

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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Contents

- 01. Editorial Page 2
- 02. The Return to School Page 3
- 03. Eton and Freedom of Speech Page 3
- 04. Gavin Williamson - The Worst Education Secretary Ever? Page 5
- 05. Demonising Winston Churchill and J.K. Rowling Page 5
- 06. How Should We Claw Back the COVID Lost Teaching? Page 6
- 07. No Comment Page 7

01. Editorial

This summer's fake exam results are going to be at least as fake as last summer's fake exam results. Grades will be determined by teachers but without the incumbrance of a messy algorithm to slow down the process.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-56157413>

Basing GCSE and A-Level grades on teacher predictions of pupil performance is akin to asking football managers to predict the performance of their team. It is folly, in the extreme, and represents an abject capitulation to the demands of teacher union bosses.

Their control over schools has now been hugely strengthened; perhaps, permanently. The role of the education secretary in this sad spectacle has been to sign the terms of surrender.

This triumph of the educational establishment over government is likely to be as final as it is destructive. Public examinations, rather like currencies, depend on public confidence. Run-away grade inflation has, already, undermined their integrity. Replacing exams with teacher predictions and then describing these predictions as 'exam results', is blatant fraud.

The educational currency is devalued to the level of a Venezuelan or Zimbabwean or Weimar, banknote.

Schools, generally, teach the importance of honesty to children. Teacher-predicted grades are a contradiction of this concept. The Covid 19 lockdown has caused the cancellation of exams this summer. Both the government and the educational establishment need to face up to this fact. If teacher assessments are considered necessary, they should be described as 'teacher assessments', not as GCSE or A-Levels.

A presenter on a recent edition of the BBC Radio 4 Today Programme asked if, this summer, we should be "rewarding the resilience of pupils". She seemed unaware that the purpose of examinations is to determine knowledge and understanding. The consequence of awarding, say, a GCSE pass in mathematics, on the basis of resilience, could have serious consequences.

Take, for example, the nurse with a fake GCSE in maths who, through a deficiency in numeracy, cannot see that he or she has pressed the wrong button on a calculator when working out the amount of medicine dosage to give a patient. From builders to bankers to beauticians to bookmakers, knowledge and understanding of numbers really do matter. They are not optional GCSE maths extra, to be set aside because of a pandemic.

All that the education secretary needed to do was to announce that, this summer, there would not be any public exams but that schools were free to issue their own 16+ attainment certificates if they so wished. Such certificates might be regarded as of little value, but they would, at least, be honest.

Instead, teachers are being required to engage in a confidence trick that will fool few, if any. Universities will not be too bothered, of course. Too many of them are more concerned with the cash that students bring, rather than their exam grades.

And who cares if the next generation of undergraduates are unable to cope with the academic demands? The simple solution is to dumb down course content and to reward 'resilience'. Do not expect to see much deflation in degree grades.

There will, nevertheless, be many losers in the examination game that has now been launched. It is, however, likely to be previous cohorts of school leavers who are going to feel most aggrieved. Their exam passes are about to become worth rather less.

"Oh, what a tangled web we weave, when first we practise to deceive." [Sir Walter Scott]

Chris McGovern

02. The Return to School

Following lockdown, schools began to re-open for all pupils on March 8th, albeit in a somewhat truncated and stage-by-stage fashion. The government is to be congratulated for sticking to its guns, faced as it was, by many obstacles placed in its way by teacher unions. These have, in the past, included element of threat and intimidation. Early in the pandemic, The Daily Telegraph reported this statement by, Kevin Courtney, the joint general secretary of the National Education Union:

Mr Courtney said that as part of an ‘escalation procedure’, the NEU *would ‘threaten’ to name and shame on social media head teachers [who it believed were ‘putting lives at risk’](#).*

Threatening head teachers with being named and shamed for keeping their schools open was a menacing statement of intent.

