



Education Politics

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Michael Gove, Magician, miracle worker, superman ...



But what happens when the magician cannot do his tricks?"

- Doctors speak out • PBR • media • sweat shop schools
- education for sale • free-academy-words • GERM
- Blunkett Plans Reviewed • Labour draft manifesto • PISA
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STOP PRESS: 93% OF PARENTS WANT QUALIFIED TEACHERS – PAGE 4

END OF COURSE REPORT

The Big Picture

Over the last four years of editing **Education Politics**, an enormous amount of time has been spent opposing the Gove revolution. Rightly so, as the damage done is massive and accelerating. However even in the first year of my five year stint, the real underpinnings of what has happened were historical, and international. I will take leave as editor by looking at the Big Picture

Clearly there were progressive moves by Labour, EMA and the Jamie Oliver food reforms, some tightening of the Admissions code – all reversed by Gove – and some Ministers have tried to work with teachers. But on the whole, the situation was summed up by Professor Sir Tim Brighouse after being brought in by Blunkett to work on issues, that he was marginalised. He said

“I was real friends with these people, and, well, it was like they had got on a boat in a fast moving stream and I stayed on the bank and, bit by bit, they got smaller in the distance and, you know, I kept waving from the bank”. *

But while we all wave from the bank of the stream and hope the boat will reverse and come back upstream, the reality is it is moving away all the time. This is a very old story. Andrew Adonis recently said that the Revolution really started with James Callaghan's Ruskin Speech in 1976. I agree. Labour started the reversal of support for Comprehensives and progressive, child centred learning – how can any educational system not be child centred? Acceleration under Gove has only built on foundations already laid.

We are coming to realise how much politicians are affected by international trends, and we know PISA is not just a place in Italy. The warnings by Janet Downs about the GERM in this issue are valid. But greed doesn't sell the undermining of state education and the belief that there are 'miracle' solutions as politicians regularly claim. And it certainly does not explain why politicians and the media remain totally convinced in these 'miracles' cures, even when they are incoherent and fail – media refuses to acknowledge that the 'miracles' are worse than the alleged problems.

THE RULING PARADIGM – ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM?

Matthew Hancock cited 5 elements on *Question*

Time (page 17) But these would not sell the project so widely. The key element is the idea of the School as the decision making body – to produce better exam and test results – apparently an autonomous unit always works better than democratic control. This is the Heart of Darkness, based on the US Charter School. This has some resemblance to anarcho-syndicalism. Not as workers control, but in the form of making autonomy the key to school progress. To cut a long story short, the Blair-Gove core belief is – on the surface – that all key decisions should be taken at school level. The autonomous school has become a mantra for school improvement sanction by PISA

A short essay cannot specify why the autonomy myth has become so powerful, but the key elements – schools admitting and expelling who they want, teaching what they want, how they want, employing who they want, on whatever contracts they want, controlling the length of the

The DFE claimed on December 16th 2013 that “The sponsored academies programme has been a huge success in transforming the fortunes of the weakest, most challenging schools”. This has no validity.

school day and term as they want, paying what they want, and with the all powerful Head Teacher apparently in charge of all activities of staff and students (with parents marginalised) is the core belief. The classic example of Wilshaw and Mossbourne is paraded to support the theory of the Heoric Head, now embodied in the post of Chief Inspector,

Dogma abounds. The DFE claimed on December 16th 2013 that “The sponsored academies programme has been a huge success in transforming the fortunes of the weakest, most challenging schools”. This has no validity. As we went to press Cambridge Assessment reported that they had analysed the PISA figures and quoted researcher Tom Benton saying “the assertion that the key to driving up standards is greater autonomy with sharper accountability is far from proven”. Alas evidence does not demolish the myth of the autonomous school, so what's going to happen?

THE MYTH ENCOUNTERS REALITY

Paradigms only collapse when evidence becomes overwhelming. Gove still remains superman for his supporters but the systems are

now starting to stress.

Short term there are major crises brewing from this autumn onward. Gove has given away the power to control teacher supply – and the sweat shop conditions which make teachers leave the profession will be intensified when Payment by Results and the weakening of national pay scales kick in. Look for staffing crises. Gove still has power over school building and the autumn will see the crisis of school places start to intensify. Labour recognises this but shows no sign of addressing the crisis as the housing boom generates estates with no schools. The declaration that councils cannot build schools will rebound. This is more toxic because of the drive to build faith schools. While the Trojan Horse scandal in major cities is sub judice, it is a time bomb waiting to explode that socially divisive religious groups control so many state schools.

Caroline Flint reminded Any Questions a few weeks ago Labour started the Academy programme – taking credit for a miracle cure. Will Labour be so keen to remind us they started the current faith school programme with no control over the curriculum?

The contradictions of the academy programme are going to come home particularly when the problems in the core thinking identified by Doctors writing for the BMJ start to bite. (See Doctors Speak Out p.4) Labour is committed to extending the “Freedoms” of the academies to all schools. So no national curriculum... and the imposition of the metrics theory the programme rests on. And an inefficient OFSTED clearly failing to monitor the programmes as Labour relies on remote assessment.

An even bigger crisis now developing is the threat to the very foundation of state education –

the legal entitlement to schooling. This was flagged up in a letter from Oxfordshire Education committee to Gove at the start of May. All councillors, from the three major parties, wrote to Gove pointing out the academisation meant they could no longer fulfil their legal obligations.

Admissions are currently controlled by academies and the Local Authority. But with the academies rejecting many children, the Local Authority has to find places for the rejected. As more schools become academies, the number of LA places declines. As they are not allowed to build schools, they are running out of places. The logic is that they will soon not be able to find places for kids to attend, they are now bussing kids 20-30 miles to schools with places. The 1870 Education Act set up compulsory education. But it cannot operate if schools can

refuse to admit children even when they have spare places.

Contradictions offer the chance of a parent teacher alliance.

Contradictions abound in the thinking of the Westminster Village, and parents are starting to realise this. Possibly the desired parent teacher alliance will form, but this will be difficult. NAHT recently published a poll showing 73% of parents thought change was too fast. So the potential is there, but the Education Alliance fails to appear. The way forward must look to alliances with doctors, parents, public sector workers, and the taxpayer. Education must emerge from the 'Miracle Cures' of the Westminster Village to confront a potential crisis.

Trevor Fisher

* *Reinventing Schools*, Ed John Bangs, John McBeath and Maurice Galton, Routledge 2011. Page 166

Contradictions abound in the thinking of the Westminster Village, and parents are starting to realise this. ... Education must emerge from the 'Miracle Cures' of the Westminster Village to confront a potential crisis.

HANDING OVER

After five years in the editorial chair, I am now handing over to Martin Johnson, and wish him the very best of luck. As the Chinese curse has it, you will live through interesting times Martin!. There are problems and possibilities in equal measure.

I have enjoyed the work, though not the politics. Sliding to the right, a process which began with Callaghan in 1976 has now delivered us to the door of UKIP. Sadly UKIP is the People's Party and challenges the Westminster Consensus. It can be done, but progressives have no allies in high places.

I think my colleagues in the SEA for their support, especially Martin Dore, always patient and positive. The only complaint I have had is my layout skills, which are non-existent, so many thanks to David Pavett for positive changes. My only regret was not writing the article on the JCB Academy in Rocester flagged up on the cover of Edition 110. Technical education remains the Achilles heel of English education. England simply cannot do it. I speak as a graduate of a technical school (1966).

Trevor Fisher

Doctors speak out on School Policy

Trevor Fisher

In the middle of May, Doctors at the highest level began to speak out over the direction of school policy. The British Medical Journal (BMJ) on 13th May argued that “Education policy in England increasingly encourages schools to maximise student's academic attainment and ignore their broader well-being, personal development, and health. Schools are now monitored on attainment in a narrow range of academic subjects”.

The withdrawal of support for the National Healthy Schools Programme, particularly finance was noted, as was OFSTED's abandoning of specific reports on “how well schools promote students' health or personal development. The Personal, Social and Health Education programme remain non statutory – though the BMJ at no point mentions the academy-free school programme, which on the autonomy dogma has no requirement to do anything on health, and has encouraged an abandoning of the Jamie Oliver food guidelines.

