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The last year in education has been a challenge for staff and students alike. The pandemic has exposed the inequalities that run throughout our education system, from the lack of access to resources at home to the injustices in the exam system. The SEA has committed to a campaign ‘Give us back our schools’ the core element recognising that it is the structures that have been created by successive governments that have allowed the fragmentation of the system. In recent months we have heard politicians tell us that structures are not the key priority. We disagree. It is the structures that have been put in place that allow the corrupt system that we have to exist.

The fragmentation of our school structures have created a system where not only staff terms and conditions are at stake but also the learning conditions for our children and young people. Academy chains have instated draconian uniform and behaviour policies, including walking in silence in corridors, they have excluded children and young people at a disproportionate rate to ensure they maintain and

All this has been ignored, overlooked or dismissed by government because we are told we need competition. It is competition that makes markets, and education thrive. However many of us working in education know that this is just not true!

What makes education work is cooperation, it is happiness and a joy of learning, it is being able to express your true self without fear and it is about having the confidence to fail but to try again.

The system is broken. It wasn't broken by educators, students or parents, it was broken by successive governments. Now is the time for action. This pandemic has shown us a different world. We don't want to go back to what we had - our children and young people, our educators and our communities deserve so much more.



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About Education Politics

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HOW PRIVATE INTERESTS CAME TO RUN ENGLISH SCHOOLS – AND WHY IT MATTERS

Warwick Mansell

England's second-largest chain of academy schools, with core funding from the government of approaching £200 million a year, is in the control of a single family. This means that when its "sponsor" - a businessman and Tory peer - dies, the right to control its system of strategic decision-making, via the ability to appoint the majority of its board, will pass to his wife and children.

A group of 10 academies, as above effectively run by a Conservative Lord who has been a major donor to the party, appears to be in the complete control of this person and his wife. The latter has been described as the driving force in the creation of its curriculum, apparently able to take controversial decisions such as its primary schools not teaching ICT, or even omitting mention of the 1945 Attlee government in its history textbook, with little sceptical scrutiny from the Department for Education or Ofsted and with unhappy parents seemingly left feeling powerless.

More generally, school leaders, religious groups and, in some cases, leading figures from private businesses, have set up charitable trusts which, under the academies policy, have been allowed to take complete control of state-funded institutions via their governance structures, such that the communities which depend on these schools are left on the outside looking in, with few rights.

After more than 20 years covering England's structure of school reform, which centres on the academies policy, and having been moved to set up a website to give expression to the constant stream of tip-offs from communities frustrated with its questionable effects on the ground, I have become ever more sceptical. If you wanted to set up a regime which kept the control of public services as remote as possible from those who depend on them, which concentrated risks around corruption and service failure, and which incentivised the prioritising of institutional interests over those of all children, you would be hard-pushed to come up with a more effective structure than this.

Essentially private control

The key concept to understand about the academies policy is that it has made possible the essentially

private control of what are overwhelmingly publicly-funded schools.

Labour, of course, launched the policy back in 2000, with the first of what were then called City Academies opening two years later. Originally this was a small-scale initiative. Modelled on the similarly small-scale previous Conservative policy of City Technology Colleges, it was a radical approach to school improvement which had been targeted at, in the first instance, inner city secondary schools, many of which had been struggling.

Labour funded the relaunch of these schools, often in expensive new buildings, and with private “sponsors” – often wealthy businessmen (they were in all cases of which I’m aware male) – initially asked to contribute £2 million. In return, they would be given sweeping powers including over the curriculum and staff pay and conditions.

By the time Labour left office in 2010, there were only 203 academies, almost all of which had been previously struggling institutions, and with primary schools not included. But the micro nature of the policy changed rapidly after Michael Gove became Education Secretary, as he sought to put “rocket boosters” under the scheme by allowing primaries and already-successful schools to convert, and amid a widespread belief that institutions could benefit financially by doing so.

There are now approaching 9,500 academies, with 79 per cent of secondaries and 37 of primaries having this status.

Whatever the debate around the academies policy under Labour, viewed from the perspective of how taxpayers might expect their schools to be controlled, its expansion under the Conservatives now seems especially controversial. For a policy allowing essentially private control of state assets has grown to the extent that it is the structure behind schools which now educate a majority of school-age children in England.

The more jaw-dropping implications of this are occasionally visible on digging through the constitu-

tional documents of academy trusts.

The key structural feature to understand is that each trust has a top tier of governance called the members. The DfE has described members as “akin to shareholders”, in that they have key rights including amending the organisation’s constitution and hiring and firing the trust directors, who preside over strategic leadership. There are rarely more than five members in a trust, and usually the founders – who can be a married couple, or a group of friends – are the trust’s first members. They are therefore essentially in control of the organisation.

Two years ago, I was looking through the articles of association of an organisation called the Meller Educational Trust. This was named after David Meller, a Conservative Party donor and former Department for Education board member who was in the news in 2018 after having had to stand down in the wake of investigative reporting around the Presidents Club charity fundraising event, at which women were reportedly groped. Meller had been one of its two joint chairmen.

But what had staggered me about his academy trust, which until collapsing in the wake of the scandal had been running two schools and was closely involved in the management of another three, was that it was essentially in the control of one man: Meller himself.

Its constitution – those articles of association – listed Meller as “principal sponsor”. He was a member of the trust himself, with the right to appoint up to five additional members and up to 12 of the trust’s “governors”. Unless the government chose to appoint additional governors – and this has happened very rarely



Illustration by Polly Donnison

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– only six more governors could serve. So the board’s control was centralised – many would say, privatised – under Meller.

At a much larger scale, the Harris Federation now controls 50 academies from its base in Croydon, south London. That it is named after the carpet magnate, Conservative peer and donor Lord Harris is well-known.

However, it was only in 2019 that I reported that its constitution, which dates from the federation’s foundation in 2006, allows Lord Harris as, again, “principal sponsor” to appoint up to 32 board members. Perhaps most staggeringly, there is a clause in this document stating that the title of “principal sponsor”, and with it those appointment rights over directors, will pass to Lord Harris’s wife and two sons when he dies.

The Harris chain has been successful, in both Ofsted and results terms. However, its record, including staff turnover, relations with unions and, on occasion, the number of pupils leaving its schools early, can be subject to controversy, as can the amounts it pays its leaders: its chief executive’s pay and pensions package topped £525,000 in 2019-20.

Is it right that a chain of schools whose funding comes overwhelmingly from the taxpayer – its core General Annual Grant funding via the DfE was £186m in 2019-20 – should be in the control of, effectively, one person and their family?

The implications on the ground for families for what looks like private control have been coming through most strongly in recent weeks on investigating go-

ings-on at London-based Future Academies. This chain now has seven secondary schools – including two which were handed to it last year by the government having been run by the collapsed Meller Educational Trust – and three primaries. It was set up in 2008 by Lord John Nash, a Conservative-supporting former venture capitalist who would go on to become academies minister, and his wife Lady Caroline.

The Nashes are a white couple with combined wealth reported last year at £120 million, who preside over schools whose populations, at least in London, are overwhelmingly ethnic minority and disadvantaged. The couple are in control of Future via its governance system: they currently make up two of the trust’s five controlling “members”, with hire and fire rights over trustees. The other three members appear to be long-standing associates of Lord Nash. Lord Nash also chairs three of the 10 “local governing bodies” associated with Future’s academies, with Lady Nash also sitting on these committees and with Paul Smith, the trust’s chief executive so presumably appointed in a process overseen by the Nashes, chairing another five of them.

