



# Education Politics

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**pupil  
assessment:  
does anyone  
benefit?**

*also:*

Mike Kane

school funding

Labour's education  
policy commission

# Editorial

Education Politics has been a critic of a recent vacuum in education policy in the Labour Party. But on 17th March Labour launched the National Policy Forum consultation 2017 with the personal endorsement of Jeremy Corbyn. The early years, education and skills policy commission has produced a very open document which conveys a sense of priorities and general direction but no draft policy. Instead, it asks members for views on 18 questions. The SEA continues to lobby for a place on this commission, with the support of the Socialist Societies umbrella group, but its Deputy General Secretary, Emma Hardy, is an elected delegate from her region's CLPs, and she describes recent events in this edition (p12).

The underlying aim of party members in this policy process must be to support the front bench to move away from compliance with the right-wing hegemony on education which is a hangover from the Blair years. Hardy points out that the consultation document broadens the thinking on the purposes of education, but Labour must reject Tory definitions of priority policy issues.

One example in the consultation is the statement on regional differences in pupil achievement, with the now obligatory mention of coastal towns. The truth is, no-one has succeeded in explaining how a stretch of sand is a likely cause of low achievement in school. It's the wrong descriptor. We need to talk about de-industrialisation and migration from wastelands to the coast. Most of all we need to talk about social class and inequality. The truth is, differences in achievement were, are and will be overwhelmingly connected to class differences, and the 'underachievement' in some coastal towns is due to the class composition of their populations and the lack of employment opportunities.

The consultation also contrasts the coastal towns with London. Academics are still engaged in a debate about the factors behind London's extraordinary educational performance, with the London Challenge and the proportion of high performing ethnic minorities being prominent. But could it have anything to do with London's booming economy, in contrast to the bust in other places, the ready availability of jobs for the qualified, and the belief amongst migrants that they can succeed in such an economy? It is no surprise that in jobless areas, primary schools generally perform relatively better than secondary schools. Only as they grow up do pupils take on the depression and lack of motivation of their parents and communities.

Social class is a concept which is still understood and used by British people. Class and class differences must be at the centre of all Labour's domestic policy. Labour

must always label the Tories as the party of the privileged and has mountains of evidence to substantiate the claim. It is privilege and its unjust distribution which is the underlying cause of differential educational achievement, so it is economic and social policy which must be the major tool for reducing the differences.

It is good to see the prominence given in the consultation paper to FE and apprenticeship. But again, Labour must escape from right-wing thinking which posits two kinds of people with two kinds of educational need, the academic and the vocational. As argued in this edition, schools must offer a comprehensive curriculum and assessment system for all pupils. Schools need to be freed from the tyranny of league table points and encouraged to stimulate each pupil to achieve in their own way. The idea that some young people do not need to learn about the world of work is suitable only for the leisured classes, a relatively small group, and the idea that others need to learn only about the world of work is even more limiting. In other European countries a 'vocational route' includes a broader curriculum than currently on offer in most of our secondary schools.

Angela Rayner described the budget announcement of an extra half a billion pounds for technical education as laughable. Indeed. If you didn't laugh, you cried. T levels are to have parity of esteem because they sound something like A levels. There is no curriculum, no assessment model, no known integration into the qualifications framework, and crucially no buy-in from employers. Vocational education cannot be successful without national and local organisations of employers with clout committed to supporting it in a variety of ways. There is absolutely no possibility that Sainsbury will succeed – but of course FE will be compelled to bust a gut trying to achieve the impossible.

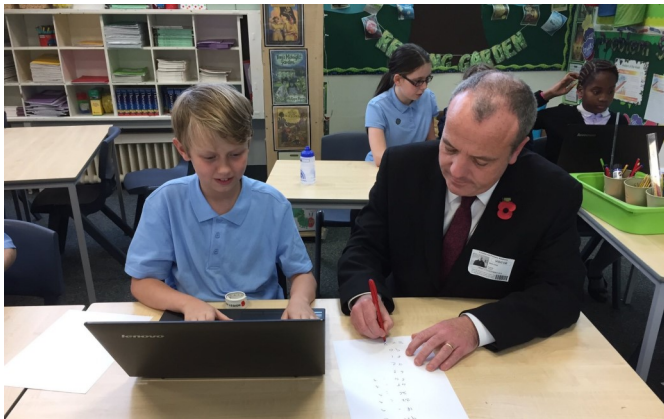
We need submissions to the policy commission which spell this out and outline ways of encouraging or forcing employers to take a greater interest in vocational education. Indeed, we need submissions from across the party on all 18 policy questions to force a break with the recent past and a return to progressive ways of thinking about the kinds of young people needed by our society – and yes, our economy.

And finally, a point of light in the gloom? In September there will be one dominant teachers' union in England and Wales. The National Education Union, largest education union in Europe, fourth largest union in the TUC, will have the resources to campaign more effectively for a better deal for children, parents, and the country, as well as for staff. We wish it well.

# Good schools, good teachers

Mike Kane

Parents have faced an anxious wait to find out whether their children have a place in their school of choice - or, in some areas, whether they have got a place at all. For months, worries and concerns about school applications have been picked over in the playgrounds of every school across the country. And with an ever-more complicated admissions and appeals system, I understand their concern.



Mike Kane at Crossacres Primary School, Wythenshawe by permission

The government's anarchic mix of different school models - free schools, academies, faith schools and local authority schools - has made the process increasingly difficult to navigate. And as parents now start to work their way through the appeals system - as tens of thousands inevitably will - its complexity will become increasingly evident.

But my concerns about admissions to our schools are not just a matter of process, but of fundamental difference between 'allocation' of places and 'selection' by the back door. Maintained schools continue to allocate places according to traditional criteria that include proximity to home, feeder schools or siblings. But other schools - academies or free schools - can set their own admissions criteria, enabling them to

engineer an intake, socially or academically. We cannot kid ourselves that we have a functioning comprehensive system if we routinely allow some schools to operate an admissions system that creams off a superior intake. This move from 'allocation' to 'selection' cannot be good for the student body as a whole, neighbouring schools or the communities they are part of. And I now firmly believe we need an urgent and full review of school admissions, to ensure there is a process that is both transparent and fair, to address this growing trend towards selection by the back door and to ensure there are sufficient places in areas where they are needed.

Parents who go through the often tortuous process of an admissions appeal do so because they perceive the allocated school - rightly or wrongly - to be lacking in some way. While some schools are allowed to select and others aren't, the perceived - and real - differences between schools will only become greater. And it is likely that an increasing number of parents will be dissatisfied.

Of course, the only way to really deal with the admission system is to make sure that EVERY school is a good school, valued by its community - and that should always be our focus. Schools should be the powerhouses of our communities - the engines of social change that enable our children to fulfil their potential and develop the knowledge and skills they need for success in the outside world. They should be safe and well maintained places, where children have access to wide ranging opportunities and are taught by respected teachers, who are as caring as they are rigorous.

And where they are not, we should ask why not. Accountability should be rigorous without being punitive, it should be routine without being intrusive and - most importantly - it should always lead to improvement. But we should never confuse this need for accountability with a belief that schools should bear all

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## Mike Kane (cont)

the responsibility for the education of our children. I believe success is more likely when a sense of ambition and optimism is reflected from a surrounding community, where there are opportunities and resources. I believe schools are strongest and most successful when local people have the power to influence and the opportunity to offer support. That's why I am saddened by the growing trend of academies and free schools operating behind closed doors, often with directors or trustees who are based remotely. And I would like to see this reversed.

