

Campaign for Real Education [CRE]

www.cre.org.uk

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

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Newsletter

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01. Editorial

Education Secretary Signs the Terms of Surrender

Bridget Phillipson, the new Education Secretary, has hit the ground running. On the 8th of July 2024, just four days after her party's landslide election victory, she published a letter of self-introduction to those whom she describes as 'the education workforce'.

This workforce she defines as 'all working in early years, children's services, further and higher education.' The purpose of the letter, she states, is to mark a 're-set in our relationship'. The previous Tory government is blamed for failing to place education 'at the heart of change and the forefront of national life.'

Phillipson promises to 'transform' education 'so that young people get the skills, care and opportunities they deserve.' The acquisition of knowledge as a vehicle for this transformation does not, strangely, get a mention. She pledges, instead, to be driven by the 'experience and expertise' of teachers.

Echoing the demands of the educational establishment, a reform of curriculum and assessment is at the heart of the promised transformation. The review will be led by Professor Becky Francis, a specialist in equality and gender issues. In 2006, with Louise Archer, she co-authored a book entitled *'Understanding Minority Ethnic Achievement: race, Gender, Class and 'Success'*.

The preface states: 'Our intention is to help lever social justice concerns back into mainstream educational debates...'. The direction of travel for the review, seems clear.

Phillipson admits in her letter that, 'change is simple to describe, but vast to deliver.' She, therefore, naively commits to relying on our educational 'wokeocracy', the cause of the problem, to transform education for the better.

Although the recent Budget provided a welcome injection of extra funding for schools, her expectations are delusional. How funding is spent matters far more than the sum available to spend. Phillipson's letter amounts to a governmental document of surrender to 'the educational workforce'.

She seems intent on restoring full power to those who have, in the past, so damaged education and, indeed, childhood. Our children and of our country are likely to pay a heavy price for the promised 'transformation'.

Chris McGovern

Chairman

02. How To Solve the Problem of Ofsted Reports

Ofsted's one-word ratings for school performance - 'Outstanding', 'Good' or 'Inadequate' - are to be scrapped. Nor is the two-word rating of 'Requires Improvement' going to survive. For the 2025-2025 school year the existing grading system will be extended to the previous sub-categories of: quality of education, pupils behaviour and attitudes, leadership and management, safeguarding. From September 2025, however, the grading system will be replaced by a 'report card'.

The Government argues that simplistic summaries in the form of the current single grade cannot reflect judgements that are often complex. Wordy report cards for each area of inspection will, therefore, take over.

The proposed change comes in the wake of the tragic death of a headteacher, Ruth Perry. The coroner's report on her death concluded that an adverse Ofsted report contributed to her taking her own life. Her school had been downgraded from 'Outstanding' to 'Inadequate' on account of a failing in one area of pupil 'safeguarding'. Ofsted's sensible response has been to allow schools the time to rectify such failings in future inspections, before publishing their final report.

It is a legal truism that hard cases, such as this one, are inclined to make bad laws. Unsurprisingly, however, teacher unions have welcomed the abolition of the one or two-word judgment. They may be useful to parents but, undoubtedly, they pose a threat to failing schools. Why use one word to summarise a finding when a couple of hundred will more effectively blur meaning, if that is the intention? And, of course, many parents are a lot more likely to read a single word than a few hundred. Indeed, school are forever promoting themselves on the basis of single-word Ofsted judgements. Take a look at their websites.

And that brings us to the central irony of this row over Ofsted grades. There is, in fact, very good case for abolishing single word judgments but not one that has been spotted. Currently, around 90 per cent of schools are rated 'Good' or 'Outstanding'. This is nonsense! Even Sir Michael Wilshaw, a former Ofsted boss, has admitted as much. The latest and most authoritative international attainment PISA tests from the OECD, place our 15 year-olds at least three years behind the superstar education systems of the Asia-Pacific.