The BMJ commented on the thinking behind the changes, which are more than just Gradgrind focus on facts. It believes that two ideas underpin the dogmas, the first being that health and academic study are a zero sum game, that the more time on health the less time on academic study. Thus this supports the notion that education is now about exam factories, though the BMJ does not use the phrase. It does however critique the folly of thinking there is a contradiction. They indicate research showing better health means better academic work. Seems very simple really – a healthy mind in a healthy body. But not an idea favoured by Gove and his allies.

The BMJ suggests that a second key idea is that “improving attainment is singularly crucial to increasing economic competitiveness”, which it believe is a deeply flawed idea. It runs counter to Westminster Village thought – focussed in the discussion by Eddie Playfair on Labour's draft manifesto – by arguing that “an effective labour force does not merely require cognitive skills

gained from academic learning. Non-cognitive skills such as resilience and team working skills are also needed. And productivity increases as worker's health status improves”. It is astonishing that anyone, with a century of experience of school meals and the school medical service behind us, should have to say this.

However the belief in the Westminster Village that schools are exam factories, certificates equal success and people are disembodied brains is so deeply ingrained that we cannot even begin to discuss the value of sport and dancing – except to win medals in international competition. Obesity and the threat of growing diabetes and heart disease amongst the young has astonishingly failed to make any appearance in any political document I have read in the last five years.

The BMJ cogently argues that those school systems that focus on academic metrics such as England and the USA, focus on the able students who win the prizes “and not engaging other students or recognising their efforts”. Thus these students become disengaged from school – and I would argue become NEETs. The BMJ comments that “research indicates that 'teaching to the test', which commonly occurs in school systems with a narrow focus on attainment, can harm student's mental health. That school can make you sick has long been suspected. Linking this to preparation for exams and tests is a new and alarming, especially with Gove imposing tests on 4 year olds.

The following day the multimedia producer for the BMJ wrote a blog supporting the above, but adding that poverty also harms children. Duncan Jarvis reminded readers that “Childhood poverty's disabling effects were written about in 1973 by the National Children's Bureau, which now estimates numbers of kids in poverty has risen from 2m then to 3.5m now. The Lib Dems to their credit recognise the problem. The silence from the Tories is astonishing. The Doctors have opened a national scandal which has to be exposed.

93% of parents want Qualified Teachers!

On April 28th the National Association of Head Teachers published a survey into parent attitudes which was widely picked up by media. The headline figure seemed to be that 73% of parents thought that the pace of change in schools was too fast – very right and very welcome. The survey also showed that 71% believed academies would make no difference or worsen standards, 69% believed politicians should trust teachers, and 62% believed 'tougher' exams would make no difference or make things worse.

As usual, the media did not look beyond the press

release. However buried in the detail was a message the Heads did not want highlighted. It was the answer to the following question.

Q3. Should there be a compulsory qualification to be able to teach in state schools?

Responses (1018) = 100% **Yes = 93%** No= 7%

It is difficult to know why the Heads did not want this result highlighted. Parents do not want unqualified teachers teaching their children and rightly so. This is a game changer. It must become a priority issue.

Trevor Fisher

Reclaiming Education

John Bolt

SEA's collaboration with partner organisations¹ is now focussing on trying to influence the agenda for the General Election, now less than a year away. On 8th April over a hundred people packed Committee Room 14 at the House of Commons to talk about the kind of education policies they want to see on offer. The meeting was hosted by Kevin Brennan MP (Shadow Schools Minister) who introduced the session.

The keynote speaker was Peter Mortimore, former Director of the Institute of Education and author of "Education under Siege". He began by saying "we want a new government to challenge the cosy consensus that politicians have more or less got it right and that their ideas, right-wing, ideological, neo-liberal ideas are the only show in town". He went on to present a challenging analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of English education and some radical proposals for change. His challenge to the politicians was "that political parties seem to lack the courage to really challenge many of these big ideas. They're doing their best but they seem to lack the courage to go the full hog and really challenge and say "This is not the way that we want our society to develop. This is not the way that we want our education system to serve it."²

Everyone present was then invited to identify their personal priorities for education policy after 2015. Overwhelmingly people were saying that they're fed up with an education system that seems to be based around conflict and competition and want to see the focus back on equity, co-operation and support. This came through in a number of key policy areas:

Inspection, and indeed the whole accountability regime was seen as aggressive and punitive.

There was little faith in either the objectivity or the expertise of Ofsted and a demand for an inspection service that works alongside schools and teachers to bring about improvement.

There was widespread condemnation of an admissions system which enables, indeed encourages, schools to try and beggar their neighbour by manipulating the system. There was widespread rejection of all forms of selection.

It was strongly felt that the school system needs to be planned locally by organisations that represent local communities. Trying to create a competitive market between different kinds of schools is hugely wasteful of resources and has done nothing to improve standards.

There was strong support for schools working together locally to share ideas. This is something that needs to be locally co-ordinated with all schools expected to take part.

People are overwhelmingly fed up of politicians imposing their prejudices on schools and using education as a way of scoring party political points. They want to see more respect for the professionalism of teachers with a focus on high quality training and educational decision making at arms-length from politicians.

These are the issues that very many people want to see addressed in the election campaign and SEA, with its partners will be working to make that happen.

1. CASE, Comprehensive Future, Forum and Information for School Governors.

2. Peter Mortimore's slides can be found at www.pickingupthepieces.org.uk/petermortimore.html

To what extent do higher teacher salaries improve pupil attainment?

Jackie Lukes

As teacher pay has until this autumn largely set by national agreements, variation in salary reflects experience, so it is usually hard to separate the effect of teacher pay from teacher experience. Recent research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies¹

cleverly compared teachers on either side of the London fringe boundary: in the same geographical area, with the same levels of experience (on average) but who are paid differently because of London weighting.

¹ IFS Working Paper W14/03: "Estimating the effect of teacher pay on pupil attainment using boundary discontinuities" Greaves, E & Sidbieta, L. March 2014, London.

The study compared pupil attainment in English and maths at the end of primary education in schools close to the fringe, on both sides of the boundary. Just inside the fringe, teacher salary

scales were 5% or c.£1000 higher than those just outside. But there was virtually no difference in pupil test scores. "The difference in pupil attainment between schools on either side of the pay boundary is very close to zero."

Why has the study received little attention? Perhaps because it is not about Performance-Related Pay (PRP). It does mention UK, American, Australian and Indian experience suggesting PRP could make a difference to pupil outcomes. "Pay differentials may be effective when linked more directly to [teacher] performance. There is some evidence of a modest positive effect of PRP on pupil attainment, though it appears to matter a lot how such systems are designed."

That conclusion accords with a more substantial report on PRP, the Policy Exchange study of "the introduction of PRP for all teachers in English schools"² starting in Sept 2014. This looks systematically at the costs and benefits of PRP, and examines objections in principle.

Teaching can't be measured? Not by one single criterion but maybe by a mix of agreed approaches. No evidence supporting PRP? By now there is, ever since threshold pay for Upper Pay Scales began in England in 2000; a global range of public sector cases is reviewed. PRP is divisive, preventing collegial teamwork and damaging morale? Not necessarily if differentiation is agreed and schemes are fairly designed and constructively carried out, it seems. PRP is really aimed at cutting the pay bill? Again it depends on school autonomy and how it is used.

Objections in practice turn out to be the serious ones and this report makes plausible suggestions about design, implementation and pace of introducing a scheme. Most surprising is how a national YouGov poll found teachers not opposed to PRP in principle, only cautious and anxious in practice. To the idea of combining it with a supportive context of CPD (Continued Professional Development) and a reduction in administrative reporting and bureaucratic workload, a majority of teachers in England is in favour. It looks like doing the right things, over CPD and workload, for the wrong reasons!

NB. The Institute of Fiscal Studies is a well established politically neutral policy think tank. However Policy Exchange is a right wing think tank partly set up by and with connections to Michael Gove – whose policy it is to introduce PRP. It is time we had guides to think tanks to work out which are the ideologically and politically well connected ones. Editor.

² Policy Exchange: "Reversing the 'widget effect': the introduction of PRP for all teachers in English schools". Robb,M & Simons,J. Jan 2014, London.