Perhaps most relevantly to controversy on the ground, Lady Nash, whose brief biography on Future’s website lists no teaching qualifications, is described there as its “leading force for curriculum development”.

Lady Nash is a history graduate. Its primary curriculum is overwhelmingly skewed towards this subject: in March I revealed how pupils receiving three lessons in British or ancient history for every one they were taught in science. One of the schools appears not to have had religious education taught this academic

year, while, since 2019, as I understand it none of the primaries have seen pupils taught computing/information technology, with sources stating that the Nashes’ dislike of the subject is the key factor.

Even resources within the teaching of history are controversial. Staggeringly – though perhaps not surprisingly if the risks of private control of schools by individuals with political sympathies are thought through – a British history textbook for primary pupils includes un-nuanced coverage

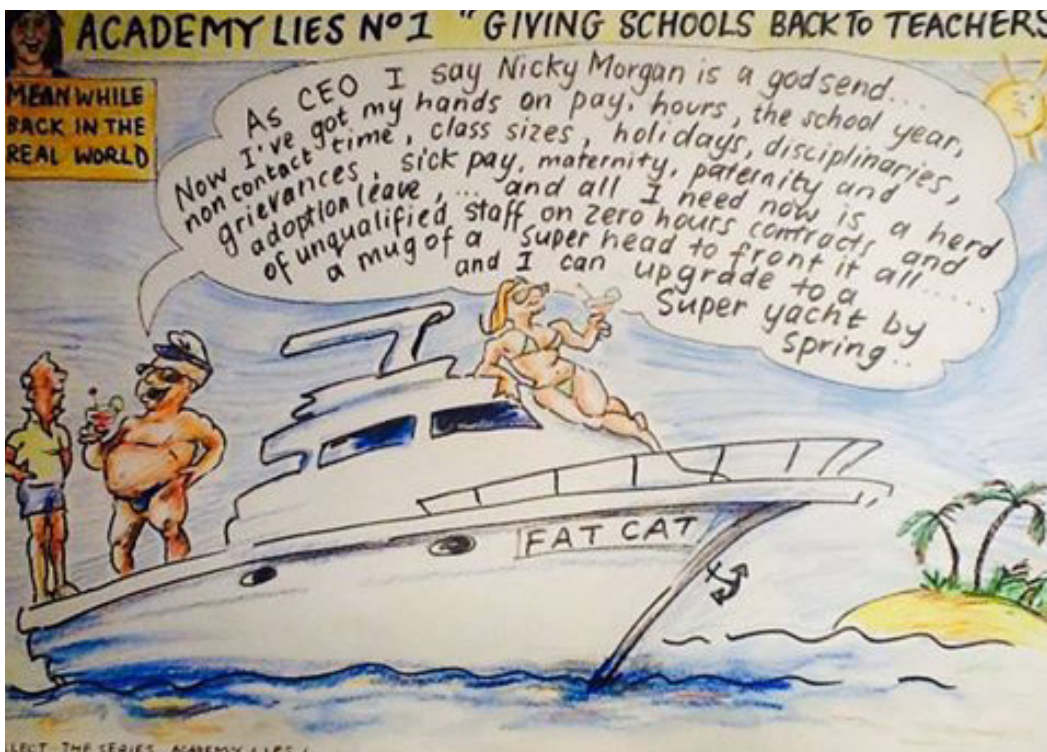


Illustration by Polly Donnison

of Churchill as a wartime leader, mention of his 1951-55 government, but no mention of Labour's Attlee governments in between.

In January, a letter sent by a governor to the governing body of Millbank Academy, one of Future's schools, chaired by Smith, warned of parental unhappiness. The letter said: "There is an overall lack of satisfaction with the 'academisation' of Millbank. This, it is felt, has led to an imbalanced curriculum and reduction in parental input in decision making." One parent told me the Nashes were seen as "untouchable" within the trust: able to do as they chose and with neither Ofsted nor the Department for Education likely to exert any influence over them.

The trust has also been attracting media attention this spring, after the school where it has its headquarters, Pimlico Academy in Westminster, faced student protests over changes including new uniform and haircut rules which had been described as racist – an allegation the trust denied – and the alleged cancellation of Black History Month. Critics see this as reflecting a structure which has seen change imposed on a community from on high.

These trusts may appear extreme manifestations of centralisation of control under the academies policy. But they are not alone. In late 2019, I calculated that schools educating more than 100,000 pupils were within academy trusts which were in the near-complete control of businessmen.

To take other examples, the David Ross chain, named after the Carphone Warehouse co-founder who is a friend of Boris Johnson and David Cameron, was as of 2019 in control of 35 academies educating 13,000 pupils, via a charity he set up which can hire and fire the academy trust's directors. And Lord Laidlaw, another major Tory donor, controls a six-school group of academies, with 4,000 pupils. Its constitution gives Laidlaw the right to be one of its controlling members, with the ability to appoint additional members, and with the members then allowed to appoint up to 10 trustees out of a minimum of 13.

More broadly, the academies policy has institutionalised control of state-funded institutions by, in some cases, an individual and his or her friends or family members, or by particular organisations. England's largest chain, the United Learning Trust, for example, is in the control of just a single "member": the United Church Schools Trust, an organisation linked to the Church of England which previously was only running Anglican fee-charging schools.

Oasis Community Learning, another of the largest chains, has as its single member a related charity which has listed as its first aim "the advancement of Christianity". Another major chain, Aspirations Academies Trust, saw a husband-and-wife team among its four founding members, with the members having the

right to appoint up to 15 directors. The husband and wife have been paid around £400,000 between them per year by the trust in recent years – a development made possible by the academies policy of deregulated pay and conditions.

Surveying these structures, in which the system seems to be that individuals or organisations can set up a trust, apply to the DfE for permission to take control of schools and then be in complete charge of their governance through appointing close associates, it is possible to wonder what other countries would make of it.

As a friend from New Zealand, which in recent decades has seen school governors entirely appointed by community election, put it to me when told of England's academies arrangements: "What: so, you can set up a trust, appoint your mates to the board so you are in control and that's it?" With a minor wrinkle – there must be two parents on each board, who will be in the minority – yes, that's essentially it.

There are several problems with the model. First, the idea of handing individuals' complete control of what are state-funded institutions seems morally very dubious. To put it another way, what qualifications does Lady Nash, for example, have to shape the curriculum at Future Academies, other than forming one half of a wealthy married couple running the schools?

Second, the concentration of power in the hands of academy founders and those they appoint can and has created the practical problem of intensifying risks. These are glimpsed when a trust collapses, with implosions which can be spectacular.

For example, Wakefield City Academies Trust (WCAT), which ran 21 schools, saw its former chairman, Mike Ramsay, become its chief executive, with the trust reportedly paying almost £440,000 to IT and clerking companies owned by Ramsay and his daughter before it was shut. A chain called Bright Tribe, presided over by the businessman Michael Dwan, saw allegations on the BBC's Panorama programme that false claims had been made for hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of building and maintenance grants, although police later said they had "insufficient evidence" to pursue a prosecution.

Scandals have happened on a scale not seen in the days before academies: my job as a reporter has been transformed under the policy, as issues of possible conflict of interest, for example, contracting and sky-high leadership pay barely featured on the investigative landscape for schools pre-2000.

School control made private in other ways

Aside from the way that academies are controlled via their governance structures, influence over what happens to our state-funded schools has been made pri-

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vate via the policy in other ways.