Educational improvement in the UK, where it has occurred, is largely confined to England and Northern Ireland and, largely, relates to reading levels. On the most recent Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), 9-10 year olds in England came fourth out of forty three countries. This certainly represents progress but does it mean that 90 percent of our schools are 'Good' or 'Outstanding'? As with so much in Education we need to take account of the 'smoke and mirrors'. The integrity of the tests was affected by COVID disruption in those countries that opted

to take part. We can certainly be proud that we were in fourth position but cannot totally ignore who came third - Russia. 'Catching up on Russia!' makes a less impressive headline.

Any improvement on the PISA tests of 15 year-olds is harder to discern. On the latest tests (2022) the position of the UK was: Reading 13th, Maths 14th, Science 15th. When the first PISA tests were sat back in the year 2000, albeit with a smaller cohort of countries, our positions were: Reading 8th and Maths 7th. Science was first tested in 2006 and our position was 13th. It should be noted that the UK excludes far, far more pupils from the tests than other countries and that the dire education system in Scotland and Wales depresses our overall results.

So, can we conclude that 90 per cent of our schools merit the Ofsted single word judgement of 'Good' or 'Outstanding'? The best argument for ditching such single word judgments is that they are not rigorous or precise enough. A more honest way to summarise overall school performance would be to give each of the four current areas of assessment a percentage mark and convert that into a final percentage.

In educational terms we are living in a fools' paradise. The Government's new, non-grading proposal will entrench us further in the land of make-believe.

03. "I Was a Teenage Werewolf" Horror Movie Becomes Classroom Fact

*This article by Chris McGovern, the CRE Chairman,
was first published in The Daily Mail [18 Sept 2024]*

Whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad!" These words of wisdom from Ancient Greece pretty much sum up leadership in Scottish education. Believe it or not, what amounts to 'protected status' has now been awarded to a Scottish secondary school pupil who identifies as a werewolf.

The popular 1950s horror movie, "I was a teenage werewolf", can no longer be regarded as spoof fiction.

The technical term for this latest example of educational lunacy is 'species dysphoria'. And let's not forget that the term 'lunacy' has lunar connotations associated with the full moon, so beloved of werewolves.

Accommodating and excusing naughty behaviour by dressing it up in pseudo-medical terminology is all the rage amongst educators across the UK. It is part of the Woke, politically correct, victimhood industry that currently defines too much schooling.

Never mind Scotland's abysmal collapse in educational standards according to international tests, what matters is that anyone self-identifying as a wolf or other creature, is to be respected and protected.

Woe betide anyone seeking employment in a Scottish school who is not prepared to kowtow to this bonkers equality agenda. The policies are all well-intentioned, of course . . . But, as we know, the path to hell is paved with good intentions.

It is not so long ago that a sane and sensible pupil in a school south of the border was reprimanded for questioning a classmate's claim that she identified as a cat. 'How can you identify as a cat when you are a girl?' asked the 13 year-old pupil. She added that such an identification was 'crazy'.

In response her teacher told the complainant that her attitude was "despicable". "How dare you- you've just really upset someone" by "questioning their identity." The exchange continued and, fortunately, was recorded. It was not a made-up hoax to fire-up the media. This is real fascist Wokeism in action.

The Western Isles Council has told The Daily Mail that its policy on 'species dysphoria' is guided by the Scottish Government's GIRFEC (Getting it right for every child) strategy.

Central to the strategy is that "children have their rights upheld at all times" and that they are "to be treated with kindness, dignity and respect at all times." Who could possibly disagree with these sentiments?

Sadly, however, the words disguise how the strategy translates into classroom practice. It's okay to identify as a werewolf and your choice will be respected, whatever it is.

And just in case there is any doubt about identifying as a wolf the Council is backed up by the Scottish Government's promotion of a 'Wellbeing Wheel'.

The Western Isles Council is falling back on what can be termed the post-War 'Nuremberg Defence' of 'only obeying orders'.

So, where do we go from here? Other Scots councils have also admitted to allowing pupils to identify as an animal. The time has arrived for sane parents and pupils to say that enough is enough.

Either they revolt or they follow the werewolf and succumb to howling lunacy.

