickle-down'. Yet Joseph Stiglitz, former chief economist of the World

Bank, and economic advisor to the US's Clinton Administration in the 1990s recently observed:

We tried the experiment of trickle down. A third of a century later, we can fairly definitively say it was a failure.

Low tax results in a shift from a tax state to a debt state, and public services including education suffer pressure on funding. One 'solution', Public Private Partnerships, only leads to greater profit for the private sector and inferior outcomes. Public debt is coupled with rising private debt, leading to a political shift to the right with dependence on financial markets.

Prof Robertson pointed out that Caroline Benn always campaigned for a strong state model, where education is provided on the bases of public ownership and democratic accountability leading to improved outcomes, and funding is secure because of fairer taxation. Some countries hold on to this model.

But in weak states intensified competition, such as for jobs, leads to high value being placed on credentials, which are more than qualifications. They include the right school, and the upper and middle classes have supported differentiated markets in schools and the 'distinction' which goes with them. Prof Robertson observed that this leads to inequality and ultimately to lower performance overall and a poorer quality of life for all.

Finally, Prof Robertson turned to global edubusiness, now estimated to be worth \$4.3 trillion. The largest firm, Pearson Education, is experimenting in emerging markets with sales of tests and exams, text books, and a chain of schools in Ghana. Pearson works closely with the OECD. Private equity is also heavily involved, leaving schools vulnerable to the logic of profit.

One way private interests dominate global policymaking is through philanthropic foundations. They promote market forms of governance and work with international agencies to develop an exclusive

Susan Robertson (cont)

Full transcript of the lecture from

<http://socialisteducationalassociation.org/caroline-benn-memorial-lectures/>

policy debate. An example given was the \$300 million project by the Gates Foundation on the assessment of teacher quality which did not involve teachers.

Another contribution to the privacy of policymaking is the recourse to 'commercial sensitivity' as a justification for withholding information where private interests are involved. Prof Robertson gave two examples: the current TTIP trade negotiations between the US and the EU; she made a plea for transparency in these talks; and the proposal in the current higher education White Paper to disallow Freedom of Information requests in the sector, being 'unaffordable'.



Forthcoming research compares pupil outcomes in three weak states, Chile, Sweden, and the US with three strong state neighbours, Cuba, Finland and Ontario respectively. At the system level the weak states lost ground regarding equity and quality, while the strong states are amongst most highly ranked nations in mathematics, reading and science and have high quality curriculum. Their teachers are well paid with strong collective bargaining, strong preparation and licensing regulations. Another study suggests that much depends on whether the middle

class feels it benefits from state provision; if so, working class campaigns may succeed in building support for state investment models.

In conclusion, Prof Robertson described Caroline Benn as education's Mary Wollstonecraft, but regretted that we had made no progress since her death. The UN Rapporteur for Education, Kishore Singh, recently showed in his annual report that privatisation is adversely affecting the right to education as an entitlement and as empowerment. The economist Thomas Picketty has shown that, left to their own devices, markets work to concentrate wealth and increase inequality. In education, too, markets increase inequality of outcomes.

To take forward Benn's vision, we must campaign for a strong state based on redistributive taxation and public investment. We must use the evidence on the links between inequality and educational performance as well as economic growth to campaign for education as a human right and a social good. Finally, we must campaign for a reformed education system with a purpose to create social justice.

The lecture was well received by the large audience, which included three of Caroline Benn's offspring. A number of questions raised the small issue of how to build support for the restitution of a large state model in England.

Meanwhile, in the chamber of the House of Commons, the government was completing its latest attack on human rights in the Trades Union Bill, and the Conservatives moved on to a more weighty matter, hedgehog conservation.

Susan Robertson is Professor of the Sociology of Education, University of Bristol

Whose Education is it Anyway?