First, the system through which academies are set up is one of a private contract between the Secretary of State and the academy trust. This is negotiated in private, with communities not getting sight of what is agreed, via what is termed a funding agreement, until after the event, and with funding agreements not being subject to scrutiny by Parliament or elected local councillors.

Second, governance of state-funded schools in many cases has been made more remote, with the favoured multi-academy trust structure seeing key strategic decision-making power sitting at the level of the central trust, whereas in local authority-maintained schools it rests with community-facing school-level governing bodies.

Third, the government's decisions over whether a school should become an academy in the first place, or whether an existing academy should be transferred from one trust to another, take place at behind-closed-doors meetings.

These deliberations of Regional Schools Commissioners – civil servants taking advice from regional “Headteacher Boards”, then reporting to ministers – are held in private, with journalists having had to fight to see even the briefest details as to why decisions have been taken released.

The secrecy of such a system, including via school and trust governance meetings which are also held behind closed doors, contrasts with that operating in other countries, including Canada and even in relation to United States charter schools. The latter are often seen as archetypes for academies. However, transparency rights, including access to decision-making meetings, can seem much stronger there.

Finally, there is no requirement for Regional Schools Commissioners – who, again, preside over decisions within the academies system which can have huge significance for communities, such as whether a school transfers to a trust which might have a very different ethos – to answer to those communities. That is, decisions are taken by unelected officials whose duty is to report back, in private, to ministers, who themselves have no formal elected relationship with those on the end of their decisions, rather than being accountable to those communities. When a decision is taken, there is not even a public announcement to the affected community. This system, drawn up in haste by civil servants under Gove as Education Secretary, is rotten.

Fragmentation, competition and its impact on vulnerable pupils

Another effect of fragmenting England's system of school control from the old structure of 152 local authorities to, as of February 2021, the current one of

9,469 academies organised via 2,612 trusts has been to raise questions about vulnerable pupils falling through the cracks.

Running a system in which semi-autonomous multi-academy trusts compete with each other for the best results, as measured by test and exam indicators, has not seemed to this observer to be a good recipe for safeguarding the interests of young people felt unlikely to achieve top grades.

Concerns have been repeatedly voiced about “off-rolling” – the practice of encouraging children to leave a school's care because of their likely impact on institutional results, including by the Chief Inspector of Schools.

All schools face results pressures, in a system which, beyond academies, controversially hangs success on competitive performance indicators via league tables. Yet the semi-autonomous academy structure, which sees trusts given control of admission arrangements subject to some oversight via local authorities and the schools adjudicator, would seem to exacerbate problems.

Eighteen months ago, a Commons Education committee inquiry saw multiple claims made, in evidence from organisations including London Councils; the local authorities of North Yorkshire, Rochdale and Northamptonshire; and the campaign group Special Needs Jungle, that academies were less likely to support children with special educational needs and disabilities than were other types of school.

In March, even Sam Freedman, a former adviser to Michael Gove, conceded that academies should not be in control of their own admissions arrangements, with local authorities given a role policing exclusion from school, in the interests of “protecting vulnerable children”.

What should happen?

As the above should indicate, the academies policy is complex. Part of the problem, in seeking to understand it, has been tracking goings-on through the thousands of trusts now operating across England, with details emerging through local developments, and the individual legal documents through which the trusts are governed.

However, more than 20 years after the policy's introduction, and with little good evidence of any great national transformation of results under academisation versus the alternative, it seems reasonable to call for a fresh look at it, from first principles.

Specifically, we should ask: is it right that control of state-funded schools can be handed to individuals, small groups of connected people or organisations wholesale? Should decision-makers be allowed to take decisions without being answerable to the people

affected by those decisions? Should decision-making mainly be in private? And are we really doing all we can to protect the interests of children which organisations might be incentivised not to help them?

In my view, the above questions answer themselves. Public funding of schools must surely come with public, locally answerable control of those institutions, and with the principle that decision-making must be in public, rather than in private.

Communities need a say over the schools they use and fund. At thousands of institutions, now educating the majority of children in England, this has been taken away from them. At the core of the story of England's academies policy is a deficit: a sense that control of schools has been made more remote from those they are meant to serve. As well as being wrong in itself, unsurprisingly for this government perhaps, this has been a recipe for cronyism and scandal.

The academies model was controversial enough as a vehicle for a small number of troubled schools. As the template for the entire state-funded sector, it is fundamentally flawed: as ethically dubious as it is practically problematic. This is a system crying out for systemic reform.

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MATS: 'IDEOLOGICAL STATE APPARATUS'

James Whiting, General Secretary SEA

The Marxist, Louis Althusser, saw education as part of the 'ideological state apparatus' which prepared the working class to accept a life of exploitation. Schools are seen as a mechanism to ensure the working class is kept in a state of 'false consciousness'. Many of us educators on the left conveniently park this idea. It gets in the way of our mission to use progressive education ideas to counter 'false consciousness' and give pupils the knowledge and skills they need to build a better world. Preferring Paolo Freire to Althusser we do not want to see the institutions we work in or more importantly the colleagues we work with as agents of social control.

Education in England is a forum for struggle between those who uncritically accept the edicts of the establishment and the teachers, students plus a very

small number of schools who challenge it. The way the National Curriculum has been reconfigured marginalises the knowledge and skills students need to promote change. Instead it focusses on 'the best that has been thought and said'. This turns out to be highly subjective and excludes the thinking of feminists, environmentalists, socialists and those who have been victims of imperialism and colonisation. Schools have always been responsible for the transmission of knowledge, values and culture which has the approval of the ruling class. However, pre-Gove there was space, depending on the school or local authority, for teachers to promote alternative perspectives. Vibrant arts curricula giving students the means to explore and communicate ideas, the inclusion of black poets and writers in English schemes of work, as well as alternative historical perspectives, were all part of the curriculum in some schools actively promoted by left leaning LEAs. Now multi-academy trusts act to promote the narrow and prescriptive curriculum put in place by Gove.

The balance of forces in the struggle has shifted very much towards the right. Why? The Tories have been aware for some time that the expansion in higher education under Blair was at least partly responsible for their poor polling among young people. James Kanagasooriam in a research paper for the Tories (Polling and the Conservative Loss of Political Ascendancy 2018) shows that the average age of Labour voters is decreasing (now 45) and that the average age of Conservative voters is rising (now 56). This cannot be good for them particularly when the proportion of educated people, who are less likely to vote Conservative, among the different age groups is so markedly different. 9% of people aged 25 to 34 have no qualifications where as a massive 53% of over 65s did not achieve any. 18% of over 65s have level 4 qualifications where as 44% of people aged 25 to 34 do. There is little doubt that the shift in tactics under Johnson to attract less educated working-class voters in ex industrial towns was because of this awareness. But an attack on the nature of education itself must also take place. First the Tories have to change the content of education to prevent engagement in topics for study which might persuade pupils that a better and fairer world might be possible. Esther Mcvey speaking on a panel at a Conservative gathering last September said, 'I think [it] needs to be removed from the whole educational system – a left-learning bias or an educational bias in the whole of the education platform.' Recent edicts telling schools not to use materials from 'anti-capitalist groups' and banning mock elections are evidence of their intent. Second the assessment system with its linear exams and grade rationing is designed to the limit numbers of young people going to university.

Far subtler is the marginalisation of standpoints critical of the record of capitalism on the environment

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and of cultural perspectives which affirm the identity of black and ethnic minority students. The failure to properly address gender equality too is now having profound consequences. This marginalisation has led to student protests in schools. It appears too that it is in the schools most allied to the right-wing ideological project, in the main academies, selective schools and even the private sector, where protests against oppression are the most prevalent.