04. Good Childhood Report 2024 Places UK at the Top of the League - for Unhappiness

UK pupils are not usually pace setters on international tables of performance. In one area, however, we lead the European rankings of 27 countries.

The Children's Society places our 15-year-olds at the top of the league table for 'life satisfaction', commonly referred to as 'unhappiness'. 25.2 per cent report low life satisfaction:

<https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/information/professionals/resources/good-childhood-report-2024>

This compares with just 7 per cent of their Dutch peers. In addition, children in Romania, Hungary, Denmark, Portugal, Croatia and Finland have a 'life satisfaction' rating that is at least twice as high as the rating for UK 15-year-olds.

These damning statistics lift the lid on the ineffectiveness of 'Personal, social, health and economic [PSHE] education' provided by our nation's schools for many years.

The report is based on the collation of data from the OECD's programme for international student assessment [PISA] and from the UK Longitudinal Household Survey.

05. 'Poor & Clean': a Play About Black-on-Black Killings

*Here it is previewed by its author, Roger Diamond,
who is also a CRE Committee member*

What a strange old world this is...

It is so easy for us to become acclimatised to the overwhelming abundance of conflict and violence we are exposed to through various media including TV. Even when the violence and horrors are presented to us as latest news and/or fact, we soon become used to it, as if it were just fiction.

But what if on a number of occasions 'you' personally have looked out of your window only to see someone lying there on the public pavement below you, dying from knife or gunshot wounds. Is it so easy to take it for granted as if it were fiction?

What if every time the shootings and killings happen near where you live, it is always teenagers killing each other? What if most of the time those teenagers are Black? What if you yourself were/are also Black, and do not believe in community violence?

Is there anything to help ease the shock and confusion - that could last many years or decades - as to why this should happen in your neighbourhood? Can it be eased by taking part in a riot, listening to rap or grime music, listening to jazz, Bob Marley or old school reggae or by simply watching a play/film about the subject?

Police, Youths and Riots

What if you lived opposite Broadwater Farm and experienced the horrific, infamous riots there in 1985? What if you then watched in horror on your TV set as riots broke out in Tottenham again in 2011? These sparked off riots all over the country. Actually, who/what started those Tottenham riots? I mean really...

Literacy Classes wanted by Young People

What if you moved to an infamous council social housing estate? There, two young gang leaders told the security guards (campaigns for by a local community activist) that they wanted help with their reading and maths homework in order to keep them from getting involved with anti-social behaviour, violence and gang crime.

And what if many of the local secondary schools told you that most of the children tested at age eleven (often between 75 and 95 percent!) could not spell three letter words?

But this was reality - not fiction! So, consequently, *Real Action and now The Roger Diamond Foundation [RDF]*, have been formed.

These charities run Saturday Morning Classes with the Butterfly Method invented by Irina Tyk, a former committee member of the CRE. Using her innovative phonics teaching system, children's reading ages improve on average by over a year in just 18 months of whole-class teaching. Since 1997 thousands of children in West London have thereby gone into good jobs and/or university instead of choosing a life of deprivation or crime.

Performances, Plays & Films

In addition RDF promotes scriptwriting, films, documentaries and plays that discuss these ongoing issues.

The Play: Poor & Clean

The play is centrally about a single parent family of three and how they cope with tragedy and unpredictable experiences, on the one hand in the family, and on the other hand within the Black British Community, whilst trying to imbue their life with

the best and highest morality. What is love? What music should they listen to? Who are their role models? Should they take part in riots?

The teenagers in the family have their own stylised way of practising the Rastafarian faith, this includes their use of a version of Jamaican Patois, but their mother wants them to speak the Queen's English and their estranged father doesn't...

This is a longer, updated version of my original short play which was staged in Tottenham in the eighties. It will hopefully inspire further discussion and research.

All geographical locations, shops, centres, addresses, historical references, educational statistics, musicology, and religious organisations in the play are real!