We know that last year 10% of teachers in England left the profession, with one in four new teachers leaving the profession within three years. And headteachers now point to teacher supply as one of the biggest barriers to success. If we are to stem the tide we need to return teaching to a high status profession. We need to invest in good teachers, we need to select from the highest achieving students and we need to ensure training salaries make the profession an appealing choice. We need to establish an increased entitlement to professional development and we need to introduce

I believe schools are strongest and most successful when local people have the power to influence and the opportunity to offer support.

If we are to achieve a universal high quality school system, we need to focus on our most important resource - our teachers. International OECD data shows teachers in the UK work longer hours, have lower salaries and have fewer opportunities for professional development than their counterparts around the world. This research shows our teachers are now working more than 48 hours a week - which is significantly more (19% longer) than the average elsewhere. And, it suggests, one in five teachers are working in excess of 60 hours in a typical week. The data also shows new teachers in the UK are paid less than their OECD counterparts, with starting salaries 16 per cent lower than the average reported in the survey. And the findings support evidence that too many are leaving the profession - with only 48% of UK teachers in the survey reporting more than 10 years experience. I believe that the most effective way to improve our schools is to focus on the teaching experience; valuing the staff we have and ensuring education is an appealing profession for our highest achievers.

an appraisal system that rewards teacher contributions, in and out of the classroom.

But if we are to really raise the status of the profession we also need to review the training pathways into the classroom. There are currently too many routes into teaching and I would like to see a return to a single university training route, befitting teaching as the profession that it is. It is by taking steps to recruit the brightest and best, give them an academically rigorous training and then give them the respect and autonomy that professionals command so they can really make a difference in our classrooms that we can ensure our education system is world class.

**Mike Kane is the Shadow Schools Minister and MP for Wythenshawe & Sale East**

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# Assessing pupil assessment

Across Britain, teachers are unhappy about many things, but they are used to putting up with things they are unhappy about. Yet one thing above all makes them consider rebellion, especially in primary schools in England and secondary schools in Scotland. It is the requirements for assessing their pupils. This edition has a focus on formal pupil assessment in England, the external tests which sum up pupils' attainment.

External tests might have many uses; one expert identified 18 and said there were more, while others point out that a test should be designed according to its purpose. The obvious purpose is to assess the attainment of a student, normally at the end of a stage of education, in order to select them for the next stage or the labour market. Test design and administration is a highly technical task, beset with difficulties that have never been overcome, such as bias against particular groups such as gender and class, and the inconsistency of results from slightly different tests or the same test taken on different occasions. The proportion of students receiving an inaccurate grade at key stage 2 due to test unreliability was calculated to be at least 30%, and see EP130, Dec 2016, for an analysis by Rebecca Hickman of the unfairness of the 11+.

The over-use of tests is due to their misuse as a school accountability measure. Apart from the 11+, none of the tests taken by a pupil before the age of 16 has any impact on their future, nor do they inform future teaching, parents, or anyone else concerned with the pupil's progress. Their use is to create league tables of school performance. Spurious tables, because apart from the reliability problems of all tests, according to the OECD *...there is wide consensus in the literature that reporting student test results in performance tables is coupled with several methodological problems and challenges*. One age cohort in one school is small enough to introduce sample variance which makes statistical confidence very low. Differences between schools are generally not statistically significant, and schools' future performances cannot be predicted. Of course, raw test scores tell us nothing about a school's effectiveness, and despite huge and continuing efforts no convincing method of controlling for pupils' backgrounds has ever been devised – including the latest, Progress 8 for secondary schools. Thus league tables are misleading, but the state devises them to try to foster the myth, now widely believed across the political spectrum, that there are 'good schools' and 'bad schools' – a far too simplistic dichotomy. All part of creating a market for schools.

The following pages have examples of the way pupils are damaged and learning is obstructed by this testing regime. Two contributors refer to the child psychologists Piaget and Vygotsky, and the educationist Bloom, names which may be foreign to today's 'stand by Nellie' trained young teachers. Pam Jarvis (p6) condemns baseline assessment as an affront to what we know about brain development in young children. Anne Heavey (p8) tells a sorry story of the damage being done to children and schools by SATs. Roger Titcombe (p10) has many targets in his sights, but again situates an argument about what should be taught and assessed in secondary schools within learning theories. The marxist blob again? Or just a demand for a return to scholarship?

All the contributors make the link between assessment and accountability. As argued in EP126, Dec 2015, schools must be accountable, but assessing a school cannot be reduced to ultimately flawed numbers, and the duty of the government is to mind the system, not individual schools. The only tests in schools should be administered by teachers for the purpose of checking a class's learning and planning the next stage as a part of their continuous assessment of their pupils.

The usual objection to using teacher assessment is that teachers unconsciously exercise bias in their judgements, for example in respect of social categories like gender, class and race, but research has shown that when properly trained and supported, and when the levels of performance of the observed activity are rigorously differentiated, teachers can be at least as reliable as tests.

Since 16+ is hardly an education leaving age now, it really is time to think again about GCSE. England is test-mad, but in many countries in Europe a certificate awarded by teachers is the only qualification gained by school leavers at primary and lower secondary levels. There are no reports of subsequent damage to achievement arising from such practices. Could the hundreds of millions spent on GCSE come under scrutiny under the ongoing school cuts hammer?

And then all we would need is a new 14-19 comprehensive curriculum with an overarching qualifications framework for all students at 18+. That should be easy enough...



# Too Young to Test

Pam Jarvis

While national news headlines have been inevitably grabbed by the unfolding Brexit situation, another debate, just as important for the future of our nation has been quietly building; that of 'baselining' children at the age of four-and-a-half. The concept of baseline is commonly known in the world of commerce and of the physical sciences; that of measuring an experimental subject or situation at the start of a project in order to judge progress as an experiment unfolds. But the problem is that children are not stocks and shares, or rocks or chemicals, and their education is not a scientific or commercial experiment.

The key drivers behind this quest for statistical certainty emerge from the neo-liberal philosophy that currently sits at the heart of Anglo-American culture. All elements of society, from education to health to criminal justice are constructed as a set of economic relationships, where the core concern is value for money, which is assessed through quantitative measures of success. The difficulty is, where this type of assessment is applied to human situations, problems arise. For example: did we process all those patients coming into hospital quickly enough? Well yes, but one died because we had targets to meet and couldn't spend enough time to properly diagnose what was wrong with him. Did we process all those criminals into court quickly enough? Well yes, but several weren't actually criminals but we didn't have time to do a full investigation of the allegations.

The arena where additional, more complex issues arise is in the attempt to summatively assess children under seven. At this stage in life, neuronal architecture is being rapidly built, and it is incredibly plastic. This is particularly so for the under fives, whose speed of learning in some areas can be remarkable. For example, if we spoke three different languages to my six month old grandson, Ed on an everyday basis, he would learn them effortlessly, and eventually speak all three with no traces of a foreign accent. By contrast, if I tried to learn two more languages now, this would take a lot of time and effort, and I would never be able to speak them perfectly; my neuronal architecture is just not that flexible anymore.

On the other hand, what older children and adults can do much better than infants is to organise their thoughts into categories, because when a new idea is presented to them, there are similar concepts in their more mature cognitive architecture for it to stick to. For example, if you presented me with a four legged, furry animal that I had never seen before, even if I didn't yet

have a name for it, it would immediately go into the neuronal network designated 'mammals'. However Ed's brain is not yet organised in this way; he has not yet had enough experience of the world. But because he is a human being, his neurons have already made a start on connecting up in this fashion, and this process is at the heart of the infant cognition-building process.



