

Campaign for Real Education

www.cre.org.uk

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

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Newsletter

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01. Editorial

On the eve of summer half-term, Gavin Williamson, the education secretary, deemed it necessary to send a message to schools reminding them that they 'have a responsibility to ensure that they act appropriately, particularly in the political views they express.'

Children should be presented, he added, with a 'balanced presentation of opposing views' when political issues are raised. 'Schools should not present materials in a politically biased or one-sided way and should always avoid working with organisations that promote antisemitic or discriminatory views.'

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/may/29/antisemitism-williamson-warns-headteachers-amid-tension-in-schools>

His message comes after expressions of support for the Palestinian cause in schools have led to suggestions of anti-Semitism and to political partiality.

Williamson is right to sound an alarm about the growing politicisation of our classrooms and to declare that it is 'unacceptable to allow some pupils to create an atmosphere of intimidation or fear for other students and teachers.'

He seems unaware, however, of the dangerous territory into which he is trespassing when he refers to a 'balanced presentation of opposing views'. This can readily lead to a promotion of a harmful philosophy of 'value relativism' that imposes equal validity on these opposing views.

When they were pupils at school many of today's teachers were, themselves, brain-washed and, in some cases, radicalised by the value relativism the education department has long promoted as holy writ.

With specific reference to the current conflict between Palestinians and the state of Israel, the examination question below, carrying 50 percent of the marks for a paper on World History, reflects the 'value relativist' approach to learning that was required by the public examination system back in the 1980s.

It is from a specimen paper of 1986 that guided teachers on how to prepare pupils for what was then the new and forthcoming GCSE History exam. Those pupils are today's teachers.

It is clear that, in order to pass the exam, they had to be indoctrinated into an ideology of 'value-relativism' whereby the view of the terrorist and that of the victim of terror is to be treated as equivalent and as equally valid.

Southern Examining Group, General Certificate of Secondary Education
History: Syllabus 2 - World Powers since 1917
Paper 2 (Topics)

The Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1947-1973

It is late in 1972 and there is to be an international conference. This conference will discuss events of recent years to do with Middle East. These events are the hi-jacking of aircraft to Jordan in 1970, the shootings at Tel Aviv airport, and the attack on Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympic Games.

(a) Write a draft speech to be made by a representative of the Palestine Liberation Organisation. This speech will justify these actions.

(b) Write a draft speech to be made by a member of the Knesset (the Israeli parliament). This speech will attempt to persuade the conference to condemn these actions.

Small wonder, then, that the Class of 2021 is inclined to see the perspective of those who perpetrate terror as equivalent to those who are the victims of terror. Teachers are promoting the value relativism they were once taught at school.

How else are we to explain model lessons such as the one published by the teachers website bible, the TES, in the wake of the Paris terrorist attack in Paris in November 2015 in which 130 people were murdered?

The model lesson asked 14-to-16-year-olds to imagine that they are fighters for ISIS and to write about the good side of membership, not least acquiring white slave girls. For evidence the children were directed to the online Isis in-house magazine.

It has taken thirty-five years for a Secretary of State for Education to discern the issue of classrooms being politicised.

If it takes as long for government and, indeed, the security services, to understand why this is happening and accelerating, not only will schooling fall further into the abyss, the safety and security of our country will be imperilled.

02. Freedom of Speech

Freedom of speech has long been an educational battlefield. Within schools, at least, the battle is now largely over. It has been won by those wishing to suppress this freedom and represents the greatest achievement of our educational establishment.

It has mostly silenced any criticism from within the ranks of the teaching profession. The status quo may not be questioned. To do so is considered to be heresy.

Voices of dissent are, nowadays, rarely heard. The stranglehold of politically correct conformity to Woke ideologies is more or less complete. A chill reminder of what will happen to apostates was sounded, recently, by Eton College.

English teacher, Will Knowland, lost his employment and his livelihood after he refused to take down from Youtube an alternative, 'non-Woke', viewpoint he had published about 'current radical feminist orthodoxy'. Such questioning of approved belief is no longer permissible.

For some decades teacher training has proved itself to be remarkably deficient at maintaining, let alone improving, educational standards.

The UK's performance on the OECD's triennial measure of attainment for 15-year-olds across the globe makes for grim reading.

Much more successful, though, has been the performance of teacher trainers in filtering out deviant views on what constitutes 'best practice' in the classroom. In that domain of suppressing educational heresies we are one of the world's leaders.

The attack on free speech is also plaguing universities. The no-platforming of speakers has been widely reported in the media; less so, a growing climate of fear. *The Sunday Telegraph* reports that students at one in four Russell Group universities can report their lecturers for so-called 'micro-aggressions', with avoiding eye contact regarded as a potential offence on one campus.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/05/29/lecturers-avoid-eye-contact-could-reported-1-4-top-universities/>

The University of Cambridge has been especially prominent in taking the attack on freedom of expression to this new 'micro-aggression' level. It, recently, launched a website that encourages the anonymous reporting of 'micro-aggressions'.