Roger Diamond

06. Smart Phones and Social Media

Across the world there is increasing concern about the negative impact of digital technology on the wellbeing of children. Back in 2014, Baroness Susan Greenfield, a leading neuroscientist, warned of the potential dangers.

In her book, 'Mind Change', she described the physiological changes to the human brain that are consequent upon prolonged exposure to this technology. This, she observed, was particularly apparent in the developing brains of children.

Ten years on, her concerns are more widely shared. A growing mental health crisis amongst children in so-called 'developed' countries has coincided with their increasing addiction to social media sites and adult website content.

Reflecting a growing level of concern amongst parents, the Australian Prime Minister, Anthony Albanese, has recently announced plans to ban children from using social media sites. Parents, he observes, are 'worried sick' about the impact on childhood of these sites.

They 'want their kids off their phones and on the footy field,' he says. 'We are taking this action because enough is enough.' Opinion polls indicate that a majority of Australians agree with him. Australia is already amongst an increasing number of countries that either ban or restrict the use of smart phones in schools.

According to England's Department for Education by the age of 12, 97 per cent of children own a mobile phones. Is this high level of ownership and the access it provided to social media sites, connected to our 15-year-olds heading the 'unhappiness' league table amongst 27 European countries [see article 5, above]?

If so, it may be time to reconsider the Government's conclusion that: 'An outright ban of phones in schools isn't necessary because headteachers already have the power to ban phones in schools.'

<https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2024/10/16/mobile-phones-in-schools-are-they-being-banned/>

Bans on under-18-year-olds have long been on place for other addictive items such as alcohol and smoking. Many parents yearn for some equivalent government support and legal backing to prevent their children from the dangerous consequences of addiction to smart phones

'Mind change' should be as central to educational debate as 'climate change'.

07. Back to Basics in Sweden

The performance of Swedish 15 year-olds on the OECD PISA [Programme for International Assessment] tests has been unimpressive for some time. On the latest round [2022] it did not make the top twenty for either Mathematics or for Science. Nor did it do a great deal better in Reading, although it did manage to squeeze into 18th place. It was behind the UK in all three areas of assessment.

Alarms bells are finally ringing in a country that has long been admired for its economic progress and its quality of life. Increasing criminality and the fragmentation of urban life in Swedish cities has been widely reported. The electorate's move to the right has given fresh impetus to those who sees education as part of the solution to a growing crisis in the country's social cohesion and economic stagnation.

So, in 2028, The Sunday Times reports [19th September 2924], Swedish children will commence primary school at age 6 rather than the current starting age of 7.

This proposal has considerable cross-party support and was, indeed, initiated by the previous left-leaning government. The extra year's schooling will focus on the 3-Rs of reading, writing and arithmetic. It is also planned that classroom learning become more teacher-led.

This is a rejection of what might be described as a 'disintegrated curriculum', by which young children take responsibility for their own learning through following their personal interests.

An 'integrated curriculum' of planned teacher-led learning in the core subjects will now replace this approach. The reforms will also include reducing children's exposure to digital technology.

Sweden has, in effect, concluded that teaching methods that are too child-centred, do not work. Swedish pupils are now trailing well behind those in the best education systems across the world.

Much the same challenge over falling standards of attainment faces Finland. Its children, too, do not start primary school until the age of 7 and learning has, in recent years, paralleled the child-centred approach of its Swedish neighbours. Finland's move to this approach has been followed by a dramatic fall in the attainment of Finnish 15 year-olds on the PISA tests.

From being top or close to the top of the PISA league tables earlier this century, on the most recent tests [2022] it fell to 20th in Mathematics, 14th in Reading and 9th in Science. Once described as an educational 'nirvana' by The Guardian newspaper, Finnish schooling is in crisis.

Estonia remains a beacon of excellence in northern Europe whilst retaining a school starting age of 7. Its pre-school provision, from ages 3 to 7 is, however, carefully structured and leads to a certificate of child development that is passed on to a child's primary school.

Academic rigour is at the heart of the schooling and, significantly, compared to teachers in most other countries, Estonian teachers spend more time on teaching than on administrative tasks and on issues of discipline.