First, the failure to properly address the climate crisis in the curriculum has been the cause of Friday strikes and the growth of student led groups in school such as Teach the Future entirely run by school students. By fragmenting aspects of the climate emergency across geography, science and beyond the DFE is prevent-

ing school students from getting a clear picture of the extent of the crisis and possible solutions to it. Iron-ic, when it is the generation in schools now who will experience the consequences of inaction. COP 26 is in doubt because of the pandemic. If it were to take place there is no doubt that young people who could now be criminalised because of the new anti-protest bill, will be organising demonstrations. As the restrictions around the pandemic lift, groups such as UK Student Climate Network and Teach the Future will organise again.

The murder of Sarah Everard prompted hundreds of testimonies from girls and young women outlining the sexual harassment, assault and rape they had been subjected to in schools. Evidence at first was from

students in the private sector in schools that had not always had a coeducational history. The extent of the abuse reveals school cultures in which male objectification of women and the subsequent abuse goes unchallenged. Complacency on the right has caused the growth of this culture against a background of increasing access to pornography by young males. Always suspicious of any course of study in schools which does not come under a subject banner and still harbouring a lingering prudery about explicit sexual content, right wing traditionalists have fought against the introduction of compulsory sex and relationships education. Finally, statutory guidance on RSE came out in 2019. It is weak on consent, the role of pornography, the power imbalance between the genders and is still not compulsory for all students. The testimonies on 'Everyone's Invited' have led to an outcry to which the DFE response is an investigation by OFSTED. Surely it will reveal what feminists have always argued. Girls must be empowered to tackle the culture of male objectification of women, sadly often brought into school by many boys, head on. Or Will it?

Part of the right's project has been to present Britain at the



centre of the liberal western cultural tradition which they see as inherently superior to any other. They have avoided the exploitation inherent in colonialism, and the brutality of the transatlantic slave trade in their version of history without which, the economic growth underpinning cultural development would not have happened. Hence, their curriculum now stripped of most black history and non-white writers, causes reactions like this from a year 13 South London student.

'The lack of diversity in the curriculum, especially as it relates to history and literature, was something that was so disheartening because, in my eyes, it was a refusal to acknowledge the presence and importance of black people in the history of the world, and the history of the UK in general. Having to continuously learn about the World Wars, whilst only featuring the contributions of white Britain and white America, effectively erased the contribution of black Americans and British soldiers from the Britain's colonies, without whom Britain would not have won the war. Additionally, the fact that the history of Britain's role in the Transatlantic Slave Trade is never comprehensively taught, that British Colonialism and British Empire is NEVER DISCUSSED, and that certain figures in British history are portrayed as heroes when their actions were in fact monstrous, is not only a disservice to the many black and non-black POC in UHS whose history and heritage were directly impacted by Transatlantic chattel slavery, British Colonialism and British Empire, it perpetuates the lies in books of history that Britain is innocent. Additionally, this propagandist manner of approaching history, and education in general, refuses to acknowledge how integral Black people have been to the construction of Britain as an economically and culturally relevant core state in world affairs.'

Protest from students in South London has erupted in academies and grammar schools. The highest profile of these has been the actions of students in Pimlico Academy (ironically previously an ILEA flagship) in protesting against racist hair rules, the flying of the Union Jack and the content of the curriculum. It is in this area the right is weakest. They hide behind a cloak of 'levelling up' and better opportunities for black and working-class students but either do nothing or actively work against this aim. Pimlico is run by Future Academies which in turn is run by Lord and Lady Nash, Tory peers.

Future Academies was established to improve the life chances of children through an education that is built on the importance of knowledge-rich teaching by subject experts and of raising the aspirations of all... A

knowledge-rich aspirational curriculum with a focus on cultural capital delivered by expert teachers is our raison d'être and is transforming the life chances of the children and young people in all our schools.

Warwick Mansell, Education Uncovered, has revealed what this means in practice. The notion of cultural capital here, prominent in the new OFSTED framework, means nothing less than a cultural whitewash. This happened literally in the Pimlico corridors where pictures of black achievers, including Tammy Abrahams a Chelsea player and alumnus, were removed and the walls whitewashed. No black perspectives in the curriculum have been allowed, including even Black History month. Instead students are subjected to a parade of white kings and queens masquerading as a history curriculum and worse the trust insists on, in the name of cultural capital, students learning all the Greek and Roman myths. These are presented in the most tedious prose and followed by the inevitable comprehension questions. Check out the website. All this is not surprising as the curriculum is devised by a group led by Lady Nash who is not a teacher and has no educational experience. The idea that by teaching such a curriculum the Pimlico students will be able to overcome the barriers to success they face and compete on level terms with private school students supposedly well versed in the classics, is a nonsense and a dangerous lie. The imposition of such a curriculum exposes a truth that those with power are imposing their white establishment view of the world on everyone else and that the notion of racial equality in our academized, marketised system is a myth. Future Academies are admittedly outliers but they are only making explicit what the Tory's education project is really all about. The academies system has enabled them to do it and stay at arm's length from the DFE. What is Nick Gibbs's view? He struggled in a recent petition committee hearing to justify the lack of a black perspective in the National Curriculum claiming the reason it was not laid down to give teachers more flexibility. Because of the academies system he does not have to take direct responsibility for the Pimlico debacle.

The academies and free schools programme were sold as a way of improving standards by encouraging innovation. There is a small minority of schools who have taken advantage of the programme to genuinely innovate. However, two thirds of free schools have been created by existing MATS. Rather than innovate, the CEOs of MATS have worked with the government to deliver the 'knowledge rich' curriculum, support the government's core content framework on pedagogy, advise OFSTED on its new framework to ensure schools comply and contribute to the CPD programme to 'improve teaching'. The resulting education school students receive is designed to control, by deliberately restricting access to alternative per-

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spectives in order to maintain Tory hegemony. Fortunately, school students and teachers are starting to fight back. The struggle will need a coherent strategy to not only change the content of education and the way it is delivered and assessed but to also deconstruct the state apparatus, in this case the semi-privatised academies, the Tories have created.

WHY LABOUR MUST EMBRACE STRUCTURAL CHANGE IN THE SCHOOL SYSTEM - AND WHY IT COULD BE GOOD POLITICS

John Bolt, SEA Executive

To reform education, you need control

At the ASCL conference in March, Kate Green gave some indications of where she wants to take Labour's education policy. Schools Week reported her saying that:

"I think very early on we would want to look at the nature of what teachers are doing in the classroom and how we can support and develop that professional expertise and incentivise and reward teachers for brilliant teaching and brilliant leadership," and that the party would "want to look at the content of what's happening in schools and make sure that it is preparing children for that unpredictable but exciting future that I was talking about. And I think it would be about really embedding broader wellbeing in the ethos of the education system, as a pre-requisite for successful learning." Labour will also look at "what's going on in schools, curriculum, the means by which we assess children and young people. Exams are important, but last year we saw what happens when you have nothing to fall back on." She acknowledged that "social inequalities could not be addressed by schools alone, adding that lifting children out of poverty will be among the party's priorities."

While there is little detail here, as a direction of travel there are indications of a willingness to consider alternatives to the Govian model that has dominated

the scene since 2010 – symbolised perhaps by the removal of "children" and "families" from the title of his department.