This human thought-building apprenticeship unfolds between birth and approximately seven years, during which there is an exponential development in the ability to organise and categorise thought. In particular, conceptual neuronal networks help people to focus attention without becoming distracted by the intrusion of non-relevant thoughts. The younger children are, the more difficult they find this; their thoughts are far more susceptible to interference than those of adults, due to the incomplete, immature networks across which they travel; some ideas are not retained because there is nothing yet there for them to stick to. An analogy I use with my students is that an organised cluster of existing ideas acts like a hanger for incoming information, and that it is far easier to find something in a tidy wardrobe with all the clothes hanging neatly on hangers than jumbled in a muddle at the bottom.

What we know about the human brain indicates that, at the early stages of learning, rather than relentlessly inputting 'stuff', which has the tendency to become jumbled without the relevant hangers to hang it upon, the focus should be upon supporting children, through practical experience, to organise their understanding of the world around them and their place within it. What this stage of learning most crucially creates is not only

## Pam Jarvis (cont)

the ability to acquire information, but also to use it conceptually and flexibly - which lies at the basis of independent and innovative cognition. In order to reach this cognitive state, however, human beings need time to absorb ideas, and to apply them in many different ways, most crucially being given the latitude to do this in some ways that succeed and in some ways that don't. The younger the child, the more crucial this process becomes, due to the immaturity of the underpinning knowledge base.

At the three to five year old stage, children may seem quite knowledgeable in situations with which they are familiar, but nevertheless find it difficult to disembed knowledge and transfer it to different situations and applications. This is because they are still building those basic hangers or networks of ideas - which child psychology expert Jean Piaget called 'schemas' - and consequently, need time to engage in practical trial and error. This is most effectively provided in play-based and discovery learning, which allows young children the freedom to safely experiment in real world situations. Most importantly, during this stage, getting things wrong should be an everyday occurrence, triggering the very human urge to try again in a different way; there should be no concept of failure. Such an urge lies at the base of all human investigative activity; therefore it is crucial that children become able to harness it at this stage of development if they are going to become confident, innovative and tenacious adults. Formative assessment is highly effective at this stage, tracking children's explorations and successes, and this can be achieved through regular observations undertaken by practitioners who have sound knowledge of child development, with a view to facilitating future opportunities for discovery or next steps.

The Department for Education, however, currently has other plans. It is developing a high stakes summative assessment that will be presented on school entry. This is likely to be a set of questions on an iPad, administered by an adult, recording how many are 'correctly' and 'incorrectly' answered. The score will be used to peg the individual child into a percentile, and as a baseline against which to measure future progress, and hence, the accountability of future teachers for the child's progress.

However, the testing instrument is so artificial and disembedded that it is entirely unsuitable for children at this stage of development, and will therefore have no possibility of generating accurate results. What a child

knows and can do in real world situations cannot be accurately measured by an assessment of this nature. As an attempt at measurement, it is the equivalent of Mary Berry passing summative judgement upon a contestant's cake when the first few ingredients are just being mixed in the bowl. In this sense, then, baseline in the reception year will become the most heinous offence ever unleashed on the British public in the neo-liberal pursuit of accountability.

What schools should do is to simply refuse to instigate such an assessment on the basis that it is developmentally inappropriate. On the basis of previous experience, however, what they are most likely to do is to truncate the play-based and discovery learning that is such a crucial stage in the production of self-motivated, critical and analytical adults, and instead, train toddlers towards the inevitable test. Not only would this be perilous for the later lives of the children themselves; it is an assault upon future democracy, risking the production of what George Monbiot calls a zombie population, lacking a full capacity for independently motivated discovery and learning.

The DfE must therefore now jettison the arrogant 'had enough of experts' attitude that Michael Gove brought to the Ministry and begin to work collegiately with academics and senior practitioners in the field of child development. My grandson Ed will only be 84 when the twenty first century becomes the twenty second, which will maybe not be a very great age by that time; in this sense the twenty first century belongs to his generation. However, it is the responsibility of the current adult generation to properly equip him and his peers throughout their journey into the future; in the first instance, by facilitating the development of their capacity for independent learning by ensuring that their first seven years are spent in unpressurised discovery and innovation. The whole concept of baselining human beings is problematic, but attempts to baseline them at the age of four-and-a-half is shockingly ill-informed, undemocratic and potentially abusive.

**Dr Pam Jarvis is the Reader in Childhood, Youth and Education at Leeds Trinity University**

# Scrap the SATs? Yes, scrap the SATs

Anne Heavey

Speaking in the Commons in July last year Angela Rayner said:

*These SATs undermine the morale of our dedicated primary teachers, who have battled against the odds to prepare children for tests they knew were inappropriate while trying to protect them from their worst consequences.*

It is unusual, and refreshing, to hear such critical words from an education spokesperson about these tests and assessment. Perhaps it is time for Labour to go further, and call for the abolition of the SATs?

Whilst it is very difficult to claim that the SATs cause tangible harm to children, there are several factors which when combined could have a negative impact on children's perceptions of themselves and consequently their wellbeing. Statutory assessments in primary schools are restricted to a narrow range of subjects that are perceived to be "of value" by ministers. In primary schools this is limited to reading, writing and mathematics. Language used to assess children is also incredibly stark: either they reach the "expected standard" or they do not. In 2016, 47% of Year 6 children were told they had not reached the expected standard. This new assessment system focusses on what children cannot do, and fails to recognise what has been learnt across the full curriculum. Reay and William's research on assessment and identity highlights the negative impact that assessment can have on how children perceive themselves. In their study one pupil's comments are particularly revealing:

*Hannah: I'm really scared about the SATs (standard assessment tasks). Mrs O'Brien (a teacher at the school) came and talked to us about our spelling and I'm no good at spelling and David (the class teacher) is giving us time tables test so I'm frightened I'll do the SAT's and I'll be a nothing.*

*Diane: I don't understand Hannah. You can't be a nothing.*

*Hannah: Yes, you can 'cause you have to get a level like a level 4 or a level 5 and if you're no good at spellings and timetables you don't get those levels and so you're a nothing.*

A BBC/ComRes poll of Year 6 pupils in 2016 found that more than half (59%) said they felt some pressure to do well while (28%) felt "a lot of pressure". As part of the survey children were asked to select words describing their mood in the run-up to the tests: 59% said they were nervous, 39% worried, 27% stressed, 17%, sad and moody and 16% said it affected their sleep.

The language used to report how children have performed in the SATs to parents is extremely problematic. The notion of the "expected standard" perpetuates notions of fixed ability which are completely inappropriate. Such language assumes that every child can learn at the same rate across all disciplines. Removal of National Curriculum levels was a positive step, but their tiered structure of levels 3,4,5,6 did enable reporting of attainment to be differentiated enough to reflect progress and new learning, the current system simply divides children into those who can and those who can't. Children who do not pass these tests at key stage 1 and key stage 2 will be labelled as permanently behind, their individual progress never recognised by the system. Just 14% of children with special educational needs who took the SATs last year achieved the expected standard – compared to 62% of children without SEND. It is worth remembering the boom in interventions and revision for the SATs, holiday day revision classes and catch up classes are commonplace for pupils at risk of not reaching the expected standard. Whilst a school should push every child to achieve their best, this should not be at the expense of receiving a broad and balanced education or having family time.

