

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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Contents

1. Editorial
2. The game is up for Mr Tickle
3. When ignorance impacts on UK diplomacy
4. Is intelligence heading south?
5. A music lesson for our time
6. Shame in national identity as part of the school curriculum
7. Assessment, mark schemes and ‘The Mysterious Case of Professor Baron Robert Skidelsky of Tilton in the County of East Sussex and the Russian A-Level Examination’.
8. No comment

Editorial

Are pupils being stressed out and damaged by the demands of testing? This question is currently high on the educational agenda. One head teacher in Wales has even claimed that national tests for primary school children are ‘bordering on child abuse’. The Guardian (22.6.18) weighed in with what it perceived as a rising atmosphere of hysteria and panic amongst those sitting public exams:

Pupils have delivered a damning verdict on the revamped GCSEs, saying they have caused mental exhaustion, panic attacks, crying, nosebleeds, sleepless nights, hair loss and outbreaks of acne.

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2018/jun/22/how-new-gcses-affected-pupils-panic-attacks-crying-exams>

The newspaper persuaded one youngster to pen an imaginary missive to the villain-in-chief, former education secretary, Michael Gove who initiated the move to slightly more rigorous GCSEs and A-Levels:

'Dearest Michael Gove,' said one candidate, 'if I can thank you for one thing, it would be that you have brought me closer to other struggling students across the nation, who are also facing the worst mental health problems teenagers have ever experienced.

We come together to celebrate the end of an absolutely treacherous era, all thanks to you. I look forward to results day to see how shockingly bad these mental health problems caused by the new system have affected my grade. No coursework, no second chance.'

Are youngsters such as this one justified in feeling so stressed out?

Last year only English and Maths were part of the new generation of tougher GCSE papers that, this year, covers most subjects. The overall pass rate for all subjects was down by 1.3 percentage points for sixteen year-olds. The exam boards told the BBC that results were broadly consistent with the previous year. In maths the 'good pass' rate dropped marginally, from 71.4 to 70.7%.

Through the manipulation of grade boundaries this year's cohort of candidates are most unlikely to be unduly disadvantaged by having to sit slightly more difficult papers. Last summer's 'good pass' mark for GCSE maths (grade C /4) dropped to 15%. If this year's exam poses more problems for candidates it can drop to 10% or lower.

For all the current tears, do not expect the overall pass rate of two thirds of GCSE candidates and 98 per cent of A-Level candidates 'passing', to change much this August. After all, as Sally Collier, the head of Qfqual, the exam standards regulator, informed The Sunday Times last time around 'all our kids are brilliant' (<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/schools-fear-chaos-over-tough-a-levels-twk5q906r>)

And the results that followed 'proved' she was right. They are likely to 'prove' she is right again this year.

More or less, it is being left to the Campaign for Real Education to inject an element of truth into the debate. International league tables, employer organisation surveys and the proliferation of top universities having to provide remedial catch-up courses, all point in the same direction.

Our message that candidates are being defrauded is a tough one to digest. I wonder, though, if young people would prefer a hard truth to a great lie.

Chris McGovern

The game is up for Mr Tickle

The *Mr Men* and *Little Miss* characters have been placed on trial via an academic research project at the University of Lincoln. The charge against them centred on sexism and misogyny, with a guilty verdict being pronounced at the recent annual conference of The British Psychological Society in Nottingham. <http://www.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/mr-sexist-student-group-chair-present-her-research-our-annual-conference>

The case against the books is that female characters speak, on average, twelve words fewer than the males. In addition, the research concluded that, ‘ Generally female characters were more passive, had less direct speech and relied on being saved more than male characters.’

What are we to make of this criminalising of Roger Hargreaves’ books, so beloved of infants around the globe?

Mr Silly wrote a letter of explanation to ITV’s breakfast show, ‘Good Morning Britain’. It turn out that it was all his fault.