What is missing however is any response to the issues raised by Warwick Mansell in the first article in this issue of Education Politics. Ever since the 1990's, when Labour has talked about schools, it has tended to fall back on the mantra of "standards not structures". That position can be summarised as:

"What matters is great teachers and leaders, with moral purpose, who are committed to improving the life chances of young people. Governments always fiddle around with structures because they can but it never makes more than a marginal difference. The quality of teaching and leading is key. No one wants to be distracted by more massive reorganisations"

Some have bought into the myth that academies – sometimes in expensive new buildings – have made a difference to standards – a classic case of confusing anecdote with data. Some academies have improved and some have got worse. The same is true for maintained schools. There is no demonstrable link between academy status and standards.

It was and is SEA's view that the Labour government went in the wrong direction in relation to school structures. But looking back, Tony Blair had no doubt that structures mattered. In his memoirs, he wrote:

"We had come to power in 1997 saying it was 'standards not structures' that mattered. In other words we were saying: forget about complex, institutional structural reforms; what counts is what works, and by that we meant outputs. This was fine as a piece of rhetoric; and positively beneficial as a piece of politics. Unfortunately, as I began to realise, it was bunkum as a piece of policy. The whole point is that structures beget standards. How a service is configured affects outcomes."

Much more recently Jake Richards & George Peretz wrote on Labourlist:

"as anyone who has spent any time in Labour Party politics should know, questions about rules are questions about power – and the left, surely, must always pursue an agenda to ensure that power is in the hands of the many, not the few"

The bottom line is, you won't achieve the change that you want unless you take control of the structures. Otherwise, Tory structures and the Tory people embedded in them will get in the way. So, for example:

- If you make schools compete for market share and then let them set their own admissions policy, you get a hierarchy of schools and disadvantaged pupils lose out.

- If you have a vision for a broader and more ambitious curriculum, you won't deliver it if schools can opt out of the National Curriculum and if key system leaders don't support your aims.

Warwick's article – and even more his website “Education Uncovered” – give chapter and verse about how Tory ideology and corruption is embedded in the education service by the academy system.

More important than the obvious scandals, is how Gove and Gibb's true believers in the knowledge-based curriculum and no excuses behaviour management are embedded in Ofsted and in the DfE. One of the obvious advantages to Tories of the academy trust system is that most of them are run by their ideological bed-fellows. Troublesome Labour local authorities whose vision might be different are sidelined. Tory outriders in the think tanks and the supposedly independent working parties use social media ruthlessly and have succeeded in shifting the educational Overton window so that their highly partisan views are now seen as unchallengeable mainstream wisdom.

Labour has to make a choice – either accept this state of affairs and allow it to frustrate its ambitions for fairer and more inclusive education fit of the 21st century or develop a strategy to challenge and overcome the Tories' established order in the interests of all our children.

There is actually a growing consensus that the education system currently is a mess. The bizarre mixture of centralisation with the DfE trying to micro-manage 20,000 schools while devolving control over them to over a thousand separate private companies and individuals was always a recipe for chaos - and the flailing attempts of the DfE to manage the educational implications of covid have made this all too clear

But since 2010, this has been a nettle that many in Labour have been reluctant to grasp. It may be fair enough to argue that school

structures aren't the kind of issue that will drive people to the polling station. It may even be true that in many areas, few people know or care much about how schools are run. They like their local school regardless of its formal status and don't want to see it messed about with.

But Labour needs to work as hard as Gove did to re-design our school system. In 2010, the Tories came into office with the ground well prepared and clearly understanding that they needed to break the institutions that would otherwise get in their way. This is still going on – we are now seeing an onslaught on initial teacher education designed to embed their benighted educational vision. If it is not prepared to do the same, all the ambitions a Labour government might have will run into a brick wall of structural and ideological resistance.

Crucially, this doesn't have to be an issue to be scared of. It actually need not be as complicated as people think. And there are ways in which reforming the school system can contribute to Labour's wider critique of Tory Britain and can mesh with the broad thrust of policy for 2024. Here are two suggestions:

Tory Cronyism

We have seen in the year of covid that cronyism is a way of life for these Tories with perhaps even less



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shame that amongst their predecessors. The fast-track VIP channel giving donors and Hancock's mate down the pub privileged access to many millions of PPE contracts is probably the most horrendous example and is one that hopefully will still see the light of day in the courts. But this is only the tip of the iceberg. Another is the blatant "pork-barrel" politics practiced by the Communities department as it channels funding to Tory seats regardless of the level of need. Then there was the Desmond planning deal saving a Tory donor £43 million which should have gone to one of London's poorest boroughs.

A prime target has been the BBC. The new Chair is a large party donor. The Director General was a Tory council candidate and activist. Now Johnson is telling the BBC it is "pretty detached from its viewers and listeners and I hope they move more into line."

The school system can make a powerful contribution to this narrative. The story of the academy project is riddled with waste, corruption and the abuse of power. Warwick Mansell's article documents some of the more egregious case studies. There are many more such as Durand Academy, Perry Barr and the Bradford King's Science Academy which cost taxpayers millions and ended with the disgrace of supposed "super-heads"

Throughout the public service, deregulation leads inevitably to abuse. So not surprisingly, the gap between school leader and teacher salaries is one of the widest in the world.

Tories would have us believe that this is just about a few rotten apples. But looking across the whole public sector, it is clearly something more. It's about profit, of course. It's also about power and how unaccountable individuals and companies are imposing their values on public

services. A start has been made in challenging this cronyism, especially in the outsourcing and health sectors. It's time for education to join in.

Decentralisation and Devolution

For years now, Westminster politicians (of all parties) have regarded local government with patronising contempt. And, of course, as something you can cut while avoiding the blame. Covid however has shown up very clearly that trying to run everything from Whitehall is a recipe for disaster. Test and Trace is the obvious example. But the truly pathetic attempts by the DfE to micro-manage everything from how individual schools should manage covid through free meal vouchers and the distribution of laptops to the chaotic national tutoring scheme should have taught us that the centralisation that has been the norm for 30 or more years has had its day.

The core of the case for reforming school structures is not about closing good schools or about tying head-teachers up with huge reorganisations. It's about taking power away from the centre and returning it to local communities. This is firmly in line with what Labour is saying (or at least edging towards) in other contexts but for some reason education has never been part of the devolution debate.

Local communities ought to decide what kind of schools they want and should have the first responsibility for making sure they work well. The culture of making schools bid for short term pots of DfE funding and parachuting in centrally designed projects



Illustration by Polly Donnison

without any understanding of local circumstances needs to end. Decisions need to be taken in the full light of public scrutiny, not behind closed doors by the likes of Regional Commissioners beholden only to ministers in London.

There is an increasing awareness in England of regional inequality. Labour's regional leaders are making that case powerfully and their message is cutting through. Shifting a few civil servants to the north is not an answer while decisions are still made in London. There is a real sense that this is an issue that is gaining serious traction and that resentment of centralised power is an increasingly strong driver that Labour should embrace and turn to its political and electoral advantage.

Conclusion

What Labour needs to offer at the next election is a comprehensive programme for political and constitutional reform. It needs to:

- restore basic decency to the public sector across the board
- end the politicisation of public services and
- find new ways of empowering local communities.

As one of our essential services that does so much to shape the kind of society we want to be, education cannot be left out of this process.

ACADEMISATION IN 2021

Kevin Courtney, NEU, Joint General Secretary

More than 76% of secondary schools are academies and the number of primary schools that are academies is now approaching 40%. The government seems unlikely to push legislation for a total academisation but will continue to use the tools at their disposal which will lead to increasing numbers of schools becoming academies.

