

Campaign for Real Education

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

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Newsletter

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Editorial

Since our last newsletter the storm of debate around education has, if anything, intensified. At the time of writing the union conferences are preparing to meet and it is clear that school budgets and grammar schools will be high on the agenda. Justine Greening, the education secretary, is mistaken if she believes that lowering the ‘pass’ grade for GCSE and abolishing SATs for 7 year-olds will buy peace with the educational establishment.

Fortunately, we have a prime minister who appears to understand that, unless we wish to become even more reliant on skilled immigrant labour in order to meet the challenges of post-Brexit Britain, the school system needs to up its game rather a lot.

Forget the self-congratulation from Ofsted and the schools minister about almost 90 per cent of English schools now being "good" or "outstanding". This delusional and hubristic redefinition of the English language may have the effect of making us feel better but it has no part play in evaluating how well we are really doing on the only stage that matters, the international one. We need some honesty.

The OECD has made clear that the UK is, at best, stagnating in

terms of educational standards. True, reforms in England have pushed pupil attainment standards ahead of Scotland and Wales, but these two parts of the UK seem to have an educational death wish as a consequence of their adherence to regarding schooling as a vehicle for social engineering.

It appears that Theresa May, at least, may understand that children need to be educated in line with their aptitude. Academically able pupils need academic teaching such as is provided by grammar schools. The new "Progress 8" data for measuring pupil attainment across secondary school, for all its imperfections, confirmed very clearly that more able children do far better in grammar schools than in comprehensives. By supporting an expansion of grammar schools the Prime Minister has been prepared to grasp the nettle of underachievement among academic youngsters in too many comprehensives. It is to be hoped that she pays more than lip service to her commitment.

Recently, she has, also, declared an intention to promote specialist maths schools. This is another step in the right direction. Given that our 15-year-olds are around three years behind the Asia-Pacific super-star education systems in this key subject, her initiative should be welcomed and supported. As with the expansion of grammar schools, it is not only desirable for educational reasons, it is an economic necessity. Even better, however, would have been an intention to introduce a technical/vocational school in tandem with each new grammar school. We simply must maximise the native intelligence and potential of our population.

The aptitude of many children is not especially academic and their needs and, indeed, the needs of the country, are not going to be met by providing them with a mainly academic curriculum at secondary school. It is becoming increasingly obvious and imperative that vocational/technical education must be provided as an alternative pathway to the academic route. This is the norm around the world in successful economies. The only argument that we should be having is over when the vocational/technical route should be on offer. It is as young as 11 in Switzerland whilst the Chinese leave it until age 15.

The Prime Minister is, now, proposing some action to raise the status of vocational/technical education. She plans to set up higher education "Institutes of Technology" to compete, on an equal footing, with the academic route provided by universities:

“Our action will help ensure young people develop the skills they need to do the high-paid, high-skilled jobs of the future. That means boosting technical education and ensuring we extend the same opportunity and respect we give university graduates to those people who pursue technical routes.”

In addition, the Chancellor has announced a £500m a year funding package to promote technical training as a viable alternative to the academic A-Level route post-GCSE. A new, technical version of A-Levels, to be known as T-Levels, is to be introduced. Courses on offer will include engineering and manufacturing, business and administration, catering and hospitality, construction and social care.

The Prime Minister is right to push educational reform along this dual pathway. Her grasp of economic reality and of how it spills over into our education system is to be applauded. She must now ensure that both T-Levels and A-Levels are sufficiently rigorous to compete with the best education systems around the world. Given previous experience, however, this is far from guaranteed.

She will, also, need to break down the snobbery that surrounds the grammar school system and A-Levels. This will be achieved when a technical/vocational pathway is seen as a valid and viable alternative to the academic route. Links to employers and the consequent enhancement of job prospects will need to become an intrinsic part of the technical/vocational option

There is an argument, too, for technical/vocational schools receiving preferential funding since their courses will tend to be more expensive than the academic alternative.

When some youngsters are 'savvy' enough to choose a technical/vocational school instead of a grammar school, because it matches their aptitude, we shall know that the era of the 'bog standard' comp is over and that we can begin to consider the possibility of competing with some of the best education systems

internationally.

