

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

The recent general election result will have some significant consequences for education. The Conservative Government's lack of a parliamentary majority has made many of its Election Manifesto commitments redundant, including its proposal to lift the ban on the establishment of selective schools.

The Queen's Speech did not include any proposals for new legislation on education. This would certainly appear to sound a 'death knoll' for hopes of seeing the creation of new grammar schools even though, for years, polls have consistently shown that support for them outweighs opposition. A reason why some potential Tory voters amongst parents drifted away during the election campaign was probably a lot to do with concerns over school budgets and little to do with allowing new grammar schools to be set up.

Fortunately, most parents see the sense of educating children in line with their aptitude. It was for this reason that the Government felt confident enough to include in the Queen's Speech an upgrading of technical education. This, of course, is the corollary of grammar school academic education. It is unlikely, however, that we shall see a restoration of technical schools to sit alongside existing grammars. The best we can hope for is a new 'T-Level' exam as a credible alternative to the 'academic' A-Level.

Remarkably, the educational establishment continues to promote its dogma of one-size-fits-all for secondary education. It seems that it really does believe that it should reject the schooling route of 'education by aptitude'. Howls of outrage were heard recently from teacher unions when it was reported that a handful of academy schools had set up an academic stream.

The truth is that the alternative to educating by aptitude is a continuing under-performance by our schools. Currently, the successful parts of our economy are too dependent on an older generation of workers and on well-educated immigrants. The recipe for the most

successful education systems around the world is the provision of alternative pathways – both technical and academic.

The new government should not throw in the towel on education. The expansion of existing grammar schools does not require legislation. We have already seen one grammar school ‘annex’ being set up in Kent. In order to meet parental demand we need many more such annexes. A recent report on the “Kentnews” website highlighted the extent of the demand: “Grammar schools in north Kent are coming “under siege” from London families desperate to place their children at some of the county’s top selectives...”.

Not all parents are persuaded it seems, by the much-heralded success of state schools in the capital. They recognise that it is built on the admirable work ethic of its high immigrant population, on a mass of private tutoring backed by supportive parents, and, indeed, by its own cohort of hugely over-subscribed London grammar schools.

An expansion of existing grammar school places through annexes will only ever go a small way, of course, towards ensuring education by aptitude for all pupils. Given the circumstances in which it finds itself, though, there is one effective step that the government could take to meet the needs of all pupils. It should do all within its powers to ensure that every comprehensive school has a both an academic/grammar school stream alongside a technical/vocational stream. Revolutionary? Not at all! They are what used to be described as bi-lateral schools.

School Rules – should they be enforced?

Should pupils be required to follow school rules? Surprisingly, not all parents think so and nor do all head teachers. A well-publicised row has broken out over a teacher vacancy advert at Magna Academy comprehensive in Dorset. The school is seeking to appoint someone to be in overall charge of behaviour and discipline.

The wording of the job title, “Director of Isolations and Detentions”, within the “Behaviour Correction Unit”, sounds a bit archaic but it is honest enough. All it means is that the school has a zero tolerance approach to the breaking of the rules that have been put in place for the benefit of the entire school community. In response, one parent told *The Daily Mail* that the advert was “fanatical” and “smacked of a boot camp”.

A prominent and influential head teacher, Andrew Mears, is equally concerned. He has attacked Magna Academy for providing a “sample of prison”. He told the *Mail*:

“There is no mention of any therapeutic approaches to address the epidemic of mental health issues in our schools which might go alongside what applicants might see as Dickensian, authoritarian methods.”

Mr Mears’ desire for “therapeutic approaches” reflects ‘best practice’ in teaching these days. It is part of a ‘no blame’ culture in many schools and, too often, it excuses bad behaviour. Kathryn Ecclestone and Dennis Hayes challenged the whole therapeutic

approach several years ago in “The Dangerous Rise of Therapeutic Education”. Sadly, the therapists and the narcissists saw off that challenge. Therapy now constitutes a significant part of a teacher’s responsibility.