Labour's Shadow Secretary of State for Education, Kate Green observes that when she talks to Labour Party general meetings there is almost always a question about whether Labour is pledging to reverse academisation. But when she talks to general meetings of parents, unless they are specifically an anti-academy meeting, the question practically never gets raised.

What is behind this disjuncture and what should we say and do about it?

Firstly, many of the problems associated with academisation are also associated with the high-stakes accountability system and current levels of school autonomy for ALL schools. So, for example, whilst there is some evidence that academy schools exclude children more than others, there are many non-academy schools which feel the same competitive pressures which also leads to much off-rolling.

Secondly, although there is evidence that academy schools pay teachers less, on average, and school leaders more, probably as a result of academies having a greater staff turnover, that is also a feature of many other schools as they cope with the same competitive pressures. There is some statistical evidence of lower teacher pay probably being associated with greater turnover and younger staff.

Thirdly, the number of scandals around finance and cronyism is growing but has had limited reporting and has not dramatically influenced public opinion; and there are also some examples in LA schools under local management of schools.

Fourthly, the number of democratic outrages where schools have been re-brokered with no consultation is large, but many parents feel so isolated from their school and so divorced from the running of it under normal circumstances that it doesn't appear to them to be a problem in many cases.

Fifthly, although Academy schools have the freedom to move away from national terms and conditions (such as they are) at the moment few have done so.

Sixthly, because the government isn't legislating it gets away with not defining the end state of the system:

- If they were saying every school in the country has to join one of 10 or 20 or 30 huge geographically spread mats that would lead to strong political disagreements.
- However, when they present it as school, or headteacher choosing to cooperate with other schools – it is harder to see the broader political problems
- And after all when local authorities have been so denuded the positive alternative of having a strong LA is absent in many areas of the country.

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All of these points should remind us of the adage of someone falling off a skyscraper and as they pass the third floor saying “its all going well so far”.

Despite the seeming lack of concern at the individual school level there is still a good deal of agreement that our objections to this model of school structures is absolutely right.

We can be confident that the consequences of academisation, high-stakes accountability, of the market-place, are having profound and far-reaching effects.

This “market system” leads to chief executives thinking of their schools’ interests more and individual children’s interests less. After all, it is so much easier to change a schools results by changing the children who attend the school than by supporting the improvement of teaching and learning at the school.

In these circumstances MAT chief executives can start to think of their schools interests as an institution, denying places to children who won’t get good results, prioritising those who will already do well. Then in some cases those chief executives can claim that the success of those students is their success and even suggest that they should be paid more as a result.

So, we should support groups of parents and staff who are opposing academisation, point to the problems caused by academisation when we see them, whilst continuing to support our members and the children who attend those schools.

We should campaign for an national education system organised democratically in local areas.

But we should also campaign for changes to the system now:

There are simple measures that could be put forward that eat away at the competitive logic, undermining the negative effects of academisation.

We should work for Labour and other parties to put forward a program of rules and responsibilities that should apply to all state funded schools such as:

1. NATIONAL RULES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

RESPONSIBILITY All state funded schools should have responsibility to consult parents over their curriculum offer and the freedom to adapt a more expansive national curriculum to meet local interests and circumstances.

REGULATION All state funded schools* should follow national terms and conditions for teachers and support staff; these should include terms and conditions for executive heads and Chief Executive’s pay.

2. LOCAL RULES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

RESPONSIBILITY Local authorities should have responsibility and power to build new schools as needed; which should be allowed to be local authority schools.

REGULATION Local authorities should control the admissions, exclusions and appeals process for state funded schools. Local authorities should provide facility release for elected trade union officers to represent members in all schools in the district.

3. SCHOOL LEVEL RULES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

RESPONSIBILITIES Academy schools should have a legal responsibility to fully consult parents over decisions of changing MAT and the freedom, following governing body resolutions and consultation with parents, to revert to LA status or to leave the MAT that they have been placed in.

REGULATION There should be increased regulation and guidance on state funded schools contracting with organisations that have close family or friend relationships with governors or senior staff at the school.

These rules and regulations would ensure that schools and MATs did not compete by driving down staff terms and conditions or by rigging the pupil population. Allowing schools to leave MATS if they felt that is right for them would mean that MATS like WCAT couldn’t not get away as easily with their disgraceful behaviour. Allowing LAs to open new local authority schools would mean there wasn’t such a sense of the “only game in town”.

*including independent special schools that are funded through taxpayer council tax-payer

RESTORING A DEMOCRATICALLY ACCOUNTABLE SCHOOL SYSTEM

At the 2018 Conference, Labour announced that it would “consult on and establish a new regulatory framework for schools. This would bring schools

within the principles of the National Education Service, and ensure that all schools follow the same rules, with schools being regulated by statute, rather than thousands of individual contracts". This statement left open the exact processes by which this change would be brought about. This statement sets out how the SEA proposes that the party should implement this pledge.

This statement, written in early 2019, sets out how the SEA proposed that the party should implement this pledge. We believe that it still provides a road-map towards a properly democratically accountable school system.

First Steps

Initially, a Labour Secretary of State should announce that they will make no new academy orders and will cease the free school programme. That would mean that the responsibility for making proposals for new schools would revert exclusively to local authorities (for more detail on proposed local authority structures, see below). This would have the effect of freezing the system but would not of itself restore a democratically accountable school system. To do this will require primary legislation. It will also be important to legislate in order to make the reversal of these policies by any future government more difficult.

The key elements of an initial Schools Act would be:

1. Repeal the requirement on local authorities to seek academy proposals when planning a new school

This requirement dates from 2011. The new act should require all new schools to be maintained schools. The local authority must be the decision maker in relation to all new schools. This is the only way of avoiding the waste and confusion that has bedevilled the free school programme.

2. Remove the power of the Secretary of State to create any new academies.

This would end the DfE run free school programme. It would also remove the ability of any future Secretary of State to approve any conversions to academy status.

3. Take the power to issue regulations which will have the effect of over-riding the funding agreements of existing academies and multi academy trusts

This would enable the Secretary of State to establish a "common rule book" for all schools regardless of their formal status. Regulations would cover areas such as staff pay and conditions, teacher qualifications and the National Curriculum. There are already precedents for this approach covering SEND and exclusions. Once the statutory power is in place, these regulations could be put in place over time to ensure that the process is manageable.

4. Take the power to impose a new governance framework on all multi-academy trusts

The new framework should require MATs to establish governing bodies in all schools and to devolve to them powers comparable to those held by maintained school governing bodies – so covering areas such as staffing, finance and curriculum. Governing Bodies should be representative of the whole school community and not controlled by MAT appointees. Schools should have the right to leave a MAT and to return to maintained status.

5. Make the local authority the admission author-



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ity for all schools

Currently too many schools use their control of admission criteria to covertly select a more favourable intake. Local authorities should set, after consultation (including with faith authorities), admission criteria for all schools and should be required to use this power to reduce the differences in intakes between schools. The Admissions Code would need changing to reflect the new system and priorities

6. Ban all related party transactions

Much of the financial mismanagement and corruption found in some academies relates to commercial deals with businesses connected to staff or governors. There should be an outright ban on such transactions. Managers in some academies and MATs are paid too much in relation to other staff. Clear salary banding for managers should be re-established, setting ceiling salary levels and nationally agreed pay and conditions for all staff should apply to all education providers.