Dear Good Morning Britain

I have decided to admit that it was my idea to blame the Mr Men and Little Miss books for stereotyping men and women. I am hoping to win the Nonsense Cup this year and I already have the support of:

Little Miss Giggles

Mr Muddle

Little Miss Doty

Mr Wrong

Little Miss Contrary

Mr Topsy Turvey

Little Miss Scarey

Mr Nonsense

I would have come to Good Morning Britain myself but I was too tired after working out how to spell 'stereotyping' and, in any case, you have an early start and like a lot of young people these days, although I am gender aware, I cannot tell the time.

PS: Please do not talk to my enemies about this story. They are all wrong-headed sexists. In particular, beware these dangerous individuals:

Little Miss Fun

Mr Clever

Little Miss Wise

Mr Funny

Little Miss Sunshine

Mr Happy

Little Miss Brainy

Mr Cheerful

Finally, thank-you for allowing Mr Grumpy to read this message out to your viewers!

A row erupted after the programme:

<https://www.mirror.co.uk/tv/tv-news/good-morning-britain-viewers-stunned-12505134>

Labour's Emily Thornberry, the shadow foreign secretary, was soon charging into the debate:

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-5708165/Good-Morning-Britain-guest-claims-Mr-Men-books-sexist-teacher-gender-stereotypes.html>

The Campaign for Real Education finds it rather sad that some opinion-forming adults feel the need to foist on infants the neuroses of adults. Little Misses Magic, Fun, Wise, Fabulous and Inventor give the lie to any malevolent intent. These books are, do not forget, full of laughter.

In our experience, it is, more often than not, the girls who tend to dominate in nurseries and in primary schools, just as they outshine boys at secondary level and at university. The Little Miss that one is most likely to come across in our education system is the charming but precocious Hermione Granger of Harry Potter fame. If a gender group is in need of attention and support from the PC brigade, it is the boys, not the girls.

So-called anti-sexism is, however, winning through and some of the Mr Men, at least, may soon be confined to outer darkness. In the TV debate, for example, Mr Tickle was linked, by a prominent female journalist, to alleged sex-offender Harvey Weinstein. The game for Tickle is surely up!

Meanwhile, as breakfast telly debates gender stereotyping, disengaged lads are roaming the streets with knives and bottles of acid. Many of these boys have never had a male role model in their lives but desperately needed one, especially from an early age.

Only fifteen per cent of teachers in primary school are male and secondary schools, too, are female-teacher dominated. The current Mr Men/Little Misses row is but one symptom of an over-feminised profession that is saturated in political correctness. A flashing red light is warning adult men against becoming a teacher. For young men and boys seeking male role models, however, the flashing light is green for 'come and join our gang'.

When ignorance impacts on UK diplomacy

'The Permanent Under Secretary is responsible for advising the Foreign Secretary and the ministerial team on foreign policy, and for managing the FCO [Foreign and Commonwealth Office]. He chairs the FCO Board and is also Head of the Diplomatic Service.'

This job description for the UK's leading diplomat comes from the government's website. It does not state any specific knowledge requirement for the top foreign office job. One might suppose, however, that it would expect the incumbent, currently Sir Simon McDonald, to know that the Punjab's revered Sikh Golden Temple in Amritsar is not a mosque.

Sadly, such basic knowledge escaped Sir Simon when, earlier this year, he tweeted:

'At the Queen's birthday party, presented with picture of The Queen at Golden Mosque in Amritsar in 1997, a permanent memento for Deputy High Commission's wall.'

Realising, or being tipped off, about his insult to the Sikh community Sir Simon eventually apologised:

'I was wrong: I am sorry. I should of course have said the Golden Temple or, better, Sri Harmandir Sahib.'

Religious sensitivities matter a great deal in diplomacy, especially on the sub-continent. They were, after all, a trigger for the Indian Mutiny (1857-59), a rebellion known in India, for reasons still important today, as the First War of Independence.

This UK diplomat's insensitivity coincides with a row in the Punjab over the deletion of chapters on Sikh history from the school history syllabus for their Class XII. The SGPC (Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee), overseers of Sikh places of worship, has accused the state government of being atheistic and 'anti-Sikh'.