Meanwhile classroom disorder and disruption, perpetrated by a small minority of youngsters, continues to damage the education and life prospects of too many children. The learning of a whole class of pupils suffers when one or two individuals choose to misbehave. The consequent frustration and stress is, in addition, a major reason teachers give for throwing in the towel and leaving the profession. Three cheers, then, for any head teacher who rises to the challenge of creating a school ethos and environment that is built on good order and is, thereby, conducive to learning.

Many secondary schools now have on-site ‘isolation units’ for disruptive children. Separating a recalcitrant pupil from classmates for a day or two, whilst allowing them to remain on school premises and be taught, can be an effective form of deterrent and rehabilitation. It also protects the interests of that vast majority of pupils who wish to learn

When parents register their child for a school they also sign up for the ‘rules’ at that school. Parents with children at the Magna Academy are fortunate in having an excellent head teacher. Within two years of taking over he took it from an Ofsted rating of being in “special measures” to its new status of “outstanding”. Dickensian? Old-fashioned? Traditional? Therapy-free? Let’s have more of it!

GCSEs – the new generation

A new generation of GCSEs is now being taught in schools. The government has promised that they will be more demanding than the previous generation. The first papers – English Language, English Literature and Mathematics – were sat recently, with other subjects to follow next year.

The extent to which the examination is now more rigorous is reflected in the fact that candidates are no longer be able to get away with reading just a few selected passages for GCSE English Literature.

The academic level of questions candidates are required to answer, however, remains much diluted compared to the old grammar school exam – the GCE O-Level.

A specimen English Language paper (AQA board) is illustrative. It requires candidates to read this opening passage from Daphne du Maurier’s “Jamaica Inn”

It was a cold grey day in late November. The weather had changed overnight, when a backing wind brought a granite sky and a mizzling rain with it, and although it was now only a little after two o’clock in the afternoon the pallor of a winter evening seemed to have closed upon the hills, cloaking them in mist. It would be dark by four. The air was clammy cold, and for all the tightly closed windows it penetrated the interior of the coach. The leather seats felt damp to the hands, and there must have been a small crack in the

roof, because now and again little drips of rain fell softly through, smudging the leather and leaving a dark-blue stain like a splodge of ink.

They are then asked to: *List four things from this part of the text about the weather in Cornwall. [4 marks]*

The mark scheme (below) sets out how the four marks available should be awarded:

“Indicative content; students may include:

- *· it was a cold day*
- *· the weather had changed overnight*
- *· there was a wind*
- *· there was mist on the hills*
- *· the air was clammy*
- *· the air was cold*
- *· it was raining*

Or any other valid responses that you are able to verify by checking the Source.”

In other words, the new ‘world class’ GCSE In English presents pupils with the text, *“It was a cold grey day”* and asks, *“What was the weather like?”*

The follow-up question relates to a continuation of the text and provides ‘crib sheet’ style assistance to candidates. It is an extended and only slightly more demanding version of question 1:

How does the writer use language here to describe the effects of the weather? You could include the writer’s choice of:

- *· words and phrases*
- *· language features and techniques*
- *· sentence forms.*

[8 marks]

Christian terrorism and the chance to win a Harrods Hamper

“Five luxury Harrods Hampers to be won!” That is the offer that was recently made to teachers by the *Times Educational Supplement* resources website. What is more, by using the ‘FREEHAMPER’ discount code teachers were offered “ a free teacher-created, classroom-tested resource costing £3 or less.” Amongst the model lessons on offer is one for 11 to 14 years. It is entitled, **“Extremism: Christian terrorists”**.

The “learning objectives”, under a sub-heading of “Abortion clinics”, are:

- “To know an example of Christian terrorism”
- “To explain Christian arguments for and against terrorism”
-

The “Learning outcomes” include:

- “Explain how some Christians could use Situation Ethics to justify murder”

- “Justify your opinion on whether murder is ever acceptable, using your own opinion as well as Christian arguments”

The example of “Christian terrorism” provided is an unattributed description of the shooting dead of George Tiller, “ a prominent US abortion doctor”. President Obama is quoted: “However profound our differences as Americans over difficult issues such as abortion, they cannot be resolved by heinous acts of violence.”

