

Campaign for Real Education

www.cre.org.uk

“Freedom to teach, freedom to learn, freedom to choose”

Chairman: Chris McGovern

Vice Chairmen: Jennifer Chew OBE, Jacqui Davies, Katie Ivens

Secretary: Dr Anthony Freeman

Treasurer: Priya Dutta

NEWSLETTER

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The past few months have been a period of upheaval, not only in terms of education nationally but also for the Campaign for Real Education. The loss of our Treasurer, Dr Vera Dalley, followed by the death of our Secretary and former Chairman, Nick Seaton, has caused real sadness. Nevertheless, the CRE has been able to reorganise and regenerate. We welcome Dr Anthony Freeman as our new Secretary and Priya Dutta as our new Treasurer. Both Anthony and Priya bring a wealth of experience and talent, built on classroom teaching and expertise in a range of other areas. The CRE is in capable hands and it will continue to be an honest and necessary voice to challenge an educational establishment that is, too often, self-serving and a guardian of vested interest.

Over the years our Newsletters have been sent out in ‘hard copy’ to several thousand supporters. If you would like to continue receiving a ‘hard copy’ please contact our Treasurer, Priya Dutta, preferably by e-mail: priyadutta@hotmail.com .

Alternatively, please telephone (07701 088720) and leave a voicemail, mentioning the address to which you would like future Newsletters to be sent.

Otherwise, the Newsletter will be available to read on our website in the early part of each January, April, July and October.

National Curriculum Proposals

We welcome the broad thrust of the new curriculum, however imperfect some of the detail. The abolition of the 9-level model of progression in each subject removes a strait jacket that distorts both subject teaching and subject assessment. Real progress in learning is dependent on firm knowledge and understanding of a subject’s building blocks and the proposals move us in that direction. A real strength is that, largely, they set out, in a simple and concise form, ‘what’ should be taught but they leave it to teachers to decide ‘how’ to teach. This should help end the dependency culture that has dominated schools in recent decades. It will encourage teachers to think for themselves and to be more than simply ‘facilitators’ of a single ‘best practice’ such as the failed ‘real books’ method of teaching children to read. Ultimately, of course, the success or failure of any curriculum depends on the quality of the teachers. In turn,

this is tied to teacher training. Ominously, a letter to the *Daily Telegraph* (20/3/2013) from many of the country's leading professors of education has attacked the new proposals for promoting memory at the expense of what they term "the ability to think". Their failure to admit that any depth of thinking is dependent on a depth of knowledge perfectly illustrates why too many children get a raw deal from our education system. Faced with such entrenched opposition our advice to the Government is that the success of the new curriculum will depend on the quality of its assessment.

Changes to GCSEs

The Government has retreated from its plan to restore a rigorous O-Level style examination. This is regrettable but was, probably, inevitable once the Secretary of State was pushed into agreeing to a single all-ability 16+ exam. It is simply not possible to have a single exam for all abilities. In Singapore, with its high educational standards, 80% of pupils take O-Level but 20% take a second tier exam. A two-tier exam system seems unacceptable to our politicians. The losers will be, as so often, the most able pupils. Of course, what we really need is a multi-tiered exam system that caters for all pupils, of all abilities, in all areas of the curriculum – both academic and vocational. In the short term, a simple step forward would be for our current 'ban' on O-Levels to be lifted in order that our children have the same access to this rigorous exam as children abroad. Instead, we are to have a re-vamped GCSE, largely protected from competition. The national agency for comparison of qualifications (NARIC) equates a grade C in the Hong Kong 16+ exam with a grade A at GCSE.

History

The CRE's Alternative National Curriculum for History has been sent to every school in the country. It incorporates the best features of the Government's draft proposals but offers a richer diet of history, especially at Key Stage 1 (ages 5 to 7). Academies, free schools and independent schools are free to adopt it. It can be accessed on our website: [www.cre.org.uk/docs/History-National-Curriculum\(Alternative\).pdf](http://www.cre.org.uk/docs/History-National-Curriculum(Alternative).pdf).