The narrow range of subject areas assessed results in the restriction of the curriculum offered in many primary schools. A recent DfE survey into the teaching time devoted to national curriculum subjects found that the median teaching time for subjects other than English and mathematics was often very low. Science was often taught for just 60 minutes a week and languages a shocking 20 minutes. In only a minority of primary schools are the subjects music, art and design, languages, history, geography and design and technology given over 30 minutes of teaching time per week. Of course, English and mathematics are extremely important, but so too are the other subjects.

The SATs do not give any useful information to parents about how their child is getting on at school. I'm not convinced that to know a child received a scaled score of 98, or 102, is useful to parents. This number does not outline, for example, which mathematics concepts a child has grasped and what do they still need to work on. These numbers have nothing to do with actual learning. A simple number reduces complex learning to



## Anne Heavey (cont)

a meaningless score useful only for ranking. I'm also not convinced that parents find the new league table measures useful or informative for understanding how local schools are performing. With floor standards that are negative numbers and with confidence intervals thrown into the mix, the whole package is a confusing mess. With the league tables so convoluted one does have to wonder if it is worth it? What do parents actually want to know about schools and how their child is doing? Do the SATs give them the answers that they want? I suspect not.



This leads on to the next problem. Ministers have claimed that the SATs are essential for identifying which children need extra support but they are useless for this purpose. Taken at the end of primary school it is too late for the results to inform actual teaching and learning. Many secondary school teachers view SATs scores with a mixture of mistrust and irritation. They do not trust that the results actually reflect the child's learning – especially if the primary school has devoted much of year 6 to hot housing for the tests. Many secondary teachers find SATs results useless and irrelevant for their subject area; what does the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics tell the geography, PE, French or music teacher about the child's learning in their subject? Nothing. Yet these SATs scores are used to measure progress and set targets for GCSEs across the entire secondary curriculum. Many secondary schools run baseline

assessments, often the CATs, at the start of year 7 because the SATs have such little use. Wouldn't it be better for primary schools to focus on supporting children through the transition into secondary school? If SATs were abolished then perhaps primary teachers would have more time to help secondary colleagues to understand the strengths, interests, characters and areas for development of every child. Wouldn't it be better if each child arrived at secondary school with a portfolio of their best and favourite work from across the curriculum at primary school? This would tell new teachers a lot more about their new pupils than the current series of numbers.

The current Government's obsession with cramming statutory tests and assessments into primary schools, represent a lack of trust in the teaching profession. Perhaps ministers truly believe that without state tests teachers just won't teach. There is irony here as teachers are one of the most trusted professionals, whereas politicians (rightly or wrongly) are among the least. The phonics check exists solely to ensure that teachers use the prescribed method of synthetic phonics in the classroom and tells us nothing about how are young children are developing their reading skills. Phonics is an incredibly useful and valuable approach for teaching reading, but introducing a test to check up on teachers says a lot about how the DfE regards teachers.

If the government is serious about meaningful accountability, then it should investigate introducing a new accountability system. The use of sample assessments would evaluate how our education system as a whole performs, whilst supported self-evaluation would ensure that individual schools are accountable to the local community – this approach could take the pressure off children and give us all much more useful information. The end of primary school should be a time to celebrate and recognise the achievements and growth every child has made before they embark on the next adventure at secondary school. Let's stop wasting public money on useless tests. Scrap the SATs.

**Anne Heavey is a Policy Adviser at the Association of Teachers and Lecturers.**

**The ATL will join with NUT to become the National Education Union in September 2017**

# The future of 16+ assessment

Roger Titcombe

The first question is, 'do we need it at all'? The argument goes that as all school students are now expected to remain engaged with the education system in some way until age 18, what is the point of having a hugely costly and bureaucratic exam system like GCSE at age 16? I have a lot of sympathy with this view, especially as, within the marketised English system, there are two primary functions of GCSE: to produce school performance data to drive parental choice in an artificially imposed market; and to constrain Ofsted inspectors' conclusions within ideologically defined limits, within boundaries defined by floor target benchmarks and other tick boxes, rather than supporting professional discretion and expertise in judging quality of teaching and learning.

Ed Milliband's 2015 Labour general election proposal for an 18+ 'baccalaureate' in which academic and vocational pathways would have 'equal esteem' has a superficial attraction. That such a split has no sound basis is strongly hinted at by the arbitrary assertion that there are equal numbers of such pupils. The presumption is that the academic half should be taught 'academically' and the other half enrolled onto 'vocational pathways' that will result in a diploma qualification of equal status. The stage at which such segregation should begin appears to be 14, with the assumption that the academic stream, or different school even, will be expected to progress to university and the vocational stream will not. There are many contradictions and questions that arise from this model.

Are nursing and midwifery degrees academic or vocational? The universities that offer them have entry requirements that stipulate C grades at GCSE in English and maths together with a combination of academic A Levels. However, many also state that in 'certain circumstances' they admit students without A Levels or even GCSE Cs in English and maths. Labour's proposals suggested that graduate entry to the nursing and midwifery professions should be confined to the academic streams in schools. Should such careers be denied to half the school population at the age of 14? If not, are we happy if 'midwifery-led' rather than 'consultant-led' hospital maternity units are managed by staff from the 'non-academic' half of the ability range? If there is such confusion about the purpose of university education then it is unsurprising that a curriculum policy for the 14-18 age group based on dividing pupils into 'academic' and 'vocational' streams is also confused. Many similar examples in other career pathways exhibit the same confusion.

What does 'non-academic' mean? Is it to be based on the IQ type Cognitive Ability Tests (CATs) widely used by academy chains for regulating their admissions? These tests are certainly very good predictors of performance in academic subjects at GCSE and A Level and their use gives such academies control over their pupil admission profile crucially denied to their usually much denigrated LA school predecessors.



The reality is that there is no distinctive level of performance in any tests that could validly divide a population into academic and non-academic streams at any prescribed level, let alone the 50th percentile as Labour appeared to be suggesting. All you can say is that pupils with low CATs and SATs scores at 11 generally find academic studies more difficult. But does this mean they shouldn't be allowed access to them at 14? Pupils are 'turned off' learning by inappropriate and undifferentiated teaching methods, not by the subjects themselves. What about technology and the arts? Are these subjects academic or vocational? Are we to assume that our most academically able pupils should be directed away from cooking, dance, drama and art, or that less academic pupils don't need to study and understand history, geography, literature, science and a foreign language? How should a 'Jamie Oliver' be directed at 14 years old?

To resolve these dilemmas is to question the fundamental role of schooling. I agree with Dr Patrick Yarker of the University of East Anglia in his contribution to the recent NUT publication, 'The Mismeasurement of Learning', from which I quote the following:

## Roger Titcombe (cont)

*'Learning without limits' is an emergent movement to challenge the ways in which assumptions are often made that children have a fixed amount of 'ability' or 'potential'. It rejects the placement of young children in 'ability groups' which can so easily become a self-fulfilling prophecy by placing a ceiling on children's opportunities to learn. Early testing tends to encourage such assumptions that 'ability' and 'potential' are measurable and fixed.*

*What animates fixed ability thinking, and the prophetic pedagogy associated with it, is the belief that children come in kinds. Each child can, and must, be categorised as soon as possible into the bright, the average, and the less-able, or (as with the renewed clamour for grammar schools) segregated into 'academic' and 'non-academic'. It is asserted that different kinds of children require different kinds of curriculum, supposedly tailored to their essentially-different needs. Scores play a vital part in this sorting and sifting, for they enable crude comparisons and ranking of children. A more educationally productive way of thinking about the learner would not only recognise the learner as unique, but would see him or her as always capable of remaking (and not merely receiving) knowledge and culture provided conditions are right. It would acknowledge that everyone's educational future remains unwritten, unpredictable, open to change, and that the teacher has power to affect that future for the better by actions and decisions undertaken here and now.*

So where should the secondary curriculum and the national assessment of it be going? I believe that the answer to this question can be found in the much misunderstood 'growth mindset' movement. The 'growth mindset' is fully in accordance with the view of Patrick Yarker that not only is there no limit to the development of cognition in learners of any age, but that such development should be the priority of the education system for all ages from childhood to the grave.