Reclaiming Education Conference, London, 14th November 2015

Wilkinson and Pickett's now well-known research showing that income inequality adversely affects every aspect of civil life, whether between countries or within countries, set the stage for a review of the state of education in England at the *Reclaiming Education Alliance* conference. Key-note speaker Richard Wilkinson demonstrated a wide range of correlations between high inequality and poor educational outcomes. This underlying theme gave a sharp context to the current crisis that has developed across the board in English education, every aspect of which can be laid at the door of government policy.

And in every case, though everybody suffers, it is the children of poorer families who suffer most. Poorer children on average do much less well out of the education system than their more affluent colleagues. Good early years' education (such as the Sure-Start Programme) can make a significant difference to the success of these children in 5 to 16 education. At the other end of the school age range 16-18 education can go a long way to helping those who didn't manage so well in their five to 16 education. Both areas have already been heavily cut and are not to be protected from substantial cuts in the Comprehensive Spending Review. In addition, inappropriate practice and curricula are being imposed in both areas.

For under-fives, personal, social and emotional development, communication and physical development are the most important aspects of learning. Instead the government is imposing monitoring of intellectual and cognitive development and "school readiness" for a baseline assessment. Children coming from disadvantaged backgrounds invariably do worse in tests at that age but will then carry the label for the rest of their schooling.

Compulsory schooling starts at age five so summer-born children get less time in school than their winter-born coevals. When they are tested, they perform less well on average and are often misdiagnosed as having special needs – a stigma and a handicap that often afflicts their later schooling.

The government's proposals to hold such children's secondary transfer back a year will only make a bad situation worse. The cuts to further education are so severe that many such institutions may not survive. Their curriculum is being reduced to A levels and apprenticeships so that people who have

not done very well in their previous schooling have very little choice if they want to improve themselves.

We are now going through the greatest increase in pupil numbers since the 1970s but the supply of teachers able to teach them is declining. The

Whose Education is it, anyway?

10:30am - 4:00pm, Saturday 14th November 2015

Mander Hall, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9BD

This conference will challenge the government's approach to education by revealing the impact of its policies.



Richard Wilkinson, joint author of the acclaimed book *"The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone"* will introduce the conference's key theme - how **inequality undermines education**. Richard will show how bigger income differences between rich and poor damage the wellbeing and school performance of children from both richer and poorer backgrounds.



- **Peter John** and **John Howson** will highlight the shortages of school places and teachers.
- **Wendy Scott** will illuminate Early Years issues.
- **Jonathan Simons** of *Policy Exchange* will supply a critical viewpoint.
- **Alasdair MacDonald**, former headteacher, will talk about the impact on schools and the curriculum.
- **Dan Jeffery** of Southampton City Council will explain the impact on Local Authorities.
- **Alison Garnham** of CPAG will examine the impact of child poverty.
- **Richard Rieser** from World of Inclusion will lead on SEN.
- **Marjorie Semple**, Principal of West Thames College, will speak on the crisis in post 16 and adult education and training.

The conference will end with a plenary discussion and **Richard Garner**, Education Editor of *The Independent* will provide a summing-up.

(A buffet lunch will be provided.)

Online booking is now available at
www.ticketsource.co.uk/date/181569
Tickets cost £27.50 (£30.00 on the door).



We are grateful to the National Union of Teachers for allowing us to use Mander Hall.
The NUT's Deputy General Secretary, Kevin Courtney will open the conference.

Whose Education is it Anyway? (cont)

Keith Lichman

government's policy of leaving it to the markets to sort out is a spectacular failure. Graduate starting salaries for teachers do not compare well with starting salaries in other professions so many good graduates choose not to teach. This market induced shortage is compounded by the unaffordable price of housing in many areas like the South East. The notion that every child must have an individualised learning programme which is then to be inspected by Ofsted has led to a teacher work-load crisis that deters many from beginning to teach and induces many who have started teaching to leave the profession early. There is no coherent long term planning of teacher supply and the decision to force all schools to teach the Ebacc subjects to all students means that teacher training in non-Ebacc subjects has been cut. Many valuable subjects will disappear from a narrow and, for many students, inappropriate curriculum.