Reformed Local Authorities

One key issue is whether NES structures should be single issue organisations – as is for example much of the NHS – or whether it should be part of broader multi-purpose organisations. SEA would argue that the NHS model illustrates the flaws in the single issue model. Problems in NHS collaboration with local authority services – especially social care – have been a huge obstacle to effective service provision. A simple matter like inconsistent boundaries between local authorities, and NHS bodies make collaboration more difficult. NHS decision making is excessively centralised and the level of local community input is inadequate.

It is also the case that single issue bodies, such as NHS trusts, without their own democratic mandate, find it next to impossible to stand up to pressure from central government.

SEA therefore would argue that education should be integrated into the overall local government framework. It needs to be linked not just to health but to areas such as economic development, housing and sports and leisure services. There is a strong case for a radical reform of the current local authority structure and much of the detail will depend on whether there is a wish to restructure devolved government in England more broadly. But whatever the exact structure, managing the school system should be based on the democratic mandate of elected local authorities.

Therefore we propose that:

Labour should establish a national network of local authorities with responsibility for education that have the necessary size and capacity to undertake

the strategic management of all parts of the NES. A significant number of current local authorities are too small for this purpose. Labour should define a minimum size and capacity for the delivery of education services while recognising that for some purposes large local authorities may need to work through sub-divisions. All such authorities should be co-terminous with one or more existing local authorities that have responsibility for education. To minimise disruption, we should be open to the use of existing systems such as combined authorities, metro mayors and joint committees as appropriate.

The workings of local authorities need to be more open and should facilitate the active participation of staff, learners and members of the wider community. Each local authority will establish an education committee or board which will empower both councillors and elected (where possible) representatives of the range of stakeholders in education to fully participate in decision making. There should also be the opportunity for the wider community to participate in a range of open forums where issues can be debated and proposals tested.

Local authorities and all schools should be committed to open and transparent staffing procedures. There should be a commitment throughout the system to developing a more diverse workforce and to reducing and ultimately removing inequalities between different groups of staff.

The government should take the necessary statutory powers to set out in regulations and statutory guidance the responsibilities of reformed local authorities in relation to all schools in their area. The new Education Act should require that these regulations apply equally to all schools. It should establish local authorities as the regulatory body, primary central service provider and commissioner for all educational institutions in their area. The government must commit to adequate funding of local authorities including reversing the abolition of the Education Support Grant. The key local authority responsibilities should be:

School Organisation

Making sure there are the right number of school places in the right locations and that the nature of those schools is appropriate to local circumstances.

Managing school admissions including setting admission criteria for all schools.

Establishing an Early Years Partnership to ensure the availability for all of the full range of high quality early years opportunities and support;

Co-ordinate post 16 provision across schools and colleges to ensure that the full range of courses is available in ways that are both cost-effective and

accessible to all based on the provision of independent careers advice and guidance.

School Accountability

- Monitoring school performance, financial management and governance and intervening to address poor performance or inadequate governance. This should emphasise the positive provision of advice and support rather than the current punitive model. Local authorities should work in collaboration with a reformed national inspectorate which should replace the current Ofsted structure. School improvement should be based on schools working collaboratively to share ideas and to learn from one another.



School Support

Agreeing with schools a local funding formula which conforms to nationally determined criteria and the needs of individual schools. Strictly determining every school's budget in Whitehall is unworkable, inevitably crude and unable to respond to local circumstances.

Providing adequate essential support services locally for schools including educational advice, SEND support and back office services while recognising the right of schools to draw on a wider range of expertise and support.

Encouraging collaboration between schools, including clustering by location, sector and/or specialisation as appropriate.

Providing a local framework for sharing good practice and professional development;

Supporting Vulnerable Pupils

Ensuring the needs of all vulnerable pupils are met including those with SEND, those excluded from schools and looked after children.

Managing a fair access system for ensuring schools share the responsibility for working with challeng-

ing and vulnerable pupils. This could include collectively providing SEN resource centres and alternative provision;

Community Development

The promotion of greater equality in all parts of the school system.

Co-ordinating the involvement of parents and the wider community and championing the rights of all children and young people and their families including addressing complaints.

Co-ordinating the provision of pre/ after school care and out of school activities;

There would be no place for Regional School Commissioners and a much reduced role for the Education and Skills Funding Agency. It could be that RSCs are charged with supporting, in the short term, the process of establishing an effective and modernised local authority network.

Conclusion

If these actions were taken by an incoming government, they would have the effect of:

Establishing a consistent set of regulations, approved by Parliament, covering all schools.

Restoring the autonomy of schools where this has been lost to MATs and empowering schools

to determine for themselves how they want to work together within a national regulatory framework.

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Ensuring that decisions about the school system are taken by democratically accountable bodies through open and transparent procedures.

Modernising and democratising the workings of local government in relation to schools and to education more broadly.

Given that schools have experienced excessive disruption over decades due to ill-considered government policies and legislation, it is important that, although the overall direction of travel will be clear from day 1 of a Labour government, education providers and local authorities are given sufficient time and resources to phase in these changes.

DEFEND AND EXTEND DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION POLICY

Melanie Griffiths, Chair SEA

Democracy is ultimately about accountability. The current model of education in the UK was deliberately built around the claim that schools, colleges and universities will be accountable through a mixture of competition and accountability to ‘stakeholders’: an incoherent and fragmentary form of ‘market democracy’. This has proved to be a failure right across the piece and failed to deliver successful outcomes for students, parents, educators and the wider community. Sadly, the Neo-liberal agenda, which developed piecemeal over decades was promoted by Labour and well as Conservative and Liberal democrat politicians. So, it was a major democratic step forward when the 2019 Labour Party conference made clear that it would want an incoming Labour government to:

- Stop all academisations and the opening of academies and free schools
- Ensure Local Authorities establish reformed, democratically accountable local education committees with stakeholder representation.
- Ensure all publicly funded schools be brought back under the control of these new local education committees.
- Ensure the newly empowered local education committees will be the default providers of services and will be appropriately funded.

These demands are the key to beginning to develop a truly comprehensive National Education Service.

We need to be clear that realistically no other progressive reforms can be achieved nationally without simultaneously reversing the structural changes made since the Education Act was passed in 1988, and a complete programme of nationalisation and democratisation is implemented in schools, colleges, universities, central service providers and local authorities. It will be a massive undertaking for an incoming Labour Government and in order to achieve it the Labour Party and all those who want to see a truly comprehensive national education system need to work to change the accepted narrative of the last 30 years.

It’s at best lazy to say, as some have, that parents/the public don’t want this change and so the Labour Party are just going to accept structures as they are and try to work within them. The Labour Party needs to be proactive and show why structural change is necessary and have a coherent realistic plan. In November last year Wes Streeting said “In my constituency I’ve got local authority schools, free schools, academies, I’ve got a grammar school, I’ve got independent schools that aren’t far away – and the interesting thing is, whether I am walking into a local authority school or a free school or an academy, the name above the door matters less than what goes on inside the building.” But of course, anyone who has had anything to do with the school system over the last couple of decades understands that without proper regulation and democratic accountability we can’t really know or influence what does go on behind that school gate.

The 1988 Education Act began the process of simultaneously centralising and deregulating the education system. While government rhetoric applauds the freedom deregulation affords, by centrally controlling funding and so called “standards” through OFSTED and league tables, innovation, cooperation and teacher professionalism has actually been stifled. By forcing schools to compete against each other for pupils by linking funding to pupil numbers rather than need, introducing league tables and so called “parental choice” deregulation means that the curriculum will more often than not be tailored by management to maximise results rather than actually providing a balanced and satisfying curriculum that develops each pupil’s self-esteem and encourages every child to maximise their potential and love of learning.