Media No Sense

Trevor Fisher

Media have taken the Academy success myth as unquestionable common sense, now affecting their views everywhere. On Saturday 24th May I was watching a programme about Museums on BBC2 which had nothing to do with Education. The presenter decided to take a couple of sixth formers round a museum, fair enough. But notably the two girls selected were from... Mossbourne Academy.

Its not just the stamping ground of Chief Inspector Wilshaw which benefits from the Academy myth. Some months ago one of the ageing adolescents who present Top Gear on BBC2 wanted to play with model toys with some real adolescents. So he went to Thomas Telford Academy in Shropshire. You would, wouldn't you? It was once the Guardian top Comp (sic) of the year and the head got a Knighthood.

Its not just the BBC. the Evening Sentinel in Stoke reported that the Haywood academy will get £2.1m for a new sixth form centre in the old Town Hall in the middle of Burslem. This was going to revive the town centre as it would "generate footfall in the town centre, which will be good for local businesses" according to Head Teacher Carl Ward as 400 students would go there.

No one was looking a gift horse in the mouth, and Burslem needs reviving. If you ever go to Burslem, say to see Port Vale FC, you will see the old Town Hall. Its the big Victorian Building with grass growing out the top. But would 400 sixth formers generate business? For what, coffee bars? And does Haywood Academy have 400 sixth formers? It didn't last time I looked. So would it work with the local FE college which has a campus five minutes up the road? Or would it take students away from the college?

More pertinently is this going to work? A dozen years ago I worked on a project to generate A level numbers in Burslem called the Two Towns Project (the other town being Tunstall). We failed. There are lessons to be learned, and I hope the new project succeeds. But there is little sign that any lessons are being learned, and the media are not asking the right questions.

Help spread the message

SEA members can help our campaign for better education by ensuring that Constituency Labour Parties, Local Co-op Parties and trade union are affiliated to the Socialist Educational Association.

Sweat Shop schools are burning out teachers

Beth Davies

Teacher workload has now reached an all time high according to a recent DfE workload survey .

Initially the government didn't want to publish the results of this survey but it was eventually pressured to do so.

The survey showed that amongst 1600 primary and secondary teachers there was a significant increase in working hours since 2010.

Primary teachers are now working on average 59.3 hours and secondary teachers are working an average of 55.6 hours per week.

Teachers have inflexible hours of working, they cannot take time off during term time. The school day may be seen by the general public as being short, certainly shorter than the standard office day. However, teachers work extra hours before and after the school day, weekends and holiday times.

The Schoolteacher's Pay and Conditions Document states that teachers must work 1265 hours spread over 195 days inclusive of 5 Inset days which are non-pupil days. This is called directed time.

Included in directed time are activities such as professional development and planning, preparation and assessment whilst also carrying out other duties such as parents' evenings, open evenings, break times and in service training and many more.

There is also provision in teachers' contracts that they should not routinely undertake clerical and administrative tasks, however, primary classroom teachers are spending over 4 hours per week on these and secondary teachers over 2 hours.

The NUT is currently in dispute with the Government over teachers' heavy workload , and as stated earlier, the government's latest survey shows a shocking increase which does not directly impact upon the child in the classroom. For example, classroom teachers tell us that for 19 hours of actual teaching per week, a massive 22.6 extra hours of planning, preparation and assessment is generated.

In addition, many teachers take after school clubs voluntarily, take part in extra curricular activities as well as taking on wider responsibilities such as residential courses.

Many of these teachers also tell us that this extra workload is generated for OFSTED inspections and not for children. This is a primary factor in teachers leaving the profession in the first five

years.*

It is interesting to note that in countries such as Finland, which ranks high in the PISA tables, teachers have a much shorter working day and the only paperwork produced is that which directly impacts upon children's learning.

In addition, European Trades Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) survey findings published in May 2013 showed that out of 37 European countries, UK teachers scored highest for "burnout".

In conclusion, teachers must be allowed to concentrate their energies upon the child in the classroom and not produce endless amounts of paperwork which has very little or no impact upon teaching and learning but is produced to satisfy government targets and data analysis for inspections. The lessons from Finland and its successful education system is 'less is more'.

Beth Davies is an NUT executive member

*OFSTED reports that 40% of teachers leave in the first 5 years. HMCI Wilshaw reacted by blaming behaviour in the classroom and HE courses not teaching behaviour management, and poor dress of teachers. This fitted with government (Gove) attacks on university teacher training, and shifted the blame from OFSTED's own behaviour. There has been no major change in poor classroom behaviour or teacher training till Gove's Schools Direct programme, but major shifts in pressure from OFSTED. The Focus on government policy under Gove in increasing burn out and links to similar problems for Nursing and social workers must become a high priority.

On May 3rd the Association for Teachers of Maths stated it was "very concerned about the hasty changes to ITE (Initial Teacher Training) inspection... The increased emphasis on behaviour management and professional dress seem inappropriate". They also pointed out that inspection of Newly Qualified Teachers in the first term favours Schools Direct and other providers, since they often employ teachers who have worked in a school for a year. This cannot happen for Higher Education providers. First term performance often dips when a teacher is adjusting to a new school, so why inspect in the first term? It is common sense that the second term when teachers have found their feet is more accurate. Why is OFSTED not aware of this?

Editor

Is Education for Sale?

Martin Doré

In the recent TUC commissioned report Martin Johnson and Warwick Mansell shine the spotlight on a process that has been moving towards privatisation of the education service for the last quarter of a century.

As they remind us, 'The marketisation of schools in England is influenced by the neo-liberal theories of economists such as Hayek and policies enacted in the 1988 Education Reform Act.'

Among the features of the then newly enacted policy were the provision of so called freedoms for schools.

'The theory is relatively simple: the features of a market for schools are:

- schools enjoy autonomy and are seen as independent
- schools are funded on a per pupil basis, providing an incentive to recruit
- parents (the 'consumer') can choose schools, and are enabled to be well informed about them
- schools must compete for pupils in order to remain viable; the outcome is that 'good' schools thrive, while 'poor' ones close, thus producing whole system improvement.'

The authors then examine what has happened in the intervening years as a result of these 'freedoms' and they also point out that that it was the ERA not the further step of academisation that really changed the distinctive character of education in England in particular.

Of course the academies programme instigated by New Labour and propelled to new heights by booster rockets from Michael Gove, became 'the vehicle to strengthen marketisation'. The evidence is compelling: 'At first academies were established by sponsors who needed to donate £2 million to their scheme, but by 2009 this had been scrapped and by 2012 selected sponsors were being offered extra cash.' And now of course, this centralisation process needed an increasingly large army of civil servants to administer and finance the programme. 'By 2012 the DfE had been reorganised with a third of the staff working on the academies programme, with around 500 working on 'performance and brokerage' alone.'

So we know the direction of travel and we are not aware of any significant pressure from within the Labour Party leadership to change this.

The signs are there that we are now on the way to full privatisation of these valuable, attractive government and local authority assets. Johnson and Mansell do not say that this has already

occurred to any meaningful extent. They assert 'the academies system does not – or does not yet – include what many would see as the signature element of full-scale privatisation: the ability for a company to make direct profits from the management of state-funded schools.' They say that that this is because thus far the policy of the DfE remains explicit 'Sponsors cannot profit from sponsoring an Academy. Where an [academy trust, or AT] wants to deliver its own projects, they must do so 'at cost' with no profit margin factored in. This means without charging any element of profit on the goods and/or services provided.'

What is implicit is that this is likely to change in the near future. Already people in the edu-business sector are scraping away at the flimsy constraints upon profit-making. Many private firms have already made millions from providing services to the DfE.

'Our analysis of Department for Education spending data over the period May 2010 to December 2013 shows that £76.7 million has been paid by the DfE to 14 private firms which have provided legal, accountancy, management consultancy and property service support for the academies and free schools schemes.'

Of the many example provided by the authors the following is typical: 'Turner and Townsend, a management consultancy, was paid £10.06 million during the 18-month period of June 2012 to December 2013 to provide "technical and legal advice" to free schools and University Technical Colleges.' Nice money if you can get it.

And this is only the beginning. There are now two strands of privatisation under way, according to the report.