The plight of children with special needs is worsened by the loss of local authority support as the academies and free school programmes drain their notional share of the budget from the centre to the point where the LA can no longer afford to run the support service. As one of the speakers, Richard Rieser, put it, this government sees the difficulties faced by SEN students as a problem in them rather than a problem with the system that is supposed to take care of them.

The idea of a National Curriculum – a curriculum to which every child should be entitled is not controversial but on the whims and prejudices of Secretaries of State, it has become narrow and unsuitable for many children. Everybody seems to have an opinion about the curriculum – but only the teaching profession and the academics who study education are excluded from meaningful input. Education ought to be a preparation for life but, especially for poorer children, it is simply seen as a preparation for work. And the ability of schools to try to get round the bombardment of government

strictures and experiment and innovate is severely hampered by Ofsted, fear of which seems to drive many schools to just teaching towards the test.

The combination of the forced academisation and swingeing cuts has left local authorities with many essential responsibilities but little capacity to carry them out. Even though a local authority will be aware of the need for more schools places in its area as its child population grows, it is not allowed to build schools to accommodate them. That is now left to the market – the academy chains and free schools. But these schools are allowed to select which children they are prepared to teach so that vulnerable children and children with special needs can be conveniently left out. Privatisation is the name of the game and since 2010, £15 billion of public assets have been privatised.

The *Whose Education is it Anyway* conference brought together expertise from across the whole range from early years to further education. Every sector is in crisis and government policy is set firm to make the situation worse. An insight into government double-think was given by Jonathan Simons of Policy Exchange. He asserted that the “right” cares just as much about education as the “left” but that while the government was prepared to listen to “evidence” from educational professionals, politics was about balancing conflicting interests and that was the government's job. To translate his words into something more tangible, the business lobby is more important than the education of this country's children.

For more on the Reclaiming Education Alliance see <http://www.reclaimingeducation.org.uk/>

Keith Lichman is Secretary of the Campaign for State Education

Inequality hits education more than poverty

A review of Pickett, K. and Vanderbloemen, L. (2015)

Mind the Gap: tackling social and educational inequality

Kate Pickett is best known for her collaboration with Richard Wilkinson on 'The Spirit Level'. Here she works with Laura Vanderbloemen, an epidemiologist at Imperial College on secondment to the Equality Trust. In essence, this paper starts from the evidence on education and equality presented in The Spirit Level and develops it by way of newer research.

Pickett and Vanderbloemen introduce their paper with the observation that across the political spectrum there is support for equality of opportunity in education and briefly point out that poverty has effects on educational outcomes, but devote the remainder to the evidence on the impact of social and economic inequality on both overall outcomes and inequalities of outcomes. And what evidence! Five pages of references from Britain and elsewhere. There is so much new material that this reviewer was left reeling.

inequality. But other research confirms that it is not only the disadvantaged who suffer, because even children of more affluent and educated parents perform better in less unequal societies. Further, the correlation between poor adult mental health and social and economic inequality, reflects onto childrearing. This may explain the higher rates of child maltreatment in such societies. A 2011 study of Sweden, Spain and the UK commissioned by UNICEF UK found that 'British families [were] struggling, pushed to find the time their children want, something exacerbated by the uncertainty about the rules and roles operating within the family household...many UK parents are complicit in purchasing status goods to hide social insecurities, this behaviour is almost totally absent in Spain and Sweden.' Other reports by UNICEF in 2007 and 2013 showed that child well-being suffered greater deterioration in that period in countries with greater inequality.

Educationally focused policies and interventions cannot deal with the structural issues of poverty and inequality which are the root causes of educational inequality.