Before the Gove reforms of teacher training increasingly moved it out of universities and into the 'most successful' academy chains, all teachers used to meet Bloom's cognitive domain taxonomy in their training. It divides educational objectives into three 'domains', cognitive, affective, and psychomotor (sometimes loosely described as knowing/head, feeling/heart and doing/hands respectively). Within the domains, learning at the higher levels is dependent on having attained prerequisite knowledge and capabilities gained through progression through lower levels. Professors Philip Adey

and Michael Shayer built on the learning theories of Piaget and Vygotsky to produce their 'cognitive acceleration' programmes. I argue that these have much in common with Bloom including the need for the function of teaching to be primarily focused on the cognitive development needed to mount a pyramid, which confers capabilities transferable to any subject context. Bloom, Piaget and Vygotsky are entirely consistent with the developmental 'growth mindset' approach.

This requires a radically different approach to teaching and learning from the Grangrindian, behaviourist, disciplinarian tyranny into which the school experience is ever more being transformed for pupils and their teachers by the ideology of marketisation. The detailed implications for the future of classroom experience for pupils and teachers and the national assessment system at 16+ and 18+ have yet to be worked out. Past Labour Party thinking will be challenged as much that of the current Conservative government. That is what is so exciting about the acceptance of 'plastic' intelligence and why it is so important for schools and individual teachers to know how to promote it.

As for how 16+ exams would be different if based on a developmental curriculum and teaching approach, I would point to PISA, where at the highest levels it tests deep understanding, independent of national curriculums. Clearly for some subjects, eg English literature and history, some syllabus specific knowledge must be specified, but this would not preclude at the highest levels general questions unrelated to specific factual knowledge. Exam papers would be structured with the lower Bloom levels tested in the early questions with the later ones progressing up the Bloom pyramid. Grades would always be 'Bloom Level' based, so ensuring comparability between all subjects. Better still, a coursework approach like that of the Leicestershire Modular Framework could be used.

The final and perhaps most important advantage is that such 16+ assessment would be much harder to corrupt into simple performance indicators for driving school league tables, so hastening their demise.

**Roger Titcombe is a retired headteacher, educational researcher and author.**

He blogs at  
<https://rogeritcombelelearningmatters.wordpress.com/>



# Labour's Policy Forum in action

Emma Hardy

After discovering the National Policy Forum existed I was desperately keen to get onto the Education Policy Commission. I felt that throughout the time of Stephen Twigg and then Tristram Hunt Labour lacked the bravery to present a strong alternative vision for education; we merely tinkered with the options presented by Gove and it led me to question the effectiveness of the Policy Forum. I was elected to the National Policy Forum in September 2015 and after a year on the Housing Commission I became a member of the Early Years Education and Skills Commission in January this year and I am determined to help Labour be braver.

I know that many others also question the NPF. One CLP I recently visited did not hold back in its condemnation of the policy making process in Labour. The criticisms were impossible to placate because they simultaneously wanted both Labour policies already formed for discussions on the doorstep and also influence over the formation of policy. There was anger that the submission process was not clear, that equal significance was given to submissions from CLPs and from individuals, they didn't know what happened to their submissions and that the website was difficult to navigate. There are 53 constituencies in Yorkshire Humber (the area I represent) and so far I have only been able to visit six of them, with another three lined up in the next two months, so yes the website can be frustrating but it is the most practical way to hear from a larger number of members.

What was very clear from my CLP visit is that there is a real and genuine hunger for members to be able to influence the policies of their party. The idea that members would be happy to return to the days of 'those above' writing policy and the only interaction members had with policy is when they delivered leaflets with it written on is long gone.

But I have been encouraged by the Education Commission so far. There have already been two meetings and both have been attended by the Shadow Education Secretary Angela Rayner and the Shadow Schools Minister Mike Kane. The meetings, chaired by Christine Shawcroft, are informal in tone and the atmosphere is both supportive and challenging, as you would expect in comradely debate. There was disagreement about the role of Ofsted, is it there to punish schools or to advise them? With the future of a school's ownership, its staff and management hanging in the balance of a judgement from Ofsted I wonder should any single organisation have that much power. I'm pleased that Ofsted has been added as a question on the consultation paper and I look forward to reading

the submissions about it. The agenda always includes ministerial updates and a discussion on all the submissions received on the policy forum website, each submission is sent out to each member before the meeting and is printed for the meeting too.

The previous two meetings have concentrated on agreeing the wording of the consultation discussion document sent out to members. To illustrate some of the items discussed, here are a few from the previous meeting. We discussed the impact that Brexit is having upon the everyday functionality of government. Angela correctly predicted that because the schools funding formula hit grammar schools hard the government would find some way to ensure that grammar schools ended up with extra money.



The lack of aspiration on the quality of apprenticeships was highlighted and there was a determination for Labour to ensure that further education has "parity of esteem" with all other educational sectors. Because some of my elderly relatives have benefited from the social role FE can play, I was particularly delighted that this was recognised in the consultation document: *There are now around 1.5 million fewer adult learners than there were in 2008. This has had implications for skills shortages in certain areas and has damaged the social role that accessing to this training had for many people.*

When we discussed early years education I argued that Labour should not use the term "school ready" because it is the role of schools to be ready for all pupils and not for pupils to have to be ready for school. However, this turned the conversation back to the problem of school funding and the extra resources schools need because of poverty. Some mentioned a fear that schools would lose their "institutional memory" of life before a

See the NPF consultation document 2017 at:

<https://www.scribd.com/document/342059533/Early-Years-Education-and-Skills#>

formalisation of early years partly because of the number of experienced teachers leaving the profession. The group agreed that you don't make children more intelligent by pushing the curriculum content down to the year below; in my opinion this does not make the school curriculum more rigorous, just more ridiculous. There is recognition that it would be difficult to alter the prevailing narrative of "high standards equals more testing" so if we want this to change we must help Labour make the alternative argument with the general public.

Not every change I wanted is evident in the NPF consultation document 2017 but there is evidence that we are creating clear 'red water' between Labour and the Tories on education. This part is significant because it states Labour's vision for education is about more than producing impressive data and the previous mantra/nonsense of "raising standards." Now Labour has a clearer view on what education is for and therefore a different lens for judging new policies, in stating:

*Building a strong education system is essential for our country's future economic health, but it is also important that individuals are given the opportunity to thrive and live good lives. We want to change the argument in education from one of not just economic imperatives but social imperatives too.*

The consultation opened on 17th March with an endorsement from the leader by email and twitter and closes on 31st May. Over the first weekend of that period there were 24 submissions made and I will read them all and respond to the vast majority of them. They cover issues like constant changes to the curriculum, status of teaching as a profession, members passionate about the arts/citizenship/political education and of course school funding. Having only recently left the teaching profession I can say that I believe the submissions members are making are reflective of the wishes and needs from the profession. My only criticism is that I have not come across a submission from someone not involved in education in some way.