Chris McGovern

VAT on private school fees

Some good news, at last, for moderately well off, well off and very well off parents who send their children to state schools. If Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party ever gets elected, they may be in for a cash handout. "Yippee, and three cheers for Jeremy!" might be the cry of some middle class mums and dads in Islington as they plan their next family holiday in Tuscany. More Vino Montalcino and melted mozzarella all round! "Cin-Cin", as they say in San Gimignano! Yes, believe it or not, the Labour Party is proposing to go beyond Nick Clegg's gift to the middle classes of free lunches for all Key Stage 1 pupils (5 to 7 year-olds). Its leader has announced that he would like to extend the provision to cover Key Stage 2 youngsters (7 to 11 year-olds) as well.

In the past, only those children whose parents could not afford to feed them, were entitled to a free school lunch. Indeed, entitlement to a free school meal (FSM) is still a widely used, if imperfect, measure of relative poverty.

In a civilised society, the feeding of hungry children is not an optional extra for government but should the State, also, be feeding the children whose parents are perfectly able to cover the cost of a meal? What on earth is the justification for subsidising the better off? Why is Labour so keen to feed the children of richer parents whilst complaining about cash-strapped schools? The Left's moral high ground is built, however erroneously, on what it calls 'social justice' – helping the disadvantaged at the expense of the advantaged. A free meals hand out for middle class kids does not quite fit the bill. What on earth is going on?

It does not take much digging below the surface to find Jeremy Corbyn's motivation. It appears to be the ex-prep schoolboy's deep dislike of, and antagonism towards, private education. This latest announcement amounts to a declaration of educational warfare on private schools. It is also intended, presumably, to win over that mass of middle class voters whose children attend state schools. The cost of providing free schools meals for all state

primary school pupils will be met by charging VAT on private school fees. The £900,000 raised will cover the cost, or so he argues. He is, however, mistaken.

Charging 20 per cent VAT on fees will force many private schools to close or to down size. How many? Impossible to say, of course, but I would not be surprised if a third went to the wall. The consequence would be a significant increase in the demand for state school places from private school refugees. This would, in turn, reduce the money available per head in state schools whilst lowering the amount gathered from private schools in VAT. It would also make private schools even more exclusive. In addition, that third of private school pupils, from poorer homes, who depend on bursaries, would have to fall by the wayside.

Private schools are the jewel in the much-tarnished crown of our school system. Mr Corbyn's attack on them displays both incompetence and ignorance. It might be argued that the Labour leader, or a like-minded successor, has little, if any, prospect of ever being elected to power. He would not, however, be the first leadership candidate in history to have defied those odds

How fake news was invented in the British classroom

"Daniel William Finkelstein, Baron Finkelstein, [OBE](#) (born 30 August 1962) is a British [journalist](#) and [politician](#). He is a former [executive editor](#) of [The Times](#), remains a weekly political columnist, and is now associate editor. He is a former chairman of [Policy Exchange](#), who was succeeded by [David Frum](#) in 2014. He was elevated to the [House of Lords](#) in August 2013, sitting as a [Conservative](#)."

This, according to *Wikipedia*, is a brief biography of Baron Finkelstein. Is any of it true? We have no reason to doubt it, even if we are aware that *Wikipedia* entries can be pretty dodgy at times. The Baron himself, indeed, has warned readers of *The Times* to beware of 'fake news' and fake information. He is especially concerned about the vulnerability of schoolchildren.

He argues that, "From an early age, our children need to be taught how to understand and interpret things that are seen on the internet, how to assess evidence and how to spot techniques used to fabricate it. We need also to teach people to understand their own cognitive weaknesses. Our tendency, for instance, to seek out information, however unreliable, that appears to confirm the point of view we already have. This task seems to me urgent."

How right he is, but by delving into the world of opaque mirrors that constitutes our education system I wonder if he really understands what goes on in the classroom at many people's local comp.

I wonder, for example, what he would make of one of the most widely used and popular school history textbooks, much reprinted, currently used in many schools across the land. It is entitled, *Minds and Machines: Britain 1750-1900* and its authors include senior educational advisers to government. In order to denigrate all things British, bogus evidence is invented for pupils to use in forming an opinion of the British Empire. In relation to colonised people, for example, it states that "we have tried to imagine what they would tell us if they were to come back from the dead." Pupils thus learn that an undead Princess Rani Lakshmi would tell us that: "The British punished survivors by firing cannon balls through them at point blank range", and so on and so on. Yes, imaginary evidence, 'fake news', in its purest form.