Under direct privatisation the authors note: 'After the 2010 election, education companies became more bullish in response to the political climate, and the new magazine 'Education Investor' grew like the business it reports. In May 2012, when Michael Gove was asked if it was his view that the government might eventually move to allowing for-profit operators into the free schools market, he said 'it's my belief that we could move to that situation...but...I think we should cross that bridge when we come to it'. The widespread expectation was that the bridge would be the 2015 election campaign.' I think we should not be too surprised to find oblique references to that kind of change in the next Conservative manifesto.

As for the more insidious indirect privatisation trend; 'Indirect privatisation is the operation of significant core functions of the school, such as

management and administration, teaching and learning, or performance management and improvement, under the control of a for profit company contracted for that purpose by an academy trust, which itself is a charity. It is common and growing, although its current extent should not be overstated.'

The authors then examine the global dimensions of this whole movement but there is not enough space to do that part of the report justice here.

Suffice it to say, this research should be required reading for anyone involved in education. It is an illuminating, carefully researched, incisive and, I believe, prophetic report. And it reveals, above all, a frightening spectre hovering over all of us who believe that education should be a public service not a business.

Martin Doré – May 2014

https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Education_Not_For_Sale_Repor_Report.pdf

Academy School, Free Schools – what's in a title?

Margaret Morris

Schools have always tried to establish their prestige by their titles, often by incorporating the name of a local worthy. In the past, the favourite ploy was the use of the word “academy” with its association with scholarship and the Royal Societies in England and Academies in Europe. Even “Dotheboys Hall” in Dickens’ *Nicholas Nickleby* had a faint whiff of Public Schools or Universities by its name “Hall”. So when the New Labour Government wanted to boost their proposal to establish sponsored schools within the state sector “Academies” seemed an obvious choice of title.

This caused a small problem in my local area, Haringey, because the Local Authority had used the term “Academy” to give a new start to a local school coming out of special Measures. As it has no desire as a Community School to be mistaken for a New Labour “Academy”, it has now dropped the word Academy from its title.

But, in any case, “academy” is now old hat and has given way to an even more emotive term, “Free”. Our latest new school sponsored by the Harris Academy chain is not being called an Academy School, but a “Free School”. Over the ages, oppressed peoples have raised and fought behind the banner of “Freedom” but it is hard to see in what way the sponsored or converter academies needed to become “free”, or indeed in what way any community school was being oppressed except by excessive Government intervention.

Between the 1944 Act and the Thatcher era, there was tripartite control of state schools between (1) the Government, which allocated the funds for both schools and the independent HMIs, whose role was to advise as well as monitor; (2) the Local Authorities, which provided, maintained and had financial oversight of schools; and (3) the schools themselves which decided their own curriculum, subject only to the need to prepare their pupils for public examinations. Local Authority Directors of Education had considerable authority but Head Teachers could stand up to them and saw it as

their job to run their own schools. The setting up of the Schools Council in the early 1960’s to develop new qualifications and thereby influence the curriculum also brought together the three parties with the schools being represented mainly by the Teachers’ unions, which also represented teachers on the Burnham Committee, which negotiated salary levels.

The Thatcher Government set out to weaken the role of the Local Authorities and the Teachers’ Unions and strengthen the role of the Government. The Schools Council and the Burnham Committee were abolished; Government committees became responsible for qualifications and the National Curriculum became mandatory; the Baker Act took away power over finance and appointments from Local Authorities in favour of School Governing Bodies; and the independent HMI service was replaced by Ofsted, which is directly responsible to the Government and which has come to dominate what and how schools teach by its form of inspections and the creation of League tables. Headteachers are less secure than in the past and fear each Ofsted visit could result in their dismissal.

When the current Government created first Academies and now “Free Schools” directly responsible to the DFE, it took over the remaining powers of Local Authorities for the financial accountability of schools and excused them from the obligation to follow the Government imposed National curriculum and other Government regulations. The results are now evident: financial mismanagement, gross overspending and waste of public money and distortions of the curriculum in some schools. Their power to choose their pupils has encouraged social segregation and distorted the balance of admissions to other schools and sensible planning of school places.

Will the mounting evidence of problems in and around “Free Schools” undermine confidence in using this emotive title to cover up the aim of central Government control?

The GERM: a virus which is killing the world's schools

Janet Downs

There's a growing and malevolent threat to education worldwide. It's the Global Education Reform Movement. GERM symptoms, described by Finnish educator and academic, Pasi Sahlberg, are:

- Competition between schools.
- Standardisation. Prescribed curriculum, teaching and expected outcomes.
- Test-based accountability.
- Choice

But competition between schools reduces collaboration. In a competitive school system there will be winners and losers. In competitive school systems the weakest will be marginalised because weak pupils bring down results.

Standardisation dilutes teacher professionalism. You don't need trained teachers to teach a centrally-prescribed curriculum. In England, academy schools are theoretically free of the national curriculum – in reality the exam system drives what is taught. And ministers make it quite clear what curriculum they expect to see in "good" English schools.

Accountability by testing narrows the curriculum – only subjects which are tested matter. Creative subjects are marginalised; essential skills which can't easily be tested are side-lined.

The OECD said their evidence suggests increasing parental choice doesn't make school systems more effective. And giving parents a "choice" of schools turns them and their children into consumers rather than recipients of a universal right: a good school for all children, good schools for every child nationally and globally.

Why, then, is GERM so virulent? Why does it threaten education?

These were questions asked the international conference, "Global Education 'Reform': Building Resistance and Solidarity" which took place at Hamilton House, London, on 24 May 2014. Delegates heard how GERM was affecting education in the Americas, Africa, Asia and Europe*. They also heard how teachers are joining with parents and students to fight GERM. And they found out why global businesses are so interested in spreading GERM.

The answer is one word: money. The world-wide education market reached \$4.4 trillion – that's TRILLION – in 2013. It's set to grow further by 2017. And global organisations want a piece of the pie.

Competition means parents must be persuaded that School X is more synonymous with "excellence" than School Y. This increases demand for marketing to strengthen the appeal of a particular "brand" whether it's an academy chain in England or global education publishers pushing their own solutions to so-called "failing" education systems.

Standardisation drives the market for published "solutions", not just off-the-shelf curricula but services provided by education management organisations (EMOs). E-learning – delivering education via the internet – is the fastest-growing sector. And you don't need trained teachers to supervise pupils in front of a computer – just "grannies in the clouds". You don't need trained teachers to deliver ready-made "affordable learning" sold as a solution for educating the world's poor. But for-profit schools for the poor aren't the answer. If families have to choose between food and education, then they will necessarily choose the former. If families can only afford to educate one child, the other children remain uneducated.

Accountability makes it easier to pay teachers by results. This is sold as rewarding "good" teachers and punishing "bad" ones. But this raises the question of what teachers are for. Are they expected to encourage children to read deeply, analyse, calculate, weigh evidence, discuss, co-operate, create...? Or are they just to push pupils through tests? And tests, of course, demand an exam system. This provides millions of pounds in England alone not just for question papers but materials which support exam syllabuses.

GERM threatens the idea that education is a human right for all children irrespective of their ability to pay. It undermines the notion that education is good for society as a whole. It turns schooling into a product that can be bought and sold for profit.

The international conference showed how teachers and parents are uniting to fight GERM – watch this site for details in a future thread.

Education is not for sale – it's a human right which needs defending.

#fightGERM

*A summary of what happened at the International Conference can be found here:

<http://electmartin1.blogspot.co.uk/>

A shorter version of the above appeared on the Local Schools Network on 25 May 2014

The Blunkett review and education's democratic deficit

Eddie Playfair

The Blunkett review is to be welcomed as it is a step towards recreating an education system. But it does not fully address English education's democratic deficit.

Overall objectives

"Standards not structures" never made much sense as a mantra. Politicians are right to signal that high standards for all are their main policy aim but the idea that the way education is organised has no bearing on standards is simply crazy. One just needs to look at England where we now have a chaotic non-system of competing providers and distorted markets which can only be described as "confusion not coherence". We have a highly interventionist government which refuses to intervene in the one effective way it should; to develop an effective national education *system*.

Whoever wins next year's general election will inherit the fractured landscape of English education. The challenge will be how to start healing the fractures and create a functional system which is actually capable of achieving high standards for all.

Enter David Blunkett, with his *Review of education structures, functions and the raising of standards for all* published a few weeks ago and commissioned by the Labour Party to inform their manifesto for 2015. The document is long and contains many detailed recommendations which have already attracted much comment. It was driven by two overriding objectives:

- To raise standards and offer equal opportunity for all children.
- To bring about coherence, consistency and collaboration to the education service.