Recent communications from Labour are evidence of a genuine desire to listen to members and have policies that we all own and recognise. Each submission to the forum is discussed and email alerts are triggered to all NPF members when submissions are made. Of course not everyone will agree and there is always a fear that compromise could end up pleasing no one but Labour cannot be accused of not listening. If you feel strongly about an aspect of education and you want it discussed all you have to do is make a submission.

**Emma Hardy is the Deputy General Secretary of the SEA**

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## SEA where you are – setting up local groups

It has been very encouraging to hear from a number of members recently asking about local SEA groups and branches. At the moment they are quite few in number but as our membership grows – and it has increased by some 10% in the last year – the opportunity to establish local groups is increasing.

The formal rules for local branches can be found at

<https://socialisteducationalassociation.org/sea-constitution/> in Appendix 4. The key points are:

- \* Where there at least ten members wishing to establish a formal branch, they may apply to the NEC for recognition. Branches may be based on a constituency, a local authority or any other appropriate area.

- \* Branches must adopt appropriate standing orders and submit them for approval to the NEC.

- \* Branches are required to adhere to the policies of the SEA as agreed by the Annual Conference and by the National Executive.

\* Branches may affiliate to constituency Labour parties within their area but will be responsible for any fees.

It's obviously also possible for SEA members to promote/ be part of a more informal Labour local education forum if it isn't possible to set up a formal branch. This offers the possibility of involving the wider party membership and may often be the best way forward.

Local groups, whether formal or informal, are a way of raising the local profile of education as a political issue and can provide a focus for local campaigns. If you're interested in forming or being part of a local group, please do contact [socialisteducation@virginmedia.com](mailto:socialisteducation@virginmedia.com). Local CLP secretaries will also be able to tell you if there are any existing local groups active in their area.

It would be really helpful to hear more about what's happening on the ground in local areas – so please do share what is going on locally.

**JB**

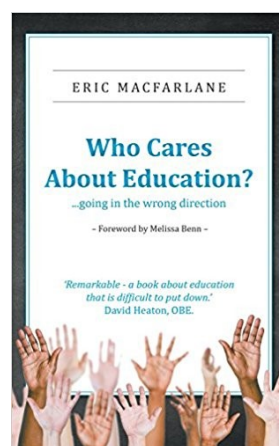
# Review of 'Who cares about education ...going in the wrong direction?' by Eric Macfarlane

The clue to this book is in the subtitle: ...going in the wrong direction? Eric Macfarlane started his teaching career in the 1950s and recalled it in an entertaining memoir 'The Making of a Maverick' published ten years ago. And now he produces a broadside at the current state of education in England informed by his very broad experience. Macfarlane taught English and was headteacher in a secondary modern and a grammar and principal of a sixth form college. He went on to a variety of roles in higher education. Very few recent developments escape his ire. I do not know how young teachers, or the new blob, will react to his assaults, but he certainly had me cheering.

On the opening page is an anecdote about the small grand-daughter, excited by continuously learning about the world. Macfarlane continues throughout the book to illustrate his ideas with his long and broad personal and professional experiences. He explains how grammar schools operated in the 50s – and knows about the company which in 2016 sold over 10,000 gown and mortar board sets for the graduates of *nursery* schools. He describes the damage done by the higher education system. Towards the end of the book a number of high-level principles become clear.

Macfarlane states *Something has to be done to break the hold academia has over our schools*. He argues throughout that HE colludes with reactionary political forces to maintain an elitist approach across education. Of course at the end of compulsory education pupils need to be sorted for the next stage, but Macfarlane attacks the unnecessary over-emphasis on competition and selection. He is correct to castigate both Adonis and Blair and what I call the new blob for the obviously illogical misconception that Oxbridge, or perhaps more accurately the so-called Russell Group of universities, is the only worthy ambition for the nation's young people. Macfarlane does a service by reminding us of the role of this self-selecting and self-important cabal, only formed in 1994 and reformed in 2007 by the appointment of its first Director-General, Dr. Wendy Piatt. He blames the Russell Group for its invention of the preposterous label 'facilitating subjects', and even more for persuading lots of people who should know better that a narrow and completely arbitrary set of A level subjects is in some way superior to all other qualifications at 18+. To start your network map, 'Flick' Piatt, as she is known to some because of her annoying hair habit, worked closely with Matthew Taylor at the Institute of Public Policy Research before they both moved to the leadership of the Number 10 Policy Unit. While at the IPPR, she was instrumental in devising the then controversial student loans policy. (Taylor now heads the Royal Society of Arts, also in Macfarlane's frame for its 2016 paper *Educating the failing 40%*, which buys into... yes, the Russell Group myth.)

Macfarlane states *We seem to have lost sight of education as a process that embraces everyone*. He lambasts those institutions which explicitly or implicitly focus on getting a few to the 'top'. When he started teaching, that was expected of public schools and the more prestigious grammar schools, which copied the style and ambience of the Oxbridge college. Education in such places was a process of continually closing doors, he explains. Now, he complains, far too many secondary schools try to emulate them. He quotes the comment by Tim Brighouse in 2007: *There is more selection now in London than before it went comprehensive*. Grammar schools still create their own bottom stream failures, and favoured comprehensive schools and sixth form colleges ape them. Macfarlane has a particular yen for the latter: he set one up when Hampshire adopted that structure in the 70s, and took pride in its broad and innovative curriculum. But now, too few resemble the admirable NewVic in Newham, which offers a truly comprehensive range of courses.



True, there is a vital piece missing from this analysis: the need for all older school pupils to engage with their future entry to the world of work, with a compulsory vocational element to their curriculum. And we lack a post-16 route with a unified qualifications pathway to level three which is predominantly vocational but, as in most advanced societies, requires a continuation of general education. Macfarlane's view of a broad curriculum is limited to the inclusion of 'soft subjects' such as creative and performing arts, social sciences, and sports. 'Soft subjects' is another of his target terms and his dismantling of the abuse by the new blob of the term 'rigorous' is long overdue. In fact, the vocabulary of the new blob is attacked throughout: 'standards', their use of 'knowledge' and 'facts'.

Another welcome target is Teach First, although since the hugely inflated cost of this training route entered the public domain, it needs only a period of pressure on the education budget and a Minister interested in evidence for its wings to be clipped. But damage has



# The school funding crisis

already been done. As Macfarlane suggests, Teach First alumni exhibit all the effortless superiority which is the hallmark of the Oxbridge product. They assume that two years heavily supported teaching gives them the right to pontificate about what's wrong with our schools. And of course they are good at pontification and are popping up in all sorts of influential policy places. More importantly, they tend to be imbued with individualistic and entrepreneurial mindsets which make them unable to value schools as communities and as part of the wider community.

Macfarlane states *...league tables have duly achieved their purpose and potential to create fierce competition between schools, competition that has at times become unpleasantly acrimonious and degrading.* Amongst the many negative effects of league table competition, he mentions the use of loopholes in the admissions code, cheating in tests by pupils and teachers, the growth of instrumental attitudes amongst students, the stress on factual recall without understanding (China used as a comparison), the amount of both stress amongst staff and mental health problems amongst children and young people.

You probably get it by now: the old-school and not noticeably radical gentleman from prosperous Hampshire just does not buy in to the concepts, the language, the world-view of the neo-liberal clique now running our schools into the ground. If you want a rant against academies and all that, go elsewhere because they are mentioned only in passing. This book is about what is taught, how, and why, in our schools and universities. And more to the point, what should be taught and how.