Recommended publication

Twenty-two Things Excellent Schools Do by Dr Jo Saxton

"Achieving best practice in the classroom need not be about social advantage or class size, nor is it derived from well-appointed or extensive facilities. Rather, it comes from a school's commitment, and that of individual teachers, to knowledge and learning."

This inspirational conclusion from Dr Saxton serves as a reminder that educational excellence need not be the preserve of the elite. Her extensive research into what she terms the 'DNA' of independent schools has identified a core set of educational

approaches that are grounded in what actually works in highly successful schools. An in-depth survey of the day-to-day operation of seven outstanding schools reveals that it is the culture of the ‘primacy of knowledge’ that is the commonality between them: “Through everything ran the understanding that education was first about *content*, and only then about *skills*.”

Among the successful strategies identified are:

- specialist teaching to emphasise the importance of knowledge and its expert dissemination
- clear timetabling of subjects and longer school days than are usual in the maintained sector
- early introduction of reading using approaches such as synthetic phonics
- regular, and promptly marked, homework in Maths and English
- front-facing individual desks and fostering an atmosphere of supportive competition.

Such ideas seem intrinsic to many outstanding schools and it is very encouraging to have these approaches supported by independent research.

The report is clearly laid out and written in a jargon-free and accessible style. It should be read by every educational professional and, indeed, by anyone interested in educational reform.

Priya Dutta

This publication is available from Temple Grove Schools Trust: www.templegrove.org.uk .

It can be read on line at:

www.templegrove.org.uk/temple-grove-schools-trust/twenty-two-things.aspx .

Mnemonics

by Andy Salmon (aka Sir Linkalot)

“The use of pithy mnemonics to commit something to memory has been around for centuries. “Richard of York gave battle in vain” is a classic example and I feel this extremely powerful technique, ‘*linking*’, has been hugely overlooked. In 2008, I launched www.thinkalink.co.uk, which is a fun and easy way to remember any fact, whether it be the year Joan of Arc was burnt at the stake, the meaning of the word ‘culpable’ or how to spell the old classic ‘onomatopoeia’.

Members of the public can give a mark out of 10 for each link and if they think they can do better, they submit their own. All that is required to play is an imagination.

Admirers of Thinkalink include Michael Gove (see clip below), David Laws (“I’m all for giving teachers freedom to teach and this free resource encourages it.”) and the British Dyslexia Association that thinks a spelling technique I have dubbed '*Letter Linking*' is ground breaking.”

See the BBC News South East clip:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LI3bR8H8Cqw> .

Biography: Andy Salmon has presented to 60,000 children and 3,000 teachers at 75 state and independent schools (Reception to Sixth Form). He is the author of two books '*Think of a Link*' (Scholastic) and '*Thinkalink*' (The School Run). andy.salmon@thinkalink.co.uk .

Snippets

“Rising scores in secondary maths examinations in England over the past 30 years do not appear to stem from real increases in mathematical understanding, according to a major research study from King’s College London, published today.”

(King’s College London website, “News”, 24/9/2012)

“...Richard was a member of the House of Lancaster. His rival from the House of York was Henry Tudor...”

(Times Educational Supplement 4/2/2013. History lesson plan for teachers entitled "Today's news, tomorrow's lesson... Richard III factfile..."

Richard III was a Yorkist and Henry Tudor was an opponent of the House of York!)

“In 1940, on average, boys from every background were reading six books a month and girls over seven.”

(Michael Gove, speech to the Social Market Foundation, 5/2/2013):

www.smf.co.uk/media/news/michael-gove-speaks-smf/ .

“The Special Education Needs and Disability Tribunal said the school’s failure was ‘beyond comprehension’ and the case had revealed ‘grave concerns about management and safeguarding at the school’ as well as ‘systematic failures’...

Last year the school was classified as outstanding by Ofsted, the schools inspection service.”

(Sunday Times 24/3/2013)

“Kent County Council is enlisting expert help to tutor primary school teachers in preparation for the introduction of a new English exam for 11-year-olds later this year.”

(Daily Telegraph 29/3/2013)