It is unlikely that many 11 year-olds or, even, 14 year-olds, will be mature enough or knowledgeable enough to understand the complex moral issues that relate to abortion in general and to the Tilly case in particular. Nor is it likely that many will wish to be plunged into it. For some, indeed, the whole issue could be deeply traumatic. Parents will be justified in feeling alarmed that this material is being promoted for classroom use in lower secondary school, with or without a Harrods Hamper backing it up.

The model lesson refers to “Situation Ethics”, the philosophical version of ‘value relativism’ whereby judgement is based on individual opinion and context. This provides the justification and shortcut for teaching children to see terrorist murder in terms of pros and cons. Terrorism is presented as a life-style choice that can be justified because everyone and anyone can choose that pathway, including Christians.

How to cope with pupils’ addiction to the internet.

“Social Media and Children’s Mental Health: A Review of the Evidence” is a new report from the Education Policy Institute (EPI). The BBC headlined the publication’s conclusions accurately enough - “Limiting children's use of the internet will not protect them against the ills of social media, researchers say.”

The EPI ‘round-up’ of research confirmed that more than a third of the UK’s 15 year-olds are, in OECD terms, "extreme internet users". This means that they are online for the equivalent of their whole evening on school days and for at least six hours per day when not in school. In addition 56% of 10-15 year-olds spend three hours or more on social media after school on a normal school day.

The EPI’s response runs long the lines of making drug addicts more resistant to the effects of the technology drug by maintaining a high dose. And, of course, in a sense, this is true! The more of a drug you take the less you are affected by a small dose. A ‘full-on’ heroine addict will not be much affected by a small ‘fix’. The same is true of digital technology and social media. If kids have plenty of exposure to the technology drug, the EPI argues, they become more resistant to the bad effects of small amounts. Readers of this newsletter may spot a dangerous flaw in this logic.

Schools are feeding this technology addiction on a daily, even hourly, basis through a blind and misguided belief that it is the key to raising standards. It allows learning to be ‘personalised’ and gives the teacher an easier time. Kids doped on computers - educational cocaine - cause less trouble. The OECD has pointed out, however, that over-dosing on

digital technology in schools is a symptom of under-performing education systems around the world.

In her important and insightful book, “Mind Change”, Baroness Greenfield points out that brain scans show clearly enough that digital technology has the same physiological ‘pleasure’ effect on the brain as cocaine and is equally addictive.

Exposure to the virtual world of digital technology is changing, in an observable way, the physiology of children’s brains at a vulnerable stage in their development. We will not discover the long-term consequences, if any, for some years. In the meantime the EPI’s advice appears to playing a game of Russian roulette with the mental health of young people. Greenfield warns that ‘mind change’ should be at least as big a concern as ‘climate change’.

Before reaching its dangerous conclusion, the Education Policy Unit should have taken note of the type of schools that are becoming increasingly popular with computer company bosses and their employers in the California. As “The Guardian” reported in December 2105:

“In the heart of Silicon Valley is a nine-classroom school where employees of tech giants Google, Apple and Yahoo send their children. But despite its location in America’s digital centre, there is not an iPad, smartphone or screen in sight.”

No Comment

Henry Smith, MP for Crawley, criticised schools for sending “party political messages” to parents in the run-up to the election, which he said was “both against the law and misleading”.

Littlehampton Gazette 28.6.2017

The Haitian revolution is as important to the development of the west as the French revolution. Kehinde Andrews, associate professor in sociology at Birmingham City University. Quoted in The Guardian 28.5.2017

A top London girls’ school [St. Paul’s Girls] has introduced a “gender identity protocol”, allowing pupils to use boys’ names and wear boys’ clothes should they wish to. The Independent 20.2.2017

Ofsted fails Orthodox primary school for not teaching eight-year-olds about sexual orientation Jewish Chronicle 26.6.2017

“I question how much school leaders really ask what the body of knowledge is that we want to give to our young people.”

Amanda Spielman, HM Chief Inspector, 23.6.2017