Schooling has as much, if not more, in common with the Asia Pacific as it does with nearby Scandinavian countries .

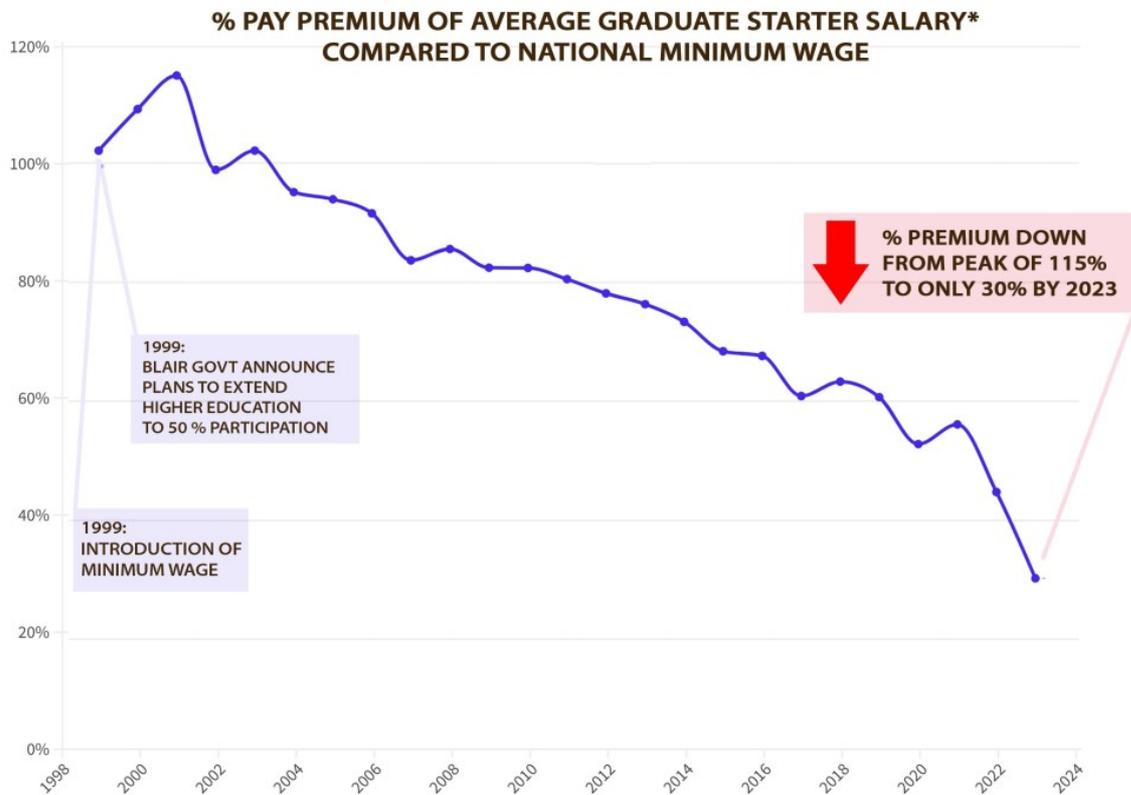
08. The Fall in Graduate Salaries Shows the Argument for Mass Entry to Higher Education Has Failed

This article, by Paul Wiltshire, was first published by the Higher Education Policy Unit [25 Oct 2024] and appears here with the kind permission of the author

One of the main policies of the Blair government was to increase participation in higher education to 50%. No doubt one aim was to increase access to the higher salaries generally enjoyed by graduates; yet 25 years later, with the 50% target reached, there is growing evidence to suggest that this aim has failed.

Research shows that, when you compare the National Minimum Wage (NMW), another of the Blair Government's policies, to the average graduate starting salary, the two have gradually converged.

In 2001, the NMW was the equivalent to an annual salary of £7.2k and the average graduate starting salary is estimated to have stood at 115% higher, at £15.5k. But by 2023, the graduate starting salary of £25.9k was only 30% higher than the National Minimum Wage of £19.9k.