Parents need to be made aware of this. They need to know that deregulation means that headteachers can cut costs by employing cheap inexperienced or unqualified “teachers” while funds meant for frontline educational services are actually wasted on excessive “benefits” for managers working in the school system or consultants providing services privately to schools which could easily be provided in house through local authority organised provision. Only by bringing

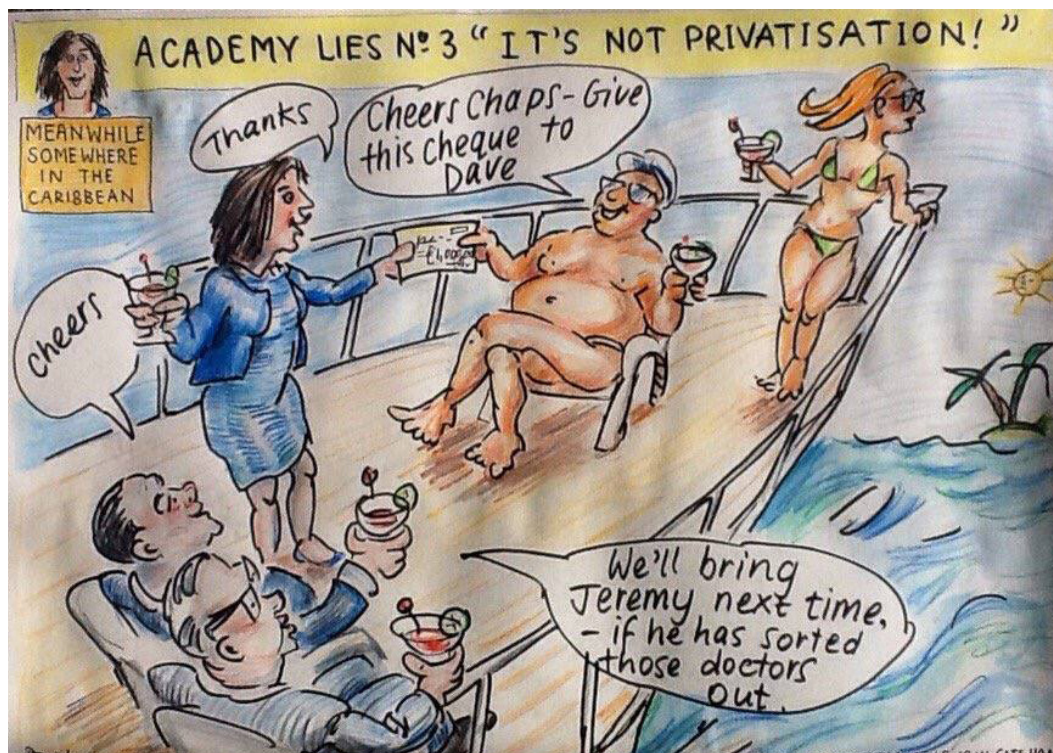


Illustration by Polly Donnison

all educational provision back into the remit of democratically reformed local authorities would the public have transparency on funding, ensure a return to nationally negotiated pay and conditions for school staff and ensure a properly qualified teacher in every classroom.

So, in the lead up to the next general election the LP needs to be changing the narrative and demonstrating to the public why these changes need to be made but in tandem with this they need to be developing a coherent and staged strategy to achieve these changes. It will not be possible to reverse 30 years of structural change overnight or rebuild the capacity and expertise which used to exist in the local education authorities, or develop a more responsive form of democratic oversight within Local Authorities. But just because the structural changes needed will be difficult to achieve doesn't mean they are not absolutely necessary.

Some time ago the Socialist Education Association (SEA) working with academic and legal experts produced a paper "Restoring a democratically accountable school system" which sets out a coherent plan for schools to break free of multi-academy trusts and return to the local authority. If implemented this would be a great first step but in itself would not be not enough. As the root problems can be traced back to the structure of school governance and procurement created by the 1988 Act the Labour Party need to build on this work instigated by the SEA and plan how to develop, fund and empower truly democratically accountable Local Authorities who will be the default provider of school services so schools no longer need to buy in services from private companies.

Funding, training and resource allocation will need to be provided to ensure that Local Authorities can build up the skills and know-how needed. The creation of newly empowered Local Authority Education Committees would enable a reforming Labour government to improve and democratise the education service, tackle profiteering and waste and promote social inclusion and equality.

In addition to establishing local democratic oversight a truly forward-thinking Labour Party needs also to plan for democratisation of

the workplace too. Education workers, especially classroom teachers have a unique contribution to make to the school decision making process and school structures should facilitate this. The Labour Party need to show how schools will be facilitated to move away from the CEO and tick box model and become vibrant, innovative workplaces where teacher's professionalism is respected and used. Governing bodies should be truly representative of the school community and have genuine oversight of the work going on in individual schools, supported by a well-resourced and expert local education authority.

The Labour Party needs to have the will to maintain and build on the education policies passed at the 2019 party conference, be bold enough to tackle the accepted narrative of the past decades and present a vision of an National Education Service which not only provides a route to academic success but helps all individuals to gain self-esteem, job satisfaction, understand their civic responsibility and lead healthy, productive lives.

This is a moment of decision for the Labour Party. Will it return to the existing orthodoxies and seek to appease dominant vested interests such as academy chain CEOs, public sector bureaucrats and business groups; or, will it continue along the progressive path established in 2019? Given the abandonment by the current leadership of numerous "pledges" the signs are not good but nevertheless it is essential that we learn the lessons of the past few decades of failure and develop policies that put equality, transparency and democracy at their centre.

REVIEW: HOW TO DISMANTLE THE ENGLISH STATE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN 10 EASY STEPS

**BY TERRY EDWARDS AND CARL PARSONS,
ZERO BOOKS, £10 (£8 TO SEA MEMBERS)**

Ian Duckett, SEA NEC

There is a new education order. Of that there is no doubt. Written in anger and some hope, *How to Dismantle the English State Education System in 10 Easy Steps* by Terry Edwards and Carl Parsons documents this new order tells the story of the takeover of England's schools by the powerful academising machine, which, in collaboration with a neo-liberal (or worse) government to recast the educational landscape.

As England's school system is catapulted into a new and dominated by Chief Executives of Multi Academy Trusts on bankers' salaries, imposing an ever-narrowing curriculum, regimes led by vested interests in favour of the few; not the many and resting on standards that must be achieved even if at the expense of teacher morale, poor service to special needs, off-rolling of students, mass exclusions - and in the face of an absolute lack of evidence that this privatised system works.

How is it to be done? Why in the 10 "easy steps" of course. These being: "embrace the third way"; "rub-bish the management of state schools"; "cut budgets to local authorities and direct the money elsewhere"; "broadcast data about state schools failing"; "sing the praises of 'standards not structures'"; "screw the vocational curriculum and make it more 'scholarly'"; "pay the few more and care much less"; "out-source slickly with relaxed attitudes to friends and relations winning contracts – sailing close to the wind"; "promote lean national oversight by government agencies" and "forget democracy and local responsibility for schools." All tried and tested by the carpet-baggers and loved and trusted by the off-rollers.

How to Dismantle the English State Education System in 10 Easy Steps, though perhaps too heavily laced with irony in places, is a good read for socialist educators and a timely reminder of how we got into this awful academised world of pirates and carpet-baggers as the SEA launches its Give us Back our Schools Campaign.

SOCIALIST EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION - MEMBERSHIP FORM

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