These are vital aims and the 40 recommendations are mostly very welcome practical steps towards the creation of a *system*; something which is taken for granted in most countries but is quite impossible under the current English free-for-all with its plethora of competing schools, chains, sponsors and constant government-inspired market interventions.

In his introduction David Blunkett also provides a much better case for the importance of education than does the current draft Labour manifesto (see my article on Labour's draft manifesto). Instead of the dreary language of economic instrumentalism

and guff about winning the global "race to the top" we are told that:

"A grasp of who we are, where we are and where we come from is essential to our sense of identity." and

"We have to provide the opportunity to build those thinking and critical skills which allow the analytical faculties to develop – to be able to challenge as well as to make sense of the world around us."

The introduction ends with a flourish:

"Education is the great liberator; it can unlock what William Blake called those *mind-forged manacles*".

Bernard Crick's former student shows his commitment to education for citizenship and his belief in the liberating power of education and this gives real heart to the document. Labour would do well to adopt these sentiments as well as agreeing the recommendations.

However....

At the centre of the Review is the proposal to create independent Directors of School Standards (DSS) who would be charged with driving up standards and would intervene or facilitate intervention where necessary, for example via Community Trusts or Education Incubation Zones. They would encourage schools to share good practice and be empowered to broker collaboration. They would be appointed by groups of local authorities from shortlists approved by the Secretary of State and relate to a forum and stakeholder panel. They would report annually to various elected representatives in ways which would encourage questioning and debate.

This is an improvement on what we have now. The Regional Schools Commissioners (RSCs) currently being introduced will only oversee part of the school system, will be biased in favour of particular solutions and will have no real accountability to local people or their elected representatives.

However desirable, the introduction of Directors of School Standards will not address the democratic deficit at the heart of English education. To be effective, such a key player as a DSS, with their vital responsibility for system-building, system improvement and system-change within their area, should have real local legitimacy. This is much diluted if it is exercised via representatives from a

group of local councils. If not directly elected themselves, I would suggest that the DSS should be appointed by, and accountable to, a directly elected education authority. There is a good case for these strategic authorities to be regional or city-wide and to take on responsibility for 16-18 education as well. In London, for example, that authority could be the Greater London Authority.

Some people argue that we shouldn't fetishize local democracy, that elections do not guarantee improvement and that one election every 4 years cannot address today's real problems. Clearly, electoral politics does not solve everything but giving up on the democratic oversight of local public services denies us all our voice and leads to rule by technocrats and experts or, worse, the anarchy of the market.

Every citizen in England has a stake in education and should know, for their area:

- Who decides education policy and priorities?
- Who defines and sets standards and tackles underperformance?

- Who ensures the system is working fairly for everyone?
- How do we get to question, debate and challenge them?
- How can we remove and replace them?

Education policy is too important to leave solely to the Secretary of State, to experts or to the market. It should be subject to scrutiny and debate locally as well as nationally. I think we should be arguing for elected education authorities, not as the only solution but to help create a new democratic space for education to be debated. We should trust ourselves to shape this debate and to elect people on the basis of their education policies. We might be surprised by how much better we can make things and any new DSS or RSC worth their salt should be delighted to report to an elected body supported by an engaged and vibrant local education community.

Eddie Playfair blogs at eddieplayfair.com and tweets @eddieplayfair

Conservatism and educational crisis: the case of England

Ken Jones

The coalition reaps the benefits of 40 years of Right Wing ideology

This is the forward to an article which will appear in Education Inquiry, an open access journal. This is a link to the Education Inquiry website. The issue in which it will appear will be published very shortly. I have read it and recommend all readers to study it, it is an excellent study of the issues facing progressive education under the coalition. Trevor Fisher.

The Conservative-led Coalition government in Britain is strongly committed to a programme of austerity. In the short term, this is a programme which makes more difficult the country's exit from a period of recession and slow growth; in the longer term, it threatens cuts and privatisation which call into question the welfare state. Yet, politically, the Coalition has managed the post-2008 crisis more effectively than other European

governments. Focusing on education, where the government's right-wing radicalism is strongly evident, this forthcoming article explores possible reasons for its political success. It looks particularly at the Coalition's policies for teachers, and for the extension of private influence over schooling, as well as at the way it justifies its policies with reference to a reconceptualisation of 'equal opportunity'.

It suggests that these are the culmination of more than 40 years of discursive elaboration and programme-building, which have weakened opposition to a point which makes the immediate costs of policy implementation quite low. It suggests, however, that the Conservative achievement is an unstable one, more likely to sharpen long-term political and social tensions than to resolve them.

Ken Jones, is Professor of Education at Goldsmiths College, ken.jones@gold.ac.uk

GET AFFILIATED

Calling all SEA members. Would you please ensure that your Constituency Labour Party, Local Co-op Party, and your trade union are affiliated to the Socialist Educational Association. Please find an affiliation application form enclosed in this issue of Education Politics.

The Blunkett Review – A New Start or More of the Same?

David Pavett

Labour's Policy Review is moving towards its culmination in the Annual Party Conference in September. The documents are now all in (as far as I know). CLPs and affiliated organisations have until 13th June to submit their amendments to the eight main policy statements. A selection from those amendments and submissions will be considered by the *National Policy Forum* in July.

The main education statement is *Education and Children* but we also need to take into account other statements from the Policy Review process. Principally these are *One Nation Politics* and the *Review of education structures, functions and the raising of standards for all* (the Blunkett review). There are still some documents from Stephen Twigg era kicking around such as the proposal for military-backed academies in deprived areas, but presumably, and one must hope, they have fallen off the table.

Campaigners for an integrated system of non-selective schools working within a framework of local democracy could be excused for feeling that *Education and Children* did not answer most of their most basic concerns. But, it was said, we had to wait for the Blunkett Review in order to see just how schools would fit into local democracy on the basis of the Blunkett review.

What's in the Review?

The Review has seven sections and forty recommendations. The style is peremptory and contemptuous of different opinions. David Blunkett knows that many (most?) Labour Party members would like to see democratic local government playing the central role in providing a coherent and common framework for all schools. Such views are dismissed without even stating them: "Regrettably, general comment from the less well-informed continues to reflect a bygone era". That's it for all you campaigners who have worked so hard to expose the flaws in and the misinformation about, academies. David Blunkett, message to you is that "Academies are here to stay and we need to build on this landscape".

That is the message of the document as a whole: the landscape created by the Coalition, with minimal opposition, is the new baseline.

The section section, *Best practice*, is based on the ideas that "Collaboration is key" and "Freedom for schools has brought substantial benefits". However we are never told what those freedoms are exactly. Freedom to compete with other schools via league tables? Freedom to have governors picked by private sponsors? Freedom to fix school

days and years independently of other schools in the area? Freedom to vary the conditions of service and salary determination from school to school? The failure to be clear about which freedoms and for what purpose/context amounts in practice do a defence of the status quo.

There is no investigation of alternative approaches. If this were a school essay to make the case the teacher would advise a re-write in which different ideas should be considered along with the arguments for and against them.

Much is made of the "community trust model" without ever explaining what it entails. *The Hackney Learning Trust* is praised for the work it did from 2002 when, and this is not mentioned, it was set up as a private, not-for-profit company to run Hackney Council's education. Hackney negotiated a 10-year contract with the company for its work. In 2012, and this is not mentioned, Hackney reintegrated the work into its domain. There is, I believe, a strong hint that Blunkett favours this sort of outsourcing of what is left of LA educational work. I would go further and suggest that the trust model of school cooperation strongly advocated by the document would be a major step to decoupling schools from any sort of local democratic process and a move which, whatever Blunkett's intentions, would facilitate further privatising measures at a subsequent stage by a government with the will do do so.

The key recommendation is for the creation of a new post of *Director of School Services (DSS)*. The DSS would be appointed by groups of local authorities from a government approved list. He or she would be statutorily independent and therefore not directly answerable to the LA making the appointment.

The DSS would be responsible for opening and closing schools on the basis of data supplied by the LAs. New schools would be put out to tender and the provider would be determined by a the DSS. Local Authorities would **not** be able to apply (contrary the claim made in briefing notes circulated to the Parliamentary Labour Party).