**Based on data published by graduate-jobs.com for 2014-2023 with an extrapolation for earlier years*

The commercially led jobs market tends to be brutally honest about the genuine value of candidates, and I suggest this evidence demonstrates its verdict: the more graduates that the higher education system produces, the less in relative terms to the National Minimum Wage they are going to get paid.

The modest and eroded premium of 30% above the National Minimum Wage is hardly the outcome that the Blair Government anticipated and I believe this shift to mass higher education must now be viewed as a policy failure – particularly now that students emerge with a life-changing level of personal debt.

Furthermore, there is growing anecdotal evidence highlighted in recent media stories that, in the attempt to make more of our young adults winners, the reality is that mass higher education is piling up more and more losers who emerge into a jobs market saturated with graduates with limited chance of converting their degree into a job that justifies the three years of study and the huge debt.

Examples include:

- Students are racking up huge debts, but how can they tell if it's value for money? – Guardian 11th Feb 24
- 'I'd be better off if I hadn't been to una': UK graduates tell of lives burdened by student loans – Guardian 4th Aug 24
- 'Like throwing myself at a wall': UK graduates struggle in 'insane' job market – Guardian 29th Aug 24

The student finance system is undoubtedly broken, yet the problems in the graduate jobs market don't appear to be being considered. Far from it, as Universities UK has recently stated that the solution lies in increasing fees and increasing participation to an astonishing 70% by 2040. Their justification is that you tend to earn more if you go to higher education but never has the adage that 'There are Lies, Damn Lies and Statistics' ever been so apt.

While it is true that those attending university do go on to earn more, it is statistically incorrect to claim that this is all due to the causation of having studied for a degree, particularly when you consider that many graduates end up in jobs where their degree subject is not directly relevant. (The Institute of Student Employers' 2023 Student Recruitment Survey found only 19 per cent of adverts for graduate jobs stipulate a specific degree.)

It can instead be reasonably argued that the jobs market pay premium is merely rewarding the correlation that exists for most graduates who tend to be more academically able and hard-working. Trying to claim that all the success of higher career earnings is down to the 'essential' element of spending three years at university before entering the workforce is bogus.

We might as well say that there is good evidence that, if you are above average academically and you work hard, then in your 20s and 30s you will be earning more than if you weren't.

Ironically though there is another causation effect at play in that the jobs market is increasingly prejudiced against non-graduates for even the most junior clerical and managerial roles, so it is forcing 18-year-olds to enter higher education and get themselves into significant debt to give themselves a chance at the most basic of entry-level roles when they attempt to enter the workforce aged 21.

It has been legitimately argued that the practice of discriminating against non-graduates in this manner is damaging to society and [should be banned](#).

Many higher education advocates will claim that we shouldn't fixate on graduate starting salaries but should rather consider the likely increased earnings say five years after graduates have entered the workforce. This doesn't of course explain why the graduate premium has reduced from 115% to 30%.

And it falls into the same trap of illegitimately claiming that all the uplift in salary once a graduate embarks on their career is causation rather than correlation. Surely if an individual's salary increases over time, this is due to their innate ability, work ethic, on-the-job training opportunities and general development of their abilities through actual work experience? So the increased pay after five years may not be a 'graduate' premium at all, more an 'entering the workforce' premium.

The Labour Government has to do something to relieve the pressure on university and student finances. But we shouldn't be throwing ever more students into higher education and a life of debt with high marginal tax rates, making them disillusioned by false promises and unrealistic expectations before they have even set out in life.

Instead, we need to cap student participation numbers drastically, ban the proliferation of discriminatory graduate-only job adverts, encourage employers to start recruiting 18-year-olds again and train and educate them in the workplace – and we need to ensure those 18-year-olds are not coerced by society into thinking that entering the workforce is some kind of dud option and a failure.

Paul Wiltshire

9. Artificial Intelligence in the Classroom How the CRE Responds to the International Debate

The CRE is regularly referenced in media outlets around the world. An current area of particular interest, internationally, is the role of AI within the classroom. Following a recent report on the issue by Sky News, featuring an interview with the CRE chairman, a number of overseas journalists were in contact with us.