Several related issues are now adding to the tensions. They range from neglect of Sikh war memorials to lack of maintenance for the heritage street that leads to the Golden Temple. I know from personal experience that these complaints are not without justification.

The modern history of the Punjab is writ large in blood. Most recently, the bloody storming of the Golden Temple by the Indian army in 1984 and the subsequent anti-Sikh riots following the assassination of prime minister Indira Gandhi have left a bitter legacy. Above all else, our diplomats need in-depth historical knowledge and understanding of the countries where they are representing British interests.

The response of Bhai Amrik Singh, chairman of the UK Sikh Federation, with regard to the 'Golden Mosque' tweet, reflects a real concern about the direction of travel for some aspects of UK diplomacy:

'This was a major gaffe by a top civil servant and totally unacceptable. In our view, a public apology and admitting the mistake is not enough. What we need is a commitment from the UK Government and senior civil servants to root out such ignorance and discrimination or we will continue to face hate, abuse and threats of violence.'

Even Jeremy Corbyn has 'cottoned on' to the significance of the Golden Temple. He has promised to investigate British undercover involvement in the events of 1984. Doubtless he sees it a vote winner with the Sikh

community. Less of a vote winner, though, may be Diane Abbot, the shadow home secretary, who has courted black voters by telling them that,

'The earliest blacks in Britain were probably black Roman centurions that came over hundreds of years before Christ.' http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/modern/dabbott_01.shtml#two

'Rooting out ignorance', as much amongst our so-called civil service intellectual elite as amongst unemployable school leavers and empty-headed politicians, is becoming a growing challenge for the UK. It was, also, at the heart of the Windrush fiasco.

The future of post-Brexit Britain will depend heavily on the quality of our diplomatic corps and home civil service. Historical knowledge and understanding, especially of the British Empire, has never been more important. It will certainly need to underpin our relationship, including stronger economic ties, with other Commonwealth members.

Placing the Empire and the Commonwealth at the heart of the school history curriculum would be a start. Its current status is that of 'Examples (non-statutory)' that teachers 'could' include in their history lessons.

Is intelligence heading south?

Children are less intelligent than they used to be. That is the headline-grabbing conclusion of a Norwegian research project just published by America's National Academy of Sciences. (<http://www.pnas.org/content/early/2018/06/05/1718793115>)

IQ scores for Norwegian males born between 1970 and 2009 dropped by roughly eight points. It is the first such fall in nearly a century. Sadly, this decline of intelligence is not confined to Norway - a country that does, in any case, out-perform the UK in both literacy and mathematics.

Under a headline, 'Dumb and dumber', The Times reports that the 'IQ scores of young Britons born after 1975 are declining roughly as quickly as they used to rise. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/news/dumb-and-dumber-why-we-re-getting-less-intelligent-80k3bl83v>

There is nothing new, though, about the latest findings. Research by Professor James Flynn back in 2008 reported IQ scores for 14 year-olds

in the UK falling by two points since 1980. Amongst those in the upper half of the intelligence scale the drop was six points. Flynn told The Sunday Telegraph that ‘there is something screwy among British teenagers.’ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/4548943/British-teenagers-have-lower-IQs-than-their-counterparts-did-30-years-ago.html>

The latest research finds from Norway are sounding alarm bells around the globe. The New York Post quotes University of Edinburgh psychologist as commenting that the ‘results are impressive and pretty worrying’. It notes researchers’ conclusions that ‘the selfie generation’s empty-headedness may be linked to the way math and language are now taught — along with more time spent on TV and computers.’

Apologists from our educational establishment, the Blob, will feel duty bound to rubbish any findings that question the success of our schools. IQ tests do not measure intelligence as it is understood in today’s post-modern world, will be the argument. Intelligence today is different from intelligence in the past. Even the head of Eton has been bewailing his boys’ lack of ‘gender intelligence’.