Lessons in 'fake' history have been all the rage in our classrooms for decades. It began in earnest with a craze for 'empathy' that struck the GCSE History exam when it was introduced in the late 1980s. You know the sort of stuff, Danny - Imagine you are a member of the PLO and justify blowing up an El Al jet with its passengers etc. The BBC even produce a book with exercises on empathising with the IRA Brighton bombers. Mrs Thatcher was appalled when I pushed it her way.

Since Finkelstein expresses a particular interest in the internet he might check out a GCSE teaching pack entitled *World Terrorism since 9/11/01*. It was published online by the Schools History Project as part of a GCSE exam course. Through 13 sources, terrorists and their victims were presented as having, broadly speaking, equal points of view – "value relativism". Osama bin Laden was covered by two extracts of his own words, "balanced" by a few neutral lines of biography and by a copy of an FBI wanted

poster for him. Of the other nine sources, two were pro-USA, two were pro-bin Laden and four were neutral. The final source provided 16 quotations from the world's press on the third anniversary of 9/11. Eight of these came from the Islamic world and were, largely, hostile to the West. The other eight were from Europe and Asia. Five of them were critical of the USA. The US press was not represented.

More recently, in the wake of the Paris terrorist attack, we have had *The Times's* sister publication, *The Times Educational Supplement*, publishing a model lesson asking children to imagine that they are fighters for Isis and to write about the good side of membership; not least white slave girls. For evidence the children are directed to the online Isis in-house magazine.

All of this is promoted in schools in the name of political correctness and value relativism. It has quite a stranglehold in the classroom.

Should homework be banned?

Rather like Mary Berry and Alan Bennett, children's author and former Children's Laureate, Michael Rosen, has become something of a 'national treasure'. This bestows on him an element of immunity to criticism. And why would anyone wish to question the insight and wisdom that emanates from the author of *"Fluff the Farting Fish"*, *"What is Humanism? How do you live without a god? And other big questions for kids"* and the forthcoming *"Who are Refugees and Migrants?"*

From a grammar school, Oxbridge and BBC background he is the most influential of commentators on childhood and schooling, writing a regular column for *The Guardian*. Spades of credentials attach to his name. They won him a place on Desert Island Discs as long ago as 2006. The following year the National Union of Teachers awarded him the *Fred and Anne Jarvis Award* in recognition of his *"campaigning for education"*.

They do not come much more 'authentic' than Michael when it comes to forwarding the wellbeing of humanity. Why, he even

backed Jeremy Corbyn's campaign for leadership of the Labour Party in 2015, contributing to a volume entitled *Poets for Corbyn*. And his Jewish roots did not stop him from signing a letter that attacked *The Jewish Chronicle* for how it reported Corbyn's links to alleged anti-Semites.

All in all, Michael Rosen is a 'right on' sort of guy whose views the educational establishment, the Blob, and indeed many *Guardian* readers, treat with great reverence.

In a recent *Guardian* article he put together a letter to the education secretary, Justine Greening. It laments the role parents are playing in supporting children with their homework because it gives some kids an advantage – those who have supportive parents and who can actually cope with the task set. "*Dear Justine Greening,*" he opines, "*homework widens the gap between rich and poor children*".

Rosen has identified a problem that does, indeed, contribute to a widening gap between children. He sees it, however, only in terms of "*rich and poor kids*". His message is that if we got rid of homework things would be so much fairer. In effect, ignorance for all would mean equality of outcome.

The real heart of the issue, though, is one that Rosen ignores. Too many parents are themselves products of an education system that left them illiterate and innumerate.

There are plenty of children in low-income families, of course, where parents are educated enough and desirous enough to give their children lots of support with homework. This is true, not least, of immigrant families, often living in deprived circumstances, but whose children are doing so well at school because of parental support and involvement. It explains the relative success of high-immigrant London schools compared to other parts of England.

True, Britain's white working class is falling further behind but the remedy for this surely lies, partly, in a campaign of adult education. Too many white working class parents today are illiterate or only semi-literate and, as consequence, incapable of helping their children. The damage already done by our education system will

not be rectified by Michael Rosen leading us in the direction of dumbing down for all by arguing for the abolition of homework.

