

RECLAIMING EDUCATION

THE WRONG DIRECTION!

The Government has spent eight years taking education in England in the wrong direction. Government Ministers have disregarded evidence and based policy on their own prejudices and preconceptions.

Parents have been misled, many school children have been denied the broad based education needed in the twenty first century, opportunities for adult learners have been restricted and the health and prospects of many students have been damaged.

School children are being let down

The school system reinforces inequality

England is a very unequal society and, since 2010, education policies have reinforced inequality.

The fragmentation of school provision into community schools, academies, Free schools, faith schools, schools based on a comprehensive intake and schools using selection, in addition to the various sorts of private schools - all with different structures, different accountability and different curriculum obligations - makes it impossible to ensure that children are treated equally and have the same opportunities.

Indeed, the system now includes features which promote inequality.

School children suffer unreasonable stress

Children are put under unreasonable stress by the barrage of tests, starting with a phonics test in year 1 and following them through school.

The tests are given high importance and children worry about doing badly. The new examinations in year 11 disregard coursework, however diligently undertaken, and a young person's future prospects now depend on how s/he does in completing a series of stand-alone papers.

Little wonder that some students buckle under the pressure.

Too many children are disappearing from schools

Too many children are disappearing from schools either through exclusion or through other forms of "off-rolling".

The most potent reason is that, with position in league tables so important, some children are being 'dumped' to ensure that their performance is not included in the calculations.

There is no effective system for accommodating these children. They are often out of school for long periods and are denied the educational opportunities that they should receive.

WHO ARE WE?

Reclaiming Education is supported by:

- Alliance for Inclusive Education
 - Campaign for State Education
 - Comprehensive Future
 - Forum (3-19 Comprehensive Education magazine)
 - Information for School and College Governors
 - New Visions Group
 - Rescue Our Schools
 - Socialist Educational Association
- in conjunction with other campaigning groups and trade unions.



CASE *Comprehensive Future* **FORUM**

newvisions
for education group



THE WRONG DIRECTION

The result is often demoralisation, the loss of self-esteem and sometimes delinquency.

Children with special educational needs or disabilities are neglected

Parents of children with special educational needs or disabilities, both physical and mental, tell of the difficulty of finding a suitable school place.

There is no robust system to ensure that children with disabilities receive the education they deserve in a school which provides the necessary support.

High needs budgets are inadequate and support services designed to support pupils with SEND have been heavily cut.

The 11 plus and selection damages children

The English education system is socially segregated and international evidence shows that segregation reduces attainment overall and seriously damages the prospects of disadvantaged pupils.

Against this background, the Government's support for an increase in Grammar school places is irresponsible. Evidence from Britain and across the world demonstrates that a comprehensive system is best for children and best for community cohesion.

In most schools the curriculum is too narrow

Formidable evidence shows that creativity assists learning but the curriculum has been narrowed to focus on a limited number of subjects, particularly on mathematics, science, and English.

Little time is left for drama, art, music, languages, technology, or the learning of practical skills.

Children will not discover a talent if the opportunity is not offered; they will not develop their talent in school if the subject is not taught.

Too little attention is given to social and communication skills

Employers tell us that they want their staff to be well-rounded individuals, with an understanding of the world, with well-developed

social skills and the ability to communicate clearly.

The focus on "teaching to the tests" and on rote learning limits the opportunity for a free exchange of ideas and for the development of communication skills. Teamwork and problem solving are rarely given sufficient attention.

Too little emphasis on understanding and analysis

Employers want school leavers to have discerning and inquiring minds but the new examinations put a premium on memory at the expense of analysis and understanding.

The new examinations are wholly inadequate as a means of assessing whether pupils are ready for higher education or for the world of work.

Our school system is being mis-managed

The school inspection system is not fit for purpose

The inspection of schools should to be carried out by experienced educationalists with a mandate to assist and support schools.

Instead the process has become both superficial and dehumanised, consisting of short visits by inspectors who appear to be more concerned with ticking boxes than understanding what is going on in the school.

Teachers regard an Ofsted inspection as threatening, bringing no assistance but plenty of misery.

Moreover, the inspection process seems heavily weighted against schools which work in challenging circumstances.

Most schools are short of money and increasingly short of teachers

Schools are under-funded. Between 2010 and 2016, education spending fell by 14% in real terms.

As a result many schools have reduced the number of teachers and teaching assistants. Since last year, the number of pupils has risen



CASE *Comprehensive Future* **FORUM**

newvisions
for education group



THE WRONG DIRECTION

by 137,000 but the number of teachers has fallen by 5,400 to the lowest number for 5 years.