‘Look at the public examination results!’ will be the Blob’s defence. ‘Standards have never been higher!’ The only ‘failure’ that will be admitted is a lack of investment in education even though, in real terms, it has increased by nine hundred per cent in real terms since the 1950s.

Ironically, according to the OECD, we are the only country in the developed world in which grandparents, schooled in more austere times, out-perform their grandchildren. It turns out that those ‘bad old days’, the days of grammar, technical, and secondary modern schools, were not half as bad as comprehensive schools zealots would have us believe. And what is more they were characterised by a lot more social mobility than exists today under our ‘selection-by-post-code’ system. As Frank Musgrove pointed out in “Schools and the Social Order” (1979) around two thirds of grammar school pupils in the 1950s were the children of manual workers. Now, we also know that IQ scores were higher.

A decline in IQ matters! Is it a consequence of failings in teaching and parenting? At the very least, we need to know what is going on. The time for ‘brush off’ comments about the world having moved on from traditional IQ tests will not suffice. If young people are becoming less intelligent it is imperative that we take action.

A music lesson for our time

Have you ever heard of M-Trap, Lynch, or Chief Keef? They are ‘musicians’ but not of the classical tradition that once defined music teaching in our schools. As ‘drill’ artists they are representatives of a rather different take on music that is having an increasing influence on some school-aged young people.

In recent years school funding has been diverted with increasing profligacy towards the recruitment of more and more classroom assistants. The share of spending allocated to music teaching, particularly for learning an instrument, has suffered disproportionately.

Something of a vacuum has, consequently, developed in the provision of music education. A form of music known as ‘drill’, whose practitioners also provide role models for many, mostly disaffected, teenage boys, is beginning to fill this void.

‘Drill’ is an adaptation of so-called ‘rap music’ that already has a place in the music teaching of many schools. Indeed, the lyrics of one notable rapper, Dizzee Rascal, now appear on the A-Level English syllabus.

In the form of ‘drill’ the purpose of the music is gang-related. Often it is generated by a desire to challenge or threaten rival groups. It has its roots in the gangland and murder culture of Chicago but, as UK drill, is now firmly rooted in our cities, especially London.

Highly discordant and alarming the sound of ‘drill’ is the sound of inner-city boys and it is getting ever louder! This is payback time for alienated and the marginalised young males, for the under-educated and the politically-uncorrected outlaws of our society. Drill has become their theme music.

Putting into action boasts of violence expressed in drill has become expected behaviour for its adherents. The father of one ‘drill’ musician’s murder victim described the music as having ‘a demonic mindset’.

It would be dangerously short sighted to dismiss all drill musician role models as moronic imbeciles. Chief Keef, for example, a trailblazer for UK drill, was bright enough to sign a £4.4 million recording deal at the age of 16. He went on to set up his own recording company and by the age of 20, drill music had provided him with enough cash for him to announce his retirement.

A key to Chief Keef's success was his lyrics such as this toned down example:

Pistol toting and I'm shooting on sight . . . Got your bitch, I was in it all night.

There is plenty of cash to be had via drill music's call for violence. The price we are all paying, of course, is social disintegration. Metropolitan Police Commissioner, [Cressida Dick](#), has directly attributed the rise in London's knife crime to UK drill and its glamorisation on social media sites.

We have a gender inequality issue in the UK and most of all it is a generation of marginalised, alienated and, often, illiterate boys who are the victims. Whilst the educational establishment obsesses over the likes of gender-biased pronouns and whether skirts be a permitted uniform item, a lost generation of young males is creating an alternative dystopia.

Judge Rupert Mayo recently identified one symptom of this dystopia, In his summing up of a case involving the murder of 17 year-old Liam Hunt he observed:

This case is about normal, immature boys who think it is OK to carry a knife. This killing was just short of an execution. The jury was exposed to a culture where kids carry knives like they were mobile phones.

Back in 2011 in a report entitled, 'The Importance of Music - A National Plan for Music Education', the Department for Education stated:

A number of studies have demonstrated the positive impact music can have on personal and social development, including increased self-reliance, confidence, self-esteem, sense of achievement and ability to relate to others.