Funding and its impact on school standards

Is educational attainment in schools related to 'per capita' expenditure on pupils? Most teachers, politicians, parents and commentators, seem to think so. It has become, almost, an axiomatic truth in Britain today and underpins the row over school funding in English schools that has started to hit the headlines. But is it true?

The UK spends more per head on schools than most countries around the globe. This expenditure, however, is far from producing higher levels of pupil attainment. We out spend Vietnam by over 800%, for example, but our pupils trail that comparatively poor country by a considerable distance in the OECD PISA tests of attainment for 15 year-olds. You may get 'more for your bucks' in Vietnam – teacher salaries, in particular, are much lower – but that can only go part of the way towards explaining the much greater value for money being achieved, not only in Vietnam, but in other parts of the Asia-Pacific.

Britain's 'per capita' expenditure exceeds most of the countries that are ahead of us in the international league table of pupil attainment. Interestingly, however, pupils in wealthy little Luxembourg, the biggest OECD 'per capita' spender of all on schools, does even worse than the UK. It seems that spending more does not, after all, ensure pupils maximise their potential. How else can one explain the 900% real terms increase in UK expenditure on education since the 1950s resulting in today's school leavers, according to the OECD, attaining below the level of their grandparents in basic skills?

It is against this background that the current debate on funding should be taking place. Sadly, the price for telling the truth would be an admission of failure in education policy stretching back several decades. Few politicians, let alone educationalists and teachers' leaders, are prepared to face up to the stark reality of what they have created or have presided over. It is something they do not wish to talk about.

The government is right to confront the very real issues of unfairness in the existing allocation of school funding. If it wants our schools to compete with the best in the world, however, it needs to restore the traditional whole-class teaching methods still used in the Asia-Pacific super-star education systems. This would allow for slightly larger classes but make teaching easier and more effective than the chaotic child-centred ideology that now holds sway. It would, also, solve the problem of teacher shortages and allow those who remain to be given a hefty pay increase.

Less stressed-out teachers on better pay, more effective teaching, higher pupil attainment and improved classroom behavior! The price? Slightly larger classes made possible by restoring teaching methods that work...and all within budget! What's not to like?

The teacher as political activist

Earlier this year *The Times Educational Supplement (TES)* carried this call to arms: *“Teachers need to step up: they can help to fight the Donald Trump and Brexit reactionary revolution...In this post-truth era, it's up to teachers to ensure that young people are being empowered and encouraged to challenge and question.”*

The author was Oliver Beach, former star of the BBC reality television show, *Tough Young Teachers* and an ‘ambassador’ for the esteemed, even revered, *Teach First* programme, which recruits bright new graduates into teaching. His regular pieces for the *TES* provide an interesting insight into the mindset of many teachers.

What he has to say may surprise some and should, certainly, concern anyone who still imagines that the classroom is some benign area of political neutrality, as the law of the land requires. Far from it!

Olly does not pull any punches in his distaste for what democracy has produced: *“The success of the Right in gaining the highest political power with a narrative of pro-guns, anti-gays, limiting*

women's reproductive rights and building physical national borders will give new momentum to those with similar views here and across Western democracies. "If he can do it, why can't we?" they'll cheer as they grab their pitchforks."

He sees it as the duty of teachers to man the educational barricades and to lead the fight back: *"Educators must be curating minds that **question their realities**, not just accept them. We must reject echo chambers, post-truth proselytes or sycophants. We don't need more Donald Trumps, Nigel Farage or Marine Le Pens; we need Martin Luther Kings, **Harvey Milks** and Rosa Parks. And we need them now. Teachers are essential if they are to emerge."*

If you were thinking that pupils should be mastering basic literacy, numeracy and the National Curriculum, you could not have been more wrong. Kids need to be mobilised to question, reject and overturn democracy. Olly wants teachers to realise that the "next world leader is sitting in a classroom today." That world leader needs to be 'got at' today and brainwashed to be 'on message'. This is how to make social change and revolution deep-rooted and permanent. Get the kids! Revolution starts in the classroom!

Olly, himself, though, will not be on the classroom front line. In February 2014, *Teach First* provided updates on how the six *Tough Young Teachers* were getting on. It boasted of Olly that, "with characteristic ambition and drive he's working towards a longer-term career in teaching." A couple of years on, though, and Olly has thrown in the towel. He explained his decision to the *TES*: *"A pupil's ability to access opportunities shouldn't depend on the depth of their parents' pockets...That's why I am leaving the classroom to address this gap."*

Olly has set up a charity that he says, "is geared to addressing the gap in access to opportunities. "It turns out that he was not as "tough" as the television show and *Teach First* suggested. At least, he now has more time to fan the flames of anti-democratic social revolution that many wish to promote in our schools.