These included the raising of an eyebrow, misgendering a person, asking someone where they are 'really' from, and referring to a woman as a girl.

Members of the university could be anonymously denounced on the site for any alleged transgression.

Reputations stood to be tarnished or ruined, without targeted individuals ever knowing the name of their accusers.

A resistance group of dons called for 'unfettered freedom of speech and expression within the law'. They argued that the new denunciation system would foster a culture that is 'akin to a police state'.

Following media exposure, the University's vice-chancellor, Prof. Stephen Toope, claimed that the publication of a micro-aggressions list 'was a mistake'. They were withdrawn from the site. A definition of racism was also withdrawn.

The public shaming and denunciation of individuals, though, remains provided it is accompanied by the name of the accuser. At the time of writing, the protection afforded by anonymity has not been ruled out but is under review.

<https://digitaleditions.telegraph.co.uk/data/614/reader/reader.html?#!preferred/0/package/614/pub/614/page/23/article/178943>

The Campaign for Real Education regards freedom of speech within the law as overriding all other education priorities since without it education ceases to be education and becomes, instead, a vehicle for indoctrination and oppression.

The absence of dissent in schools against the religion of Wokeism signifies that, in the classroom, the cultural revolution has been accomplished and we have now entered a post-revolutionary period.

Most universities, meanwhile, are negotiating, and zealously embracing, the terms of their own surrender to the Wokeist jackboot.

03. Recovering From the Pandemic's Impact on Education

A number of studies have indicated that the negative impact of school closures on pupil learning has been uneven but significant.

The closures averaged around 23 weeks. It has, unsurprisingly, been disadvantaged children who have suffered most as a Department for Education report has pointed out.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/962330/Learning_Loss_Report_1A_-_FINAL.pdf

By mid-May 2021 the government had promised £1.7 billion in 'catch-up' support.

One influential think tank, the Educational Policy Institute, argued that £13.5 billion would be needed.

Kevin Courtney of the National Education Union, was one of many others demanding a big increase in spending:

"The government must prioritise education in the forthcoming Spending Review so that schools can increase the number of properly qualified teachers on staff, and bring down our historically high class-sizes. The solution to Covid cannot be yet more austerity."

On June 1st a leaked catch-up plan reported by The Times suggested that those demanding a very significant increase in spending had got their way.

It claimed that the school day will be extended by half an hour to provide an extra 100 hours of schooling each year from 2022 at a cost of between £12bn and £15bn.

Twenty-four hours later, however, the government announced that its catch-up plan will be based only on tutoring session for pupils at a total extra cost of £1.4bn. over three years. The suggestion for longer school days appears to have been shelved.

The educational establishment, of course, is not happy about what it regards as a constraint on spending. Head teachers have told the BBC that the latest announcement is a 'damp squib' and 'hugely disappointing'.

How different was the 'can-do' attitude of Singaporeans when the island city state, much of it a mangrove swamp, achieved its independence in the mid-1960s. In terms of education it had to catch-up several centuries on the UK, its former colonial master. Today, its school system is a world leader in educational attainment. Its 15-year-olds are around three years ahead of ours according to the OECD.

Singaporeans, with large pupil numbers per class and little money, were able to catch-up on missing several centuries of schooling. With a 'can-do' attitude we Brits can, surely, catch-up on a few missing months of schooling.

04. Summer Assessment Meltdown

Most university degrees this summer will be awarded on the basis of unsupervised exams sat on online. Students will be allowed up to a week to submit complete papers. For only a small number of subjects, including medicine, nursing, engineering and accounting, will a traditional time constraint apply, alongside some 'proctoring' technology that provides an element of supervision.

Alongside GCSE and A-Level exams that are to be based on teacher predictions, the educational currency is being devalued. Grade inflation has become an institutionalised feature of the UK education system at all levels. Those most let down are those able and honest youngsters whose attainment is being devalued and corrupted.

05. Spelling

The English Spelling Society is proposing that the spelling of some words be made easier in order to improve standards of literacy. It is arguing that English spelling takes up to three years longer to master at primary school than the other languages.

<https://www.itv.com/news/calendar/2021-05-20/should-spellings-of-some-words-be-made-easier>

Some universities, meanwhile, have already declared an intention not to mark down students for poor spelling, punctuation and grammar. This new policy is in response to a call by the Office for Students for a narrowing of the attainment gap between white and black students. The University of Hull has declared that any requirement for a high level of proficiency in written English can be seen as 'homogeneous, North European, white, male and elite.'

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9457171/Fury-education-regulator-tells-universities-marking-students-bad-spelling-ELITIST.html>

English is the world's most widely-spoken language and, self-evidently, this achievement has not been impeded by the challenges posed by spelling. A few variations in spelling do, indeed, already exist, as between the UK and US.

A dilution of the language is likely to widen, not diminish, the attainment gap and the social gap between the privileged and the under-privileged. There is a very real danger that dumbed down spellings will be the preserve of the least well-educated. An educational apartheid is a likely consequence.