Expertise has been lost. About a third of physics teachers and almost a quarter of chemistry teachers have no higher education qualification in the subject they teach.

The workload of teachers is too heavy

Teachers have to work excessive hours: in many schools 50 and 60 hours a week is normal.

Much of this time is spent recording teaching practice and filling in forms associated with serial testing. This apparently pointless work is resented.

Long hours and excessive paperwork mean that many experienced teachers are leaving the profession and newly qualified teachers rapidly resign.

Too few school places to meet our needs

The number of children of school age is rising and the need for new schools is becoming desperate.

Yet the Government refuses to allow local authorities to manage the provision of new places properly or to build new schools.

It requires all new schools to be so-called Free Schools and too many have been set up in areas where there is no pressure for new places.

In any event, the Free School initiative is failing. A significant number of Free Schools have had to close and others have attracted a smaller intake of children than had been planned.

Many schools are not accountable to parents or to their community

The Government has tried to turn the education system into a marketplace with Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) competing to sign up schools. When that happens, schools move outside the influence of Local Authorities and MATS set up their own systems of manage-

ment with no democratic or community accountability.

Control by a MAT means that the school governing body may be dismantled, the role of parent governor is often eliminated and decisions are made remotely by the Trust, whose members are appointed without any obligation to represent local people or interests.

MATs are not accountable to the schools or to the parents.

Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) do not provide reliable management for schools

In many cases MATs are too small to provide a proper level of support to individual schools, and the problem is even more serious when the MAT runs schools in different parts of the country.

There have been spectacular examples of corruption and of MATs collapsing, with damage to the school children and leaving a legacy of financial problems.

MATs are unaccountable and unreliable, and should not be allowed to run Britain's education system.

Money is being wasted

The Government has depleted public assets and wasted a great deal of money. The Public Accounts Committee has noted that Government policy has transferred land and buildings from the public realm to MATs and Free Schools.

Opening 422 Free Schools during the past seven years has cost about £3.6 billion with an estimated £900 million going to lawyers.

The Government is now intending to deliver £50 million to Grammar Schools for their expansion when the money is badly needed by under-funded community schools.

Competition between schools does not raise standards

The Government has established an ethos by which schools are required to compete with each other.



CASE *Comprehensive Future* **FORUM**

newvisions
for education group



THE WRONG DIRECTION

The creation of academies, the establishment of MATs, the league table process and the school inspection system are all based on the belief that competition will improve standards.

The evidence suggests otherwise. The considerable improvements achieved by the London Challenge and by similar initiatives in Manchester and Birmingham came about as a result of cooperation between schools.

Schools should work together and not compete against each other.

Opportunities for Lifelong Learning are being destroyed

Support for families and children in the early years has been drastically reduced

Research demonstrates that the life chances of children are greatly enhanced if they receive significant support during their early years. Instead of providing this support, the Government has cut back the funding for the valuable and popular SureStart scheme.

It is also seeking to force young children into formal lessons much earlier than happens in countries with more successful education systems.

Career and youth services have been cut

Only a small proportion of school children now have access to an expert and properly resourced career service. Moreover the National Youth Agency has recorded that a whole range of youth services has been greatly reduced.

Craft and technician training has been neglected

Britain trains far too few people to craft and technician level.

Instead of expanding that training, the Government has starved Further Education Colleges of funding and created a large number of low quality apprenticeships which deliver few

transferable skills and have little credibility with young people.

Little provision for adults to return to training and education

With increasing longevity and rapidly changing technology, most adults will need to return to training and education several times during their lifetime.

The evidence suggests that learning in later life also improves general wellbeing. To help people fit periods of study into their busy lives, course delivery needs to become more flexible.

Instead, courses have become rigid and expensive. There are fewer opportunities for people to take courses on a part-time or intermittent basis: the number of people studying for degrees on a part-time basis is actually falling.

The commercialisation of higher education is very damaging

The Government takes a narrow and commercial view of higher education. It promotes the establishment of more private Universities which brings the risk of poor standards and financial impropriety. It expects students to pay for their own education and tells them they should choose university courses on the basis of the income which can be earned from a particular degree.

The Government has even foolishly suggested that, where future earnings are likely to be low, courses might be shut down. This would eliminate courses in nursing and social care.

Higher Education policy is elitist

Government pays too much attention to the views of Oxbridge and the Russell Group and often overlooks the needs of other universities.

It should realise that many universities outside the Russell Group are more modern in outlook and work with more diverse student bodies. These universities also tend to do much better than the Russell Group in promoting equal access and social mobility.

More information at www.reclaimingeducation.org.uk



CASE *Comprehensive Future* **FORUM**

newvisions
for education group