The review makes great play of opposing this government's top-down approach with its own bottom-up approach. Given that no good system is possible without both one has to wonder how much sense this makes. Very little, in my view.

The Government's current direct central control is being "devolved" to eight Regional School Commissioners. Labour's idea is instead to "devolve" power to a larger number of government

approved DSSs who would determine when and where schools would be created and determine and changes of status. This would all be done with independent powers. LAs could express a view if they wished, but no more than that.

This general background is so deeply conservative that even the good things in the report, and there are some, are set in a general context which means that they could do no more than ameliorate the impact of an overall very bad system.

Among the good points are:

(1) all schools to have their own clear legal status (schools in chains may lack this), although it is bizarrely suggested that those currently with legal status will need no changes, contrary to the advice from David Wolfe QC printed as Appendix III;

(2) the right of schools to leave academy chains - although (a) this is based on the continued existence of such chains and (b) would only allow movement between "partnerships, federations, trust or academy chains";

(3) No more favouritism in the funding of free schools (which would continue to exist with new ones be called "parent-led academies");

(4) The Freedom of Information Act to apply to all schools and chains;

(5) Ofsted inspection of academy chains (although it is worrying that the report is adulatory in its praise of Ofsted and its head Michael Wilshaw);

(6) Running Ofsted via contracts to just three large private operators is questioned - though without questioning the principle its privatisation;

(7) Academy chains should 'float off' or exchange schools to make more coherent geographical/local sense but there is high praise for the *Academies Enterprise Trust* chain, the largest academy sponsor with schools from Torquay to Sunderland;

(8) The creation of two participative bodies (1) *Local Education Panels*: These would include representation from schools in the area, parents and relevance Local Authority representatives, who would work with the DSS on the development of a long-term strategic plan for education. This is a potentially radical proposal although the membership of the forum is far too restrictive, (2) *City Wide Learning bodies*: these could complement the *Local Education Panel*. It refers to the local arrangements (sometimes known as borough or citywide learning bodies or forums) with whom the DSS would work closely'. These are authority-wide partnerships open to all schools, including academies, which have been set up in a number of areas in order to coordinate and promote collaboration for school improvement. The problem with them is that virtually all of them are run exclusively by headteachers.

(9) Local authorities would have the duty to inspect and monitor all state-funded schools in their area.

(10) All school funding would be through Local

Authorities but don't get excited about this. All the indications are that this would be a mere postbox function.

What's not in the review?

The first item notable by its absence is any list of contributors and contributed documents. Surely rather strange for a review of this importance.

There is no mention of a return to national conditions of service for teachers in all state funded schools. This was declared policy by Stephen Twigg but has now been quietly dropped.

There is no discussion of the degree of privatisation which has already taken place through academies and academy chains (documented in great detail by the TUC research document *Education - Not for Sale*. See review on page 8 of this issue).

There is no discussion of private schools, or the expansion of privately sponsored, state-funded faith schools - both no-go areas for Labour.

The private examination boards and their influence are not considered.

The high salaries of academy chain heads (£298,000 for Harris leader Dan Moynihan) are not looked at and so are presumably not regarded as in any way aberrant.

How should we react?

There is a great deal of detail in the review which there is no space to deal with here, but the above perhaps gives an overall idea of the main thrust of the report. It's 67 pages are not exactly an exciting read and to grasp it import more than one reading is liable to be required (I found it so). But I would urge all Labour members who might be involved in debate about it, especially *National Policy Forum* members, to read it very carefully. There are a number of useful discussions about it on Internet sites such as the *Local Schools Network*, *Birmingham CASE* and *Left Futures*.

This report would, by its own account, leave the educational landscape created by Michael Gove overwhelmingly as it is. Academies, academy chains and free schools would remain. The ratchet on no more LA schools would remain. 'Soft privatisation' measures (like the Hackney Learning Trust) would be encouraged. The fragmentation of the school system would be left only to be patched over by encouraging schools to cooperate.

The best way to resist this thrust of the report would be to reject central proposal for the new post of *Director of School Services* and by arguing that democratically revitalised local authorities should be made the umbrella organisation for local schools (although dismissing this out of hand Blunkett offers no arguments for his view) thereby allowing local debate and discussion to have a direct connection with local schools.

Reference. *Richard Hatcher on the Blunkett review:* <http://birminghamcase.wordpress.com/>

Education plans for 2015: Labour's draft manifesto

Eddie Playfair

Will education feature as a significant campaign issue in the 2015 general election? Will the major parties be offering us distinct visions of the future of education?

It's clear that any incoming government will inherit a divided and incoherent non-system. So, will the parties use the campaign to clarify how they see education meeting people's needs and aspirations or will they simply be trading scandals and arguing about who would cope best with the mess?

From Labour, we now have a draft education manifesto: *Education and children*. The document is a first effort and can be amended over the next few months. It does not yet reflect the recommendations of the Blunkett review of the role of local authorities in education and the Husbands skills taskforce with its proposal for a National Baccalaureate for 14-19 year olds.

Education and children contains some good proposals but in my view it will need substantial revision if it is to offer voters an inspiring alternative.

The critique of our fragmented and unaccountable school system is cogent and there are welcome commitments on planning for school places, qualified teachers, careers advice, healthy schools, food standards, childcare and early years education.

Education as an economic treadmill

However, the very first sentence of the document's introduction firmly signals a purely economic view of education:

"For Britain to succeed in the 21st Century, we must earn our way in the world and win the race to the top, with a high skill, high wage economy. We can only build such an economy with all of Britain's young people playing their part in making it happen."

Where is the commitment to the purpose and value of education to individuals and society? Where is the statement about what a national education system should aim to teach all children and young people? There's nothing wrong with making a connection between learning and work but as an opening sentence for an education manifesto aiming to inspire people with a vision of a better society, this is distinctly lacklustre. It offers a narrow view of education serving the national economy in a competitive international market and neglects the transformative, human, social, cultural and global aspects of education. A more expansive vision can offer us a lot more than the prospect of endless competition, growth and consumption - a catastrophic "race to the bottom" in which

everyone is a loser.

In the *Transforming vocational education and skills* section we are told that:

"The current Government has neglected vocational education, viewing it as the second class option for young people, who are not being offered a clear, gold standard vocational route through school and college. This is resulting in wasted talent, limitation on life chances and contributing to the current crisis in youth unemployment."

Whatever one thinks of the government's reform of further education programmes including vocational courses, it cannot be accused of neglecting this area. Vocational courses are being made more "rigorous" with reforms of content and assessment. The substantial full time vocational courses which have survived the current cull are of high quality and help many thousands of students progress to university or employment every year. The section as written seems to blame youth unemployment on vocational qualifications. Unemployment is mainly about a lack of jobs not a lack of skills. **The empty phrase "gold standard" is repeated nine times as if to ward off those substandard qualifications.** The document is right to point out that there is a "second-class" problem but if Labour's new National Baccalaureate is designed as a single overarching framework which includes general and vocational elements it should offer the prospect of finally achieving the much sought-after parity of esteem.

This same section also proposes to:

"transform those colleges with top quality teaching, strong employer links, and high standards in English and Maths into new specialist Institutes of Technical Education....licensed to deliver Labour's Tech Bacc, driving up standards of vocational education in England."

What on earth is the point of these new Institutes of Technical Education? Where would this leave people who happen to live in areas where no college has qualified to become an Institute? If colleges are doing the right thing, they don't need a new status. If they're not, they need to be supported / challenged to improve. Do we really need a new institutional hierarchy in an already divided education system? (* see editorial note below)

This is a very odd proposal for a party which makes a virtue of not messing around with the status of schools.

The section entitled *Ensuring strong local support and oversight of schools* tells us that:

“A One Nation education system will deliver a radical devolution of power from Whitehall. Labour will empower local communities to have a greater say about education in their area. We will also put an end to the fragmented, divisive school system created by this Government....extend to all schools the freedom academies can use to innovate and raise standards...with these freedoms must come local oversight....real local accountability for all schools.”

The promise of restoring local accountability and some level of system planning is an essential step in the right direction and the Blunkett review proposals should fill in the gaps here. But the missing words in this section are “democratic” and “elected” – surely vital components of any genuine system of local accountability – in contrast to the government’s new network of unelected regional commissioners.