The current drill-music dystopia being created in some urban areas is the alternative direction in which music can lead young people. Music education needs a renaissance but not in this form.

Shame in national identity as part of the school curriculum

According to a recent YouGov poll for the BBC, (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-44306737>) 55 per cent of England's younger generation (aged

18-24) is not proud of their English national identity. 10 per cent even admit to being embarrassed by it. Should we be concerned? Not at all, in the opinion of journalist James Marriott. Writing in *The Times* (5th June) he declared:

Anybody concerned about the future of the nation should breathe a sigh of relief . . . Let's be glad that our young people are embarrassed to be English.

Since the BBC is also reporting that 72 per cent of the over-65s are hanging on to pride in this identity, Harry Mount arrived at a more nuanced and intelligent conclusion in an opinion piece for *The Daily Telegraph* (5th June):

These results . . . chime neatly with the BBC's world-view – that old people, and old-fashioned people, stuck out in the provinces, are all unpleasantly Brexit and nationalistic; while the young, metropolitan and educated are progressive types, too sophisticated to be restricted by, let alone proud of, national characteristics.

I wonder if BBC TV News will report the national amnesia and the epidemic of ignorance that underpins its findings about generational differences over perceptions of English identity. I suspect, not. These days, as Lord Tebbit has pointed out, ‘Lest we forget’ has become ‘Lest we remember’. Readers may have their worst fears confirmed if they read an explanation of this turn of events on the ‘Reaper’ website: <http://thereaper.rip/features/the-strange-death-of-historical-knowledge/>

How depressing and how alarming it is that so many politicians and commentators are too lazy to take a genuine, or an in-depth interest in, the revolution that has been quietly taking place in our classrooms over the past three decades. One need only look at the records of attendance in the Commons chamber for years when education is up for discussion to appreciate the extent of the political neglect.

Sadly, the denial of pride in identity that the BBC discovered has not come about by accident. Nor does it represent superior emotional or intellectual maturity amongst those schooled here over the past thirty years or so, as James Marriott would have us believe.

What it signifies is a knowledge deficit consequent on a delinquent education system. Its casualties are those who leave school knowing little, if anything, about their national identity. And the little they do know

focuses on the shame not the pain and struggle of our past. Ignorance is, now, enshrined in law by a History National Curriculum that makes entirely optional any specific landmark event or personality from English or, indeed, from British history.

Outside of the UK the terms 'English' and 'British' are largely used synonymously. Within the UK itself, however, 'British' is seen as more acceptable and less a source of embarrassment than 'English'. A British Social Attitudes Survey made this clear back in 2013. It showed, however, that over the previous ten years the percentage of those feeling 'very proud' to be British had fallen from 43 per cent to 35 per cent. 47 per cent of people still claimed to be 'somewhat proud' to be British. The Sunday Times pointed out that this was an 'all-time low'.

Five years on from that survey, is pride in British identity going the same way as pride in English identity? Most likely!

How is it possible for an increasing number of young people to turn their backs on Britain's and England's heroic stand against the Nazis in 1940, the sacrifices of the Great War, the campaign against slavery and so on?

Not every episode of British history is a source of pride, of course, but, on balance, we have more to be proud of than any other great imperial power across the world, anywhere and at any time.

Assessment, mark schemes and 'The Mysterious Case of Professor Baron Robert Skidelsky of Tilton in the County of East Sussex and the Russian A-Level Examination'.

Required to write an A-Level English essay about one of his dad's own novels the son of Ian McEwan could achieve no more than a grade C+. McEwan Snr recently told 'Event' magazine:

'I confess I did give him a tutorial and told him what he should consider. I didn't read his essay but it turned out his teacher disagreed fundamentally with what he said. I think he ended up with a C+.'

If McEwan Jnr's composition reflected the views of the author but did not

merit a good grade, how much confidence can we have in the teacher who marked it? Quite possibly the marking was fair and accurate but it does raise questions about the reliability of the assessment process in schools and in public examinations.