Readers of this Newsletter may be interested in the kind of questions posed and the CRE response. We, therefore, publish below part of the correspondence with Sunok Yeon of ChosunBiz, a leading economic and industry news platform in South Korea:

Thank you very much for taking the time to speak with me. I have a few questions that I would appreciate your insights on, which are listed below:

1. Schools are increasingly using AI in classrooms to assist teachers in providing personalized education, with the belief that AI can streamline time-consuming tasks. In your view, how might this trend impact students in various aspects?

CRE response: 'AI has the capacity to instantly match learning tasks to the individual needs of pupils. This is beneficial, but long-term exposure to this style of learning may come at cost to the mental health and well-being of young people. Digital technology is addictive. The CRE has described its use in the classroom as 'educational cocaine'. UK pupils may be amongst the world's top users of AI but in a recent survey by the Children's Society they are also top of Europe's 'unhappiness' league table for children.

The use of AI de-humanises learning by removing classroom camaraderie and interaction. As robots become more like humans, humans become more robots. This is a danger. AI cannot replicate or replaced an inspirational teacher. It can, however, be better than an inadequate teacher. In terms of subjects, AI lends itself well to those more dependent on logical and accumulative learning such as mathematics and languages. It lends itself much less well to subjects that involve more subjective reasoning such as literature or history.'

2. I believe that the integration of new technologies in schools is inevitable. As both students and teachers become more accustomed to these innovations, it may be challenging to restrict their use. Given this reality, what do you think is the best approach for schools to effectively incorporate new technologies?

CRE response: Schools and parents need to wake up to the fact that many children are suffering from digital technology 'overload'. It may be difficult to restrict their use of new technologies but doing so is necessary; imperative, even. Schools need to balance every additional use of AI learning with a corresponding reduction in the use of digital technology elsewhere in school life.

The restriction on the use of smart phones in South Korean schools is a step towards achieving the necessary balance. Other countries are beginning to do the same but the UK remains too 'laissez faire' in this area. School leaders need to have the courage to protect children from addiction; ultimately this is a child protection issue.

3. What is your perspective on the role of government in this matter? In Korea, the government is making significant investments to encourage the use of AI in schools to deliver more personalized education. Do you have any advice or recommendations for the Korean government in this regard?

CRE response: Since over-use of digital technology has become a child protection issue a government's role in this matter is crucial. The Australian prime minister is moving his country towards banning social media sites for children. This is a move in the right direction and will act as a balance to the growing use of AI in the classroom.

Parents, too, need government support since it is far easier for them to restrict the smart phone use of their children, and to de-toxify widespread current addiction, if they can point to government requirements. In the long term the use of AI will reduce the need for so many teachers. This is a cost-saving that will attract governments but it will be folly to be driven by budget considerations. The use of AI confronts humanity with an existential crisis. The 'mind change' currently taking place in the developing brains of children is as important an issue as 'climate change'.

11. No Comment

Almost a third of parents are 'more relaxed' about their children attending school after the Covid pandemic.

The National Parent Survey 2024

The Scottish government is being forced to re-advertise the posts of chief inspector of education and chief executive of Education Scotland.

TES 28 October 2024

Girls play outside in nature less than boys even at the age of two, according to the first national survey of play among preschool-age children in Britain.

The Guardian 18 Oct 2024

About half of U.S. adults [51%] say the country's public K-12 education system is generally going in the wrong direction. A far smaller share [16%] say it's going in the right direction and about a third [32%] are not sure...

Pew Research Center, April 4 2024

Singapore's approach to education continues to serve as a benchmark for excellence on the global stage.

John Boyle, Irish Times, 13 May 2024

If you want to predict a nation's future, take a look at what the Department for Education is doing.

Kemi Badenoch, Daily Mail, 27Oct 2024

Today's Budget is thin gruel for those working in universities ... the Chancellor failed to deliver.

FE News, 30 October 2024