On apprenticeships, the draft promises to *“drive up the quantity and quality of apprenticeships... expect employers to create significantly more apprenticeships.”* This is welcome, although it is worth remembering that apprenticeships are jobs, and employers need to have the jobs to offer apprenticeships – this is an economic and training issue not an educational one.

The *Improving access to Higher Education* section is thin on concrete proposals while claiming that:

“The government is reducing opportunities for state school pupils to get into the best universities.”

I don’t believe this can be substantiated; poorer students have not been put off applying to university – quite the opposite. And while privately

educated students are still over-represented in many Russell group universities this is not a result of government policy. The “best universities” terminology is used here without being defined; does this mean the “most selective universities” or has Labour bought into the Russell group’s self definition? Student debt is described as being £40,000. For most undergraduates debt is no more than £27,000 at the moment. The issue which should be highlighted is how the whole loans system is becoming unsustainable.

Overall, then, there’s quite a bit of sharpening and polishing needed to make this a platform worthy of a party of government. I think the starting point should be to ask:

What are Labour’s core educational values?

What is the party’s vision of the purpose of education in a progressive programme for change?

How do we communicate this in a popular, vote-winning way?

And there are plenty of experienced people willing to help with this task.

Eddie Playfair blogs at eddieplayfair.com and tweets @eddieplayfair

Editorial note on colleges and magic.

** The college sector is now a catch all solution smacking of magic. The Tories offer UTCs, lead by Kenneth Baker – to magically solve the vocational crisis. However the Times Ed Supplement reported on May 2nd that Vince Cable for the Lib Dems is setting up new colleges for specialist skills to “help to address the skills shortage by acting as ‘national centres of expertise’ in key areas of the economy”. Three colleges might be built by the Coalition. Now New Labour proposes Institutes of Technical Education.... when you have no ideas, set up a college.. Magic solutions or just the old three card trick? Ed.*

Tackle the GERM with an entente cordiale

Colleagues are starting to see the problems as not just Gove, Labour, the Westminster Consensus or England (and Wales) but the international GERM – the Global Education Reform Movement. Well overdue, but the current focus on Finland may not be the best angle of attack. Pasi Sahlberg and the Finns have many lessons for the international movement. For England, perhaps there is an example nearer to home than Finland with its 4 million population and life in the Arctic circle.

Lets look at France. True, a little Napoleonic perhaps, but what’s wrong with a National Curriculum anyway? Few fee paying schools mostly religious. The system is mostly secular and state. But the TES of May 2nd showed that of 15 nations in a recent survey, French parents were least bothered about school choice, thinking their

local schools were good, teaching an adequate curriculum. Only 17% were bothered about choosing a school. The world average is 38%. In Taiwan 68% are ‘overwhelmed by choice’.

The French simply don’t have concerns about their state system. They presumably don’t have the ideological attack from the Black Papers onward which has convinced the Westminster village to endlessly reform in a mad search for miracle solutions. The Editor of the Good Schools Guide stated that “There is less school choice in France... but less choice has developed because of the strong degree of confidence they have in their system”. How disasterous it is that the English developed so manic a distrust of state education. Lessons from France should be taken on board.

Westminster Consensus Illusions

THE DOGMA IN 2014

The Westminster Consensus is dominated by a consensus that Academies and other Westminster interventions work. This toxic belief is now the common sense in the media.

Question Time on BBC 1 of February 6th last was a master class in the consensus, and was notable for comments by Matthew Hancock, Minister for Skills and Enterprise. He gave a precis of what the consensus believes, pointing to London success (produced by London Challenge, though Hancock may be unaware of this) which was not questioned by anyone, including Tessa Jowell who was on the panel. I set out Hancock's comments below.

It is then followed by Merryn Hutchings analysis of London Challenge from 2012. This was published by the NUT on their web site (Home-campaign-academies) with the footnotes. The document is placed on the record again. It will not make much difference when *Question Time* allows Hancock and others to subscribe to dogma. The key points are numbered.

Matthew Hancock - "It is possible, it is doable, to have very high standards in the state sector, though obviously cash is much tighter. But we know it is possible to dramatically improve standards because it has happened. And it has happened in the last 5 to 10 years. I pay tribute to some of the Labour ministers, especially Andrew Adonis (1), who started this programme, this academies programme, because some of the worst areas of London have now some of the best

schools in the country. (2) And increasingly this is happening across the country. (3)

"But there is one thing that has not been mentioned yet and this is a core driver of improvement, and this is expectation (4). The Schools that have really improved have high expectations for every child to reach their potential, even if they are not naturally gifted and even if they have had a hard time, and then you challenge children to get to those expectations, and boy have we discovered by trial and error over the last decade (5) that if you set high expectations for children they more often than not reach them...."

Core concepts of the Dogma expressed in the Hancock extract.

(1) Adonis and Blair started the miracle of academies (2) this was behind the success of London Challenge (3) Academies are spreading the success across the country (4) at the core of this is driving kids like sheep to jump through hoops, ie Schools as Boot Camps. (5) 'We' refers to the Blair Brown Cameron premierships, the 'decade' is actually from the 2005 Education Act which starts the revolution in statutory terms.

It is vital to keep stating the facts eg the analysis of Merryn Hutchings. But even more important to realise that without access to the media audience eg *Question Time*, the truth is marginal. The media are completely dominated by the Westminster Consensus.

Trevor Fisher

Why is attainment higher in London than elsewhere? (The evidence from 2012)

Merryn Hutchings

The GCSE results published this week show that in 2012, London was the best performing region for the fourth successive year, by a wide range of measures. This is despite serving some of the most deprived areas in the country; 35% of secondary pupils in Inner London are eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) compared with just 13% outside London. Analysis suggests that the London Challenge initiative has been key to this success.

- 62.3% of London pupils achieved the expected level - five A*-C including English and mathematics. This is almost two percentage points above the next best performing region.
- 53% of Inner London FSM pupils achieved the expected level, compared with 45% in Outer

London and just 33% outside London.

- White British pupils, minority ethnic groups, pupils whose first language is other than English, and those with special educational needs all achieved more in London.
- More pupils in London than elsewhere made the expected progress between ages 11 and 16 (London, 75% in English and 77% in maths; outside London 68% and 69% respectively)
- The percentage of pupils in London achieving the EBacc was second only to the South East region.
- Just 2.7% of London secondary schools (11 schools) failed to reach this year's higher floor target, compared with 7.3% of schools outside

London.

The results for national tests at Key Stage 2 published in December showed a similar picture at primary school level. The progress made in Inner London, in particular, has been remarkable. In 2006 it was the worst performing region at both primary and secondary levels, and it is now one of the best-performing.

A number of possible explanations have been put forward for this notably

a) the characteristics of London pupils, b) higher school funding c) school improvement, specifically the London Challenge, d) structural changes (ie the creation of academies)

a) It has been suggested that London benefits from a flow of high-performing immigrant children, and that London pupils may have higher expectations than those elsewhere. Undoubtedly the proportion of London pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds has increased in the last decade (from 53% in 2004 to 65% in 2012). But while some minority ethnic groups attain better than the White population, some attain less well, and the recent increase consists of both high and low attaining groups. And while it may be reasonable to assume that children of immigrant families could have higher aspirations than long-term residents, this would also have been the case when London attainment was low.

There is also evidence that London schools, rather than pupil characteristics, are responsible for the higher attainment in London. Wyness_{has} shown that in the early stages of education London pupils do not do any better than pupils elsewhere; the 'London advantage' increases through the years of schooling. Chris Cook of the Financial Times* has shown that children who move *out* of London on average achieve less than would have been expected from their background characteristics and prior attainment, while those who move *into* London achieve better than would have been predicted. *works for Newsnight in 2014 Ed.

b) Higher school funding in London

Another suggested explanation for London's high attainment is that London schools receive a higher level of government funding than those elsewhere, but published figures show that the extra is spent on the higher salaries paid to London staff, rather than on additional staff or resources. DfE figures show that class sizes are marginally larger in London than the national average.

c) School improvement initiatives: the London Challenge

All the analyses of the improvement in pupil attainment in London identify the London Challenge as a key factor. The London Challenge started in 2003, led by Tim Brighouse, and initially worked in secondary schools before extending to

the primary sector in 2008. Similar programmes also ran in the Black Country and Greater Manchester from 2008 to 2011, and these were collectively identified as City Challenge. Evaluation concluded that the programme had been very successful in improving schools in all three areas, and particularly in London, which had the longest period of input.