Mark schemes can be very rigid - more so now than ever. Once they are established, examiners may be left with little discretion. Partly, this is a consequence of the boards fretting over appeals and re-marks. Indeed, since 2016, it has become more difficult to challenge a result. Ofqual, the exam regulator, has come to see re-marks as simply a means to a higher grade for those who can afford the cost:

“It is not fair to allow some students to have a second bite of the cherry by giving them a higher mark on review, when the first mark was perfectly appropriate

In most circumstances a difference in a marker’s interpretation of an answer no longer constitutes a sufficient reason for changing a grade.

This is genuinely problematic when deficiencies in the mark scheme fail to accommodate good or, even, brilliant answers. This was vividly illustrated some years ago by ‘The Mysterious Case of Professor Baron Robert Skidelsky of Tilton in the County of East Sussex and the Russian A-Level Examination’.

His Lordship has a Russian background but was brought up mostly in England, to where he and his family fled from a Japanese interment camp in 1941. He has become a prominent and award-winning UK economist. Co-founder of the SDP he subsequently became a Conservative Party front bench spokesman on Treasury affairs (1997-9) before falling out with the Tories over his opposition to the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia. A global expert on economic affairs but with his Russian language skills under-developed, Robert decided to take an A-Level in Russian. The examination encompassed five language papers plus a sixth on *Prescribed Topics and Texts*. The topic he wrote about was unemployment:

‘... since I not only taught in a university economics department, but had discussed the Russian economy endlessly with Russian reformers. I wrote learnedly (I thought) about the problem of hyperinflation, lack of a rule of law and the wrong people being in the wrong jobs.’

Skidelsky had doubts about the quality of his Russian and expected he would probably attain a ‘B’ grade for the A-Level:

'B turned out to be right, but with an unexpected twist. On my five language papers I was comfortably above A grade. But, to my surprise, I was adjudged to have failed Prescribed Topics and Texts, scoring a miserable 26 out of 90.'

On appeal, the board explained that Skidelsky's low mark on the economics of unemployment in Russia reflected a *'lack of knowledge and understanding of the subjects'*, an *'inability to develop a coherent argument'*, *'irrelevance.'*

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2003/dec/09/schools.alevels2003>

Skidelsky's answer, clearly, did not fit the mark scheme. Probably, this is common enough for some of the most brilliant candidates across a range of subjects at both A-Level and GCSE as well as in day-to-day teaching. Was this also true for the McEwan Jnr's essay? How would the likes of Shakespeare, Milton, Austen, Dickens, George Eliot, Joyce or Woolf get on if they were asked to answer questions on their own writings?

Small wonder that these days examiners are more concerned about creating syllabi to fit a mark scheme. It is no accident that Caitlin Moran, Grayson Perry and the Secret

Footballer line up alongside Dizze Rascall, Russell Brand and Blackadder as A-Level English texts. Their writings can more easily be made to fit a mark scheme than is case with our literary giants.

All power to the mark scheme! The mark scheme is all!

No comment

The new [school uniform] update consists of shirt, tie, school jumper and trousers. This is a gender-neutral uniform to be worn by all students. Lewes Priory comprehensive school - uniform guide.

A former Department for Education civil servant has said ministers should ditch their claim that 1.9m more children are being taught in "good" or "outstanding" schools than in 2010, because it is misleading. TES
2.7.2018

To make [exams] a complete fetish and to make the very existence of the school depend on success in the league tables is just monstrous.
Philip Pullman, novelist. The Guardian 6.7.2018

The reason why London schools are doing so well, apart from good teachers, is that a lot of the immigrant families care about education, they value education, they support their children.
Sir Michael Wilshaw, former head of Ofsted, reported in Daily Telegraph 21.6.2018.

Jewish students are being put off from applying to certain universities because of claims of anti-Semitism. The outgoing National Chair of Labour Students, Melantha Chittenden has told Newsbeat that her own party's leadership is to blame. BBC News 18.6.2018