The book is littered with references to politicians, especially education ministers. Clearly, Macfarlane blames them for the state we are in. Pride of place could go to John Patten, always on the podium in 'worst ever' contests, but he was so incompetent that even a Tory government had to remove him promptly. No, he rightly saves his fire for Blair, Adonis, Gove, and Gibb. Sad to say, ideologues all. The elitism, the conservatism on curriculum, assessment and pedagogy and pretending to the right to over-ride professional judgement, the irrational belief in markets and competition, these are the attitudes which have brought us to a dangerous low. The reader might gain the impression that he would hope for the removal of education from politics, especially as he was not keen on a national curriculum. But only politicians with a different world view can turn round this tanker, and where are they in the House of Commons?

MJ

Is school funding in a crisis in England? Well, yes, of course, the nation's headteachers cannot all be crying wolf. The local press up and down the country is full of their complaints, usually backed up by the local MP and local council leaders. But the Conservative MPs mostly bark up the wrong tree and are tying themselves up in such knots that they risk being unable to slither through the voting lobby. Here is an attempt to untie those knots and place the blame where it belongs – with the austerity policies of successive Tory led governments. There are two parts of the story: the size of the cake and the way it is cut up.

The story starts in 2003 when a new funding formula was introduced after a very thorough review. The government funded a cash increase in schools' budgets of no less than 11.6% for 2003-04, but staff costs alone went up by 12% or more in some schools due to rises in pay and pension contributions. When the ensuing row ended, the reform had been reformed and became the Spend+ method which essentially remains in place. Relative funding levels between local authorities were frozen by this method, which simply added whatever percentage increase granted by the Treasury to the previous year's allocation to each LA. In 2008, the minister Ed Balls ordered a further review with the intention of returning to formula funding, but this was overtaken by the 2010 election.

## The size of the cake

In retrospect, these were the years of plenty. Above inflation increases each year led to increases in staffing levels, particularly but not only in support staff. The years of fighting for a set of exercise books were over – it seemed. But only too soon, Tory austerity wiped the smiles off faces. The current crisis has been on its way ever since 2010. The true picture is sometimes obfuscated in two ways (see box p 16) but the most useful single figure is the annual per pupil allocation from government to the LAs.

The cash freeze on per pupil funding started in 2012. The figures in the table (p16) may suggest modest increases in some years, but this is due to the transfer into the schools block of costs formerly the responsibility of local authorities, such as school improvement. The total national cash allocation to schools has increased since 2013 largely due to the increase in pupil numbers.

The current funding system allocates funding to local authorities in 'blocks'. The schools block is the bread and butter and forms 80% of schools funding. The remainder is shared between an early years block and a high needs block, reflecting the particular needs in those areas. For 2017-18, these three blocks total

# The school funding crisis (cont)

See the DfE consultation paper at: [https://consult.education.gov.uk/funding-policy-unit/schools-national-funding-formula2/supporting\\_documents/NFF\\_Stage2\\_schools\\_consultationdoc.pdf](https://consult.education.gov.uk/funding-policy-unit/schools-national-funding-formula2/supporting_documents/NFF_Stage2_schools_consultationdoc.pdf).

£41,468 million. In addition is the pupil premium, distributing a further £2,500 million to schools at per pupil rates of £1,320 (primary), £935 (secondary), £1,900 for pupils in care (or previously in care), these rates having been frozen in cash terms.

This simple table explains most of the funding crisis in schools. When allowance is made for schools facing extra costs as a result of the loss of local authority services, the cash per pupil has not improved since 2013, and because of inflation, including in staff costs, schools' spending power has worsened.

	England Schools Block £ per pupil
2017-18	4,619
2016-17	4,637
2015-16	4,612
2014-15	4,555
2013-14	4,551
2012-13	4,551

Ever since the introduction of the local management of schools in the 1990s, schools have been encouraged to hold reserves. At first, it was argued that the local authority could act as the lender of last resort in case of a financial catastrophe, but when schools started to become independent private companies (academies) that possibility disappeared, and the conventional wisdom was established that a school should not spend all its annual budget but save some for a rainy day. The teachers' union NASUWT has argued recently that schools can afford a pay rise for teachers because in 2014-15 93% of schools were in surplus to a total of £2.22 billion, with academies being disproportionate hoarders. It seems plausible that some headteachers, in thrall to the accountants, will make staffing and other cuts in the coming months while holding on to savings.

But it is clear that breaking open the piggy bank will only put off the evil day. The government has decided that the per pupil cash freeze should continue until 2020, and according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies this means a real terms reduction of 8%. The website <http://www.schoolcuts.org.uk/>, supported by six school staff unions, uses official statistics to calculate the cash impact on every school in the country, of

which 98% will be worse off. And the respected Education Policy Institute states that all schools will be worse off. There can be no doubt that the growing funding crisis is due to the reduction in the real size of the cake.

## And how is the cake cut up?

It is a mantra of public finance that the time to reform the funding of a service is when the money is stable or, preferably, growing. But the Spend+ system was clearly unfair and the government was obliged to reintroduce a formula. The system to be partly introduced in 2018 results from two key decisions, but it is a mistake to think that they are responsible for the crisis. With some exceptions, school cuts are due to the reduction in the size of the cake, not the new way of cutting it up.

The first decision was to replace the longstanding two-stage distribution method. Stage one is the allocation to local authorities, based on a formula in place in 2004. Stage two is the allocation by LAs to schools, based on their own formulae which must be in line with national regulations and agreed by their schools forums, which are committees dominated by local headteachers.

The second decision was to introduce a single stage distribution direct from the DfE to each school, based on a new national funding formula. This change concludes a very longstanding debate which centred round the capacity of a single formula to deal with

## How to obfuscate the figures

### 1 cash or real terms?

Ministers normally quote school funding figures in cash terms. As we know, this does not equate to spending power, and schools' costs rise due to salary increases, even at 1%, staffing on-costs, and inflation in goods and services.

### 2 total or per pupil?

Ministers normally quote the total allocation to schools. However, in funding statistics the per pupil allocation is often used because it reflects the additional costs of extra pupils. Although pupil numbers are rising in many parts of the country, in some places the school population is stable or even in decline.

## The school funding crisis (cont)

particular local circumstances. One of the more bizarre features of the current situation is the position of the f40 group of some of the lowest funded LAs under the Spend+ system. f40 has lobbied strongly and successfully for a national funding formula – and since December 2016, when the NFF was finally announced, it has been complaining about the exclusion of LAs from the funding distribution process!

This means that from 2018, schools will be allocated money not on the basis of their LA's formula (this includes academies, by the way) but on the same formula as every other school in the country. Obviously, when the formula changes, each individual school will be affected. Some will benefit, some will lose (although, as explained above, this is relative – all schools are losing at the moment). In this case, 54% of schools will be winners and 46% will be losers, although the losses will be cushioned. But why are Tory MPs from the shire counties the loudest critics of the new NFF?

The detail in the proposals for the NFF, now out for consultation, could not have been predicted from a Tory government. It redistributes money in precisely the opposite way to the Tory norm. The government derived the formula by analysing the 150 LA formulae and, in general, going along with the consensus of local decisions. However, the most unexpected and key decision lies in the relative weight given to a number of factors used to build the formula. This is shown clearly in the following table taken from the DfE consultation paper.