The difficulties provided by some English spellings should be regarded as an asset because they provide children with a necessary challenge. We should be encouraging children to take up that challenge as readily and with as much success as non-native speakers of English around the world.

06. 'Dodgy Data' and Scotland's Downward Side

Back in August 2015 the Scottish National Party leader, Nicola Sturgeon, declared that her priority as First Minister would be education.

'Let me be clear,' she declared in a keynote speech, 'I want to be judged on this. If you are not, as First Minister, prepared to put your neck on the line on the education of our young people then what are you prepared to. It really matters.'

Scotland's performance on the 2018 OECD international PISA tests for 15-year-olds showed a decline, however, in the attainment level of Scottish pupils in both maths

and in science. In both subjects, performance was assessed as no more than average.

This was offset to a limited extent by an apparent improvement in literacy to above the OECD average. It now seems, though, that the literacy improvement may have been based on data of questionable validity and that the decline in scores for maths and science may have been greater than reported.

Professor John Jerrim of University College, London, found that the number of pupils withdrawn or deemed ineligible in Scotland was 'much higher than in any other country.' It doubled from 4.1 percent in 2015 to 9.3 percent in 2018. This compares with an average withdrawal rate of 1.7 percent across all countries.

<https://www.tes.com/news/concerns-over-potential-bias-scottish-pisa-results>

The Guardian has reported that an equivalent issue regarding the reliability of pupil data may have inflated the performance of pupils in England and Wales.

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/apr/22/maths-scores-in-world-education-rankings-inflated-for-england-and-wales-study>

07. School Selection by Postcode

A child living in one of England's most disadvantaged areas is twenty-seven times more likely to go to an inadequate state school than a child living in one of the least disadvantaged.

This was a conclusion reached by the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission in a report of 2016. The Commission was chaired at the time by Labour's Alan Milburn.

These findings confirmed an earlier Sutton Trust report– 'Worlds Apart – Social Variation Among Schools'. Amongst state secondary schools, 91 of the most socially selective schools were comprehensive, 8 were grammar schools and 1 was secondary modern.

The most socially selective comprehensives were found to take around 9 percent of children whose parents are on income support as against 13 percent for the surviving grammar schools

It came as no surprise, therefore, when, as Prime Minister, David Cameron told his 2015 party conference: 'Listen to this. Britain has the lowest social mobility in the developed world.'

He could have added that this lamentable state of affairs stands as testimony to half a century or so of 'comprehensive' schooling.

Today, the gulf between the advantaged and disadvantaged has improved little, if at all. A report from the Social Mobility Commission last year - 'State of the Nation 2018-19: Social Mobility in Great Britain' – stated that little progress had been made since 2014. The recent school lockdowns have aggravated the situation.

Rather than reducing unfairness in educational provision, the British version of comprehensive schooling has enhanced inequality. I

n his book, 'Schools and the Social Order' [1979], the eminent sociologist, Frank Musgrove, pointed out that in the 1950s, around two thirds of grammar school pupils were the children of manual workers.

Grammar school places were awarded on the basis of academic ability, mostly at the age of 11.

This was an imperfect system and failed to provide a technical/vocational education that was equivalently good for non-academic pupils.

Today's selection by postcode to the best schools is, however, very much less fair.

Mums and dads who can afford to buy a house in the catchment area of a good school are the beneficiaries of comprehensive schooling, as this random example from *The Birmingham Mail* [30th May 2021] makes clear:

Seven houses for sale near the best schools in Redditch and Bromsgrove

A school in Redditch and one in Hollywood have been named as among the best state schools in Worcestershire - and these seven houses are for sale in their catchment areas

<https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/property/seven-houses-sale-near-best-20697074>

08. No Comment

In the short term, China's population decline will have little impact on its economic power. The number of workers may be falling but these workers are better educated. The number of graduates doubled to more than 200 million over the past decade. In the modern economy, skills matter more than numbers.

The Times, leading article, 1.6.2021

Nearly 70 tributes to slave traders, colonialists and racists across the UK have been removed since last summer's Black Lives Matter Guardian 29.5.2021

The Tennessee General Assembly has banned the teaching of critical race theory, passing a law at the very end of the legislative session to withhold funding from public schools that teach about white privilege.

Nashville Tennessean. 26th May 2021

Private schools are reaping the benefits of young Hong Kong professionals and their families moving to the UK, with enrolment of children from the former colony nearly doubling in a year.

The Daily Telegraph 31.5.2021

The number of private school teenagers going to America is soaring as elite universities here take more state students.

The Sunday Times 30.5.2021

... the curriculum, books and language used in schools reinforce ideas of how girls and boys should look and behave... *"Evidence shows us that gender stereotyping is everywhere and it causes serious, long-lasting harm,"* according to Felicia Willow, chief executive of the Fawcett Society, which campaigns for gender equality.

BBC News website 31.5.2021

FRANCE has banned gender-neutral words in the classroom saying they "harm" learning.

Daily Express 10.5.2021