How the Centre for Policy Studies has put the Marxist case for

grammar schools

“How to Overcome Selection by House Price” is the title of a new “Economic Bulletin” by the Centre for Policy Studies (CPS). It sets out a compelling case for grammar schools. Remarkably, given its source, the case should be as persuasive for those on the Left as for those on the Right.

It was Margaret Thatcher, Keith Joseph and Alfred Sherman who set up the CPS 43 years ago in order to promote economic liberalism. Here we have a publication, however, that puts forward an argument for grammar schools that Karl Marx would surely have embraced as preferable to what he would surely regard as the current unfair capitalist school selection system based on postcode. Remarkable, indeed! It is time those Left Wing opponents of selection stopped oppressing the proletariat by arguing against grammar schools.

Back in the late 1980s and early 1990s current members of the CRE committee sat on the CPS education study group under the chairmanship of Baroness Cox. The group constituted a voice of dissent and common sense at a time when reforming mania gripped schools and the DfE.

The group tried and failed to persuade Keith Joseph and, afterwards, Ken Baker, of the folly of their ways in banning the ‘gold standard’ GCE ‘O’-Level grammar school examination and replacing it with the false educational currency of the all-ability comprehensive school exam, GCSE. It, also, warned Baker that the writing of England and Wales’s first National Curriculum had been hi-jacked by the educational establishment – those who had brought our school system to its knees in the first place. In a display of hubris and giddy vanity the ‘great reformer’ of our schools, pressed on, blind to the hi-jacking of his project. These days few commentators recall that it was piper Ken who led our schools along a pathway to ruin.

Belated recognition of failure came with the appointment of Michael Gove as education secretary in 2010. He grasped what we at the CPS had been saying back in the 1980s and attempted

to restore some rigour to both the National Curriculum and to the public exams. He was opposed at every turn, of course, by the 'Blob' - a term he used to describe the educational establishment which, unlike Baker and subsequent education secretaries, he began to understand. His somewhat belated recognition of what he was up against did not, however, save him. The 'Blob' always wins has become a self-evident truth for education secretaries.

Indeed, Gove's plans have been further frustrated and thwarted by the surrender to the 'Blob' of the current education secretary, Justine Greening, on the issue of SATs and on the issue of 'pass' grade for Gove's reformed GCSE.

To her credit, the Prime Minister has had the courage to take on the 'Blob' over grammar schools. She wants more of them. They want none, at all. If the Government is to record a rare victory over the educational establishment it should use the Marxist dimension of the CPS bulletin to maximum effect.

This, it must be stressed that there is a 20% house price premium near to top comprehensives. The rich get the best deal and the poor get the scraps. Capitalism is triumphant! It can be defeated, however, by the creation of new 'free school' grammars, especially in deprived areas with entry based on aptitude. This will help overturn the capitalism hegemony because the attainment gap between rich and poor at grammar schools is just 4.3%, as against 25% at comprehensive schools. Free schools are, in any case, ten times more likely to be in the most deprived areas compared to the least.

Karl Marx wrote that:

"Capital is money, capital is commodities. By virtue of it being value, it has acquired the occult ability to add value to itself. It brings forth living offspring, or, at the least, lays golden eggs."

A new generation of grammar schools will ensure that some of those golden eggs fall the way of the proletariat

The CPS argument for grammar schools is 'power to the people'. Marxists of England should unite behind it.

No Comment

“Phonics were being taught to young children more than three centuries ago and are not just a modern craze, historians have claimed.” D.Mail 7th March 2107

“There are 51,000 children on a waiting list to become Scouts, Beavers, Cubs or Explorers, according to the organisation behind the movement.” BBC 11th April 2017

"We know that there are some schools that are narrowing the curriculum, using qualifications inappropriately, and moving out pupils who will drag down result. That is nothing short of a scandal."

Amanda Spielman, Head of Ofsted, 10th March 2017

“There are teachers out there telling the kids about Emmeline Pankhurst and Rosa Parks, but who are too scared to support their own colleagues. “

Kevin Carty (retired teacher). TES 9th April 2017