Current and proposed weighting of a selection of formula factors

Factor	Weighting given by LAs, 16-17, %	Proposed weighting in NFF, %
Basic per pupil	76.6	72.5
deprivation	7.6	9.3
Low prior attainment	4.3	7.5
English as additional language	0.9	1.2
sparsity	0.05	0.08

The table shows that the proportion of the budget allocated per pupil is to reduce, with a shift to those factors which support less advantaged youngsters: deprivation, low prior attainment, and EAL. In cash terms, this represents a redistribution towards deprivation of half a billion pounds. However, an effect of the method of defining deprivation is to extend it to the 'just managing', so that deprivation funding is spread more thinly amongst 45% of children and the poorest children lose out. Nevertheless, this change breaks the rule of public service funding: the party in power favours its friends. The proposals might represent sensible policymaking, but this is not a characteristic of our present government.

This substantial redistribution is the reason why the Tory shires are shrieking. Wealthy counties lose out, and the balance is not restored by the decision to increase substantially the sparsity factor, which is designed to support isolated rural schools. Indeed, rural schools are under threat, but clearly this is not due to the new way to cut the cake, but to the shrinking size of the cake.

As so often, London is a special case. As stated in the DfE consultation,

*Over the last 10 years, the percentage of pupils eligible for FSM in the capital has dropped from 27% to 18% (compared to the national average, which has dropped from 16% to 14%).*

London has also benefited from grants that were rolled up into the schools budget. Neither of these circumstances was recognised in the current funding arrangements. London will remain the highest funded area because of its deprivation and area costs, but the differentials will reduce under a return to formula funding with the wide definition of deprivation. And again, the cuts to London schools will be caused more by the size of the cake than the share of the cake.

The left must be careful when campaigning against school cuts. Tory backbenchers will seek to overturn the very formula for which they lobbied because of its redistributive effect. The left must separate the two arguments, supporting the new NFF while exposing the austerity programme which is the real villain. Only a cancellation of the 8% cut will solve the very real crisis.

**MJ**

# The SEA education manifesto

John Bolt, SEA General Secretary

In the last issue of Education Politics I set out how the SEA is going about the task of setting out a new policy agenda for England. Our aim is provide Labour with a comprehensive road map for the future and to challenge the damaging and backward looking policies of the current government.

This process is now well under way. At our meetings this year in Birmingham and Liverpool we've looked in detail at three of the ten areas that we identified as themes that we need to address. We've addressed the issues around the school workforce, the inspection and accountability of schools and the needs of young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

At our next meeting in Cardiff on May 13<sup>th</sup> we'll be looking at the whole issue of inequality – looking at how poverty, privilege, gender, ethnicity and geography all contribute to severely unequal outcomes from our education system. Then at our annual conference on June 24<sup>th</sup> in London, we'll be focussing on the curriculum from early years through primary and secondary to post 16. We'll look at what we teach, how we teach it and how we should assess children's progress. An important factor will be to re-define the boundary between the roles of politicians and professional educators which has become so disastrously blurred in recent years.

In the debates we've had so far a number of themes are beginning to emerge that have implications for many aspects of our education service. Key themes:

- Education is already underfunded and this is going to get worse. This has implications for pay and hence for recruitment and retention. We found it also has implications for SEND pupils, especially where the support services on which they so much rely have been decimated.
- The punitive focus on testing and accountability is damaging in so many ways. It's contributing to the crisis in teacher morale and retention. It's distorting what is taught and how it's taught. The pressure of Ofsted and league tables mean that too often the narrow interests of the school are put above the interests of the pupils.
- Marketisation and privatisation are destroying the frameworks that supported collaboration and helped to ensure a degree of fairness for all. In particular, pupils with special needs are at risk when local partnerships break down.

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On our website at <https://socialisteducationalassociation.org/sea-manifesto-2017/> you can find the first group of materials prepared for this manifesto. We'd like to have lots more contributions, especially if you are unable to get to the meetings – we know SEA members have expertise in just about every aspect of education. Do share your ideas so we can make sure our manifesto draws on all that knowledge and experience.

Below are some of the perhaps trickier questions and issues that we'll need to resolve and about which it would be really helpful to get members views. They could be used too as the framework for local debates in CLPs, union branches or any other local forums.

Please e mail your responses and ideas to [socialisteducation@virginmedia.com](mailto:socialisteducation@virginmedia.com).

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Qu 1

We know education needs higher levels of funding. So do many other public services. Being credible about the public finances is really important. So what should we be saying about how the money should be found?



## John Bolt (cont)

Qu 2

Provision for children with special needs has to strike a balance between the principle of inclusion, parental choice and the highly specialist provision that some children need. This often leads to conflict between families, schools and local authorities, especially at a time when money is short. What is the right balance between inclusion in mainstream and specialist provision? And who should decide what is right for an individual child?



Qu 3



By 2020, academisation will probably be even further advanced. Pressure to put schools into multi-academy trusts will continue and lots of elaborate organisational structures and personal vested interests will have been established. SEA has always opposed the academy model – but how practically should we go about restoring education as a public service with proper democratic accountability?

Qu 4

Selection isn't just about grammar schools. English education is bedevilled by academic, religious and socio-economic segregation in virtually every area. How can we make our school system more genuinely comprehensive?



Qu 5



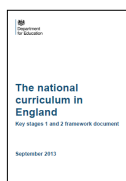
All research says that too many children under achieve in English schools. Why does that happen and what can we do about it? How far is this about what schools do – and how can that change? But also how far is it about how unequal our society is as a whole? What other kinds of things need to change if children are to have a more equal chance of success in school and beyond?

Qu 6

SEA believes there is too much of a blame culture around schools arising from our current approach to testing, league tables and inspection. We do need systems to tell us how well children and schools are doing and to identify what needs to improve. So, how can we monitor and support schools and children without the damaging effects caused by our present systems?



Qu 7



We've had a National Curriculum since 1988. Since that time, it's become more and more dominated by political opinions but, of course, doesn't apply to academies. So, do we still need a National Curriculum? If we do, what's wrong with the one we've got, how prescriptive should it be, who should be responsible for deciding what's in it and how it should be kept up to date?

## SEA Annual Elections 2017

Nominations are now open for SEA Officer posts and for membership of the National Executive for 2017-18.

Self nomination is entirely acceptable and no seconders are required.

The closing date for nominations is **30<sup>th</sup> April 2017**.

Nominations can be made by post to the General Secretary at 160 Melrose Avenue, London NW2 4JY or by e-mail to [socialisteducation@virginmedia.com](mailto:socialisteducation@virginmedia.com). There is no requirement to use a nomination form.

Although the constitution does not include specific requirements, members making nominations should be mindful of the need for gender balance amongst the officers

The posts available are as follows.

Post	Current post holder	Post	Current post holder
Chair	Martin Doré	Publications Officer	Martin Johnson
Vice Chair	Mike Newman	Recruitment Officer	Chris Newman
General Secretary	John Bolt	Website Officer	David Pavett
Treasurer	Ian Duckett	Equalities Officer	Naomi Fearon
Membership Secretary	Paul Martin	Social Media Officer	Sarah Williams
Deputy General Secretary	Emma Hardy	Youth Officer	Alex Graham
Minutes Secretary	Paul Lally		

In addition nominations are invited for National Executive membership – the NEC comprises 8 men and 8 women in addition to the officers listed above.

### Forthcoming events

17th April, 5.45pm, Fringe 2 (Level 5) St David's Hall, Cardiff: SEA fringe at NUT Annual Conference

13th May, Cardiff: SEA Executive and All members meetings

24th June, London: SEA Annual Conference and AGM

See p18 for details of SEA's policy review. All member meetings take place on Saturday afternoons and details will be notified to members in advance. New attendees particularly welcome.

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