The story so far, the Spirit Level findings, told us that the most important determinant of outcomes in education is not poverty or deprivation themselves, but the differences in wealth and income within a society – the level of income inequality. Wilkinson and Pickett showed that the level of income inequality is significantly related to the level of pupil performance in PISA and the performance and drop-out of US children.

The authors repeat that children in the UK are growing up in one of the most unequal of the world's rich and developed countries, and it is not only school achievement which suffers. Both the level of adult numeracy skills and the social class gap in skills generally are shown to be related to income

People from all status levels are more anxious about status in more unequal societies, and these anxieties are picked up by children. For example, children who are aware of their low status do less well in tests than if they are unaware; this finding has been replicated for Indian castes and US racial groups, amongst others. In more unequal societies there are higher rates of bullying and homicide amongst children. The authors review the well-known Pygmalion effect, the unconscious stereotyping of pupils when teachers mark their work, as an example of the way inequalities are reflected in cultures.

Turning to closing the achievement gap between social classes, the authors point to the evidence

Mind the Gap: tackling social and educational inequality

See <http://cprtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Pickett-Vanderbloemen-report-ONLINE.pdf>

from PISA data that there is no correlation between literacy levels at age 15 and spend on education, and only a small correlation with national GDP, but a large correlation with income inequality. In England, there are 'stark' differences in the size of the achievement gap between different areas, and Ofsted suggests that in good and outstanding schools the pupil premium is being used to reduce the gap, while generally less effective schools do not manage this.

There is a brief discussion of system change in Sweden, Finland and England. Although the tone is negative about free schools and academies in Sweden and England, no evidence is presented regarding any effects on inequality of pupil outcomes – and in the case of England, there could not be since these policies are too new to allow any sensible judgements. In its recent country report OECD recommended that Sweden restrict parent choice, but there are no clear results from the random allocation policy of Brighton and Hove. On the other hand, according to the OECD there are clear results about the effects of comprehensive systems, which both boost overall performance and reduce inequality.

After describing the range of organisations working in England on tackling inequality, the authors draw their main conclusion. They write:

'educationally focused policies and interventions cannot deal with the structural issues of poverty and inequality which are the root causes of educational inequality. Primary prevention consists of early childhood interventions, such as Sure Start. Secondary prevention consists of policies like the pupil premium, and intensive remedial education interventions might be used to treat pupils who are failing in the system. But these strategies and programmes will be needed ad infinitum unless the root causes of educational inequality are addressed, and they will always be expensive and never be more than partially effective.'

The Scientific Board of Progressive Economy, a European based social democratic think-tank of which the authors and Joseph Stiglitz are members, published proposals in 2014 to reduce economic inequality. They include more progressive income tax, higher inheritance and property tax, reductions in VAT, both tax and regulations to curb financial speculation, and higher minimum wage standards. It also proposed a European Child Equal Opportunity Programme which would include high quality early years care and support for womens' pay and employment prospects.

There is little policy discussion, nor recommendations for changes to education systems, in 'Mind the Gap'. No, its value is in its evidence. But the evidence is so voluminous and compelling that it deserves the widest circulation. The young scribes now resident advisers to Labour in Parliament should study it and take up at least a selection of its references. Let's be honest, its conclusion was well understood within the Party decades ago, but it is highly uncertain whether the new leadership can restore the collective memory and move towards the economic and social policies which it indicates.

I never tire of repeating the words of the sociologist Basil Bernstein, almost half a century ago: education cannot compensate for society. Of course teachers can make a difference, a huge difference for some individuals and a small difference for many. But the amount of evidence compiled by Richard Wilkinson and his collaborators about the global characteristics of economic inequality should leave no-one in any doubt that only more humane and inclusive forms of capitalism can produce more just societies.

MJ



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Forthcoming events

9th January, Birmingham: SEA NEC and all-member meeting:
speaker, Ian Austin MP, Education Select Committee
5th March, Manchester: SEA NEC and all-member meeting

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