A number of characteristics of City Challenge were central to its success.

- It worked in urban areas with clear identities, encouraging sharing of practice across LA boundaries, and aiming to unite schools, parents, community organisations and other stakeholders behind the idea of the Challenge.
- The aim was to improve all schools across each area, not simply the lowest attaining. School collaborations were central to the programme, and it was important to have some schools with outstanding practice that others could learn from. However, the most intensive work was in schools that were underperforming.
- Experimentation and innovative approaches were encouraged; there was no set prescription of what would work to improve schools.
- The notion that schools could learn from each other was central. Both heads and teachers argued that they learned most effectively from seeing good practice. The evaluation report argued that all teachers should spend at least a day a year in another school exploring different and/or better practice.
- The weakest schools received the most funding, generally spent on additional staff or development activity. Satisfactory, Good and Outstanding schools received much smaller sums (typically £1000-£3000 a year). This tended to be used to buy cover to release staff to visit other schools. Part of the funding was also used for central administration; to identify and target schools in need of support; broker partnerships; organise conferences; and so on.
- Perhaps the most effective aspect of City Challenge was that it recognised that individuals and school communities tend to thrive when they feel trusted, supported and encouraged. The ethos of the programme was a key factor in its success, and contrasted with common government discourse of 'naming and shaming' 'failing' schools. Expectations of school leaders, teachers and pupils were high; successes were celebrated; and it was recognised that if teachers are to inspire pupils they themselves need to be motivated and inspired.

d) The creation of academies

While evaluation suggests that the London Challenge has been a key factor in London schools' improvement, the current government

prefers to emphasise the part played by the creation of academies. It is too early to see any change in attainment resulting from the creation of large numbers of converter academies (high performing schools that chose to become academies); while the first schools converted in 2010, it was only in 2011 that large numbers did so. The focus, then, must be on sponsored academies: those created to replace under-performing or inadequate schools.

Many of the early academies were in London. But there is no evidence to suggest that they are responsible for the improvement in London attainment. When the year-on-year improvement in academies is compared with that of non-academies with similar initial attainment, we find that sponsored academies improve no more than non-academies. But our analysis of school improvement in London showed that those academies which had previously been supported by the London Challenge improved significantly more than those that had not had this support. The crucial factor in bringing about improvement was the London Challenge rather than academisation.

It is worth noting that of the eleven secondary schools in London below the 2012 floor target, three are sponsored academies and two are converter academies – schools that Ofsted had graded Good or Outstanding.

The quality of London teachers

Another explanation that has been proposed for London's high attainment is that the quality of teachers in London may be higher than outside the capital. This was certainly not the case around 2000, when London suffered from severe teacher shortages. Schools found it hard to recruit; vacancy rates were high; and supply teachers were extensively used. Turnover was high because young teachers tended to move out of the capital when they wanted to buy a home.

Since that time higher pay scales have been introduced for Inner and Outer London, and teachers have been included in Key Worker

housing schemes (though buying London property remains out of reach for most teachers). These developments cannot be seen as separate from the London Challenge. From the start, there was a determination to focus on all the issues that had a negative effect in London schools. Teacher supply was key among these, and so the London Challenge team worked with other agencies such as the STRB and Teach First to remedy this.

The London Challenge also worked to improve the morale of teachers and pupils, and to develop a positive reputation for London schools. In research that we undertook in 1998-9 about London teacher shortages, interviewees talked about London schools' reputation of discipline problems, a poor environment and poor resources. And at that time many London schools were indeed inward looking isolated institutions where teachers struggled to cope. The fact that London schools now have higher achievement than the rest of the country, and in most cases morale is high, makes London an attractive place to teach.

Implications

The evidence that the London Challenge was a successful approach to school improvement is overwhelming. It was also comparatively cheap; over three years the funding for City Challenge was £160 million, considerably cheaper than the £8.5 billion reportedly spent on the academies programme over two years.

Many of the lessons of the London Challenge have been taken on board, most notably in the increase in schools working with or supporting other schools. What is lacking is any way of ensuring that the schools that need most support and encouragement will receive it.

This is the key aspect of City Challenge that is missing from the current marketised approach to school improvement.

Merryn Hutchings is professor at the Institute for Policy Studies in Education, London Metropolitan University

Football and the importance of the supply teacher

Sometimes the best commentators are not high flown experts, but people who live with practical problems. As Michael Barber's mantra that "the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers" came up in the Lords debate in March, it has to be said that this is No Such Thing As Society rubbish. Try living in a war zone. How many good teachers are there in Damascus?

So it was good to hear Tim Sherwood, ex Tottenham manager, say before he was sacked he was being treated 'like a supply teacher'. His players did not listen to him because they thought

he would be going soon. Same in schools. Behaviour gets worse with supply teachers, the pupils think they will not be able to discipline them as they are going soon. He hit on a key issue, my biggest nightmare as a Head of Department was not recruiting super teachers – that was never on the agenda. It was recruiting supply teachers when someone went off sick, had a baby or wanted to visit a dying relative in Australia. The Barber mantra should be revised, particularly for OFSTED visits to inner city schools – "The quality of a system cannot exceed the quality of its supply teachers".

The PISA data on problem solving skills

BBC News web site 1st April 2014. Here is the table. Top 20 only

1. Singapore	2. South Korea	3. Japan	4. Macau (China)	5. Hong Kong (China)
6. Shanghai (China)	7. Taiwan	8. Canada	9. Australia	10. Finland
11. England	12. Estonia	13. France	14. Netherlands	15. Italy
16. Czech Republic	17. Germany	18. United States	19. Belgium	20. Austria

Apart from the statistical and cultural issues, these countries are affluent and are not 3rd world countries. No one can starve, suffer from chronic disease or war and do well!

PISA the issues: what on earth does it mean?

There was general rejoicing when England came 2nd to Finland in Europe in the latest PISA survey. This was not the mainstream survey of maths and home language but a study of problem solving. Rather than testing theoretical knowledge, these tests for 15 year olds focussed on how well teenagers could use their knowledge in practical questions.

The results adjusted the normal PISA results, for while East Asia still dominated, the city of Shanghai, normally top, is sixth. China of course does not take part in PISA as a country, Gove is correct to use the term 'jurisdictions' for the results. They always show small jurisdictions like Shanghai (city) and Singapore (City State) do well. But whether it makes sense to compare small rich areas with countries as large as England is one of the many questions journalists cannot understand.

It is good news that England scores highly for once, but what do these results mean? We should resist the temptation to protest when PISA shows bad results and praise it when it shows good results. Cherry picking destroys credibility. The reaction from Head Leaders to welcome the problem solving news is understandable, but short sighted. They cannot then claim the tests are flawed when they show bad news. Either they are gospel or they are not.

In reality the tests are indeed flawed, and these more than most. Taken after the main tests, they were optional and fewer schools took them than

the main PISA tests. Of the 65 jurisdictions taking the PISA tests in 2012, only 44 opted to take the problem solving tests. Whether they were taken by all schools within a jurisdiction is open to question. BBC asked no questions and stated that only 85,000 took the tests in England, but this was "a sample representing 19million 15 year olds in England". The BBC also said "China as a whole does not compete as a whole country...."

There are nowhere near 19 million 15 year olds in England. PISA is not a competitive exercise. And this is a BBC report!

Apart from the awful quality of the reporting, the bigger issue is what PISA tells us. As I said in EP118, we cannot dismiss PISA, but nor can we accept it uncritically as journalists do. My conclusion was that "the OECD surveys do measure something... the data can't be dismissed even though it is crude". We do not know what is actually measured, but one BBC comment is relevant. "Northern Italy had some of the best results in the world, while schools in southern Italy were far below average". This clearly reflects wealth distribution in Italy. The implications, especially for Payment by Results, are massive. If areas are poor, they do badly.... and the teachers however they work can't beat the system. PISA may well point to bigger issues than classroom performance. Take it with a large pinch of salt.

Trevor Fisher.

News and information on SEA

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