Intimidation became very real for the Campaign for Real Education last November. The Mail on Sunday reported how our secretary was left “terrified”, on a Sunday afternoon, by a lengthy telephone call from a north London teacher:

A retired school examiner has described being the target of a 30-minute tirade from a teaching union activist who accused her of ‘sending children to their deaths’ in the latest Covid lockdown.

Alison McRobb, 77, a theology lecturer and member of the Campaign for Real Education (CRE) pressure group, said she *was left terrified by a call from Philip Davison, a teacher in [North London](#).*

Mr Davison, 50, is an official for the NASUWT, Britain’s second-largest teaching union. He obtained Mrs McRobb’s mobile number from the CRE website.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8974237/Union-boss-accuses-retired-school-examiner-sending-children-deaths-latest-lockdown.html>

Others have received similar intimidation.

In order to protect our committee members we have been obliged to remove some of the contact deals from our website.

This time round, the teacher unions are acquiescing in government policy to fully re-open schools but with reluctance and ill-tempered restraint.

03. Eton and Freedom of Speech

Lord Waldegrave, provost of Eton College, has declared that the sacking of English teacher, Will Knowland, upheld on appeal, was ‘not about free speech’. It was, he has told The Daily Mail, ‘about a matter of internal discipline’. ‘Eton,’ he insists, ‘will never cancel debate.’

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8999119/Eton-provost-Lord-Waldegrave-defends-teacher-sacking-amid-sexist-lecture-row-public-school.html>

Knowland, you may recall, had refused to take down his YouTube video lecture entitled, ‘The Patriarchy Paradox’. It questions ‘current radical feminist orthodoxy’.

In a letter to the Eton community he pointed out that he had, ‘explained to the Head Master that I wasn’t endorsing all the ideas in my lecture, but I wanted the boys to be made aware of a different point of view to the current radical feminist orthodoxy.’

In his memoirs, ‘A Different Kind of Weather’, Waldegrave recalls that during the Falklands War, ‘I was not quite well-enough equipped for the task. There was something missing.’ In educational terms, his Falklands moment has returned and, once again, he is found wanting.

A petition launched by current Eton pupils had gained close to two thousand signatures within twenty-four hours of the story breaking.

<https://www.gopetition.com/petitions/letter-from-boys-to-provost-about-mr-knowland.html>

Waldegrave argues that an ‘independent barrister’ provided the school with a written opinion that the video lecture broke the Equality Act and the Education [Independent Schools Standards] Regulations.

In other words, the school was doing no more than it is obliged to do by law. It is in effect obeying orders. This defence [Befehi ist Befehl], however, was discredited at Nuremberg in [1945-46].

If anyone is in breach of its legal duty in the Knowland case it is, surely Eton College. Back in 2014, the Department for Education, under its so-called ‘British Values’ requirement, made very clear the rules for presenting controversial topics in schools:

‘We want every school to promote the basic British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance for those of different faiths and beliefs.’

Amongst the examples published in its guidance were these:

- ‘an understanding that the freedom to hold other faiths and beliefs is protected in law’
- ‘an acceptance that people having different faiths or beliefs to oneself (or having none) should be accepted and tolerated, and should not be the cause of prejudicial or discriminatory behaviour’
- ‘an understanding of the importance of identifying and combatting discrimination’

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/guidance-on-promoting-british-values-in-schools-published>

In other words, the teacher concerned in this dispute was upholding the requirement for ‘balance’ in the curriculum. By closing him down, the school may itself be the party acting illegally.

Since the case is, now, heading for an employment tribunal, it may, in due course, have to ask its ‘independent barrister’ for a re-fund.

Not so long ago, the TES, [formerly the Times Educational Supplement] published an online lesson asking children to ‘give three good reasons for joining ISIS’ and telling them to imagine the world ‘from the point-of-view of a soldier of the faith.’

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3324681/Outcry-lessons-reasons-joining-ISIS-Plan-uploaded-popular-teaching-website-sparks-fury-claims-sympathises-terrorists.html>

It was only after the CRE brought this material into the public arena that the TES kindly decided to remove it from its website. There do not appear to have been any sanctions against the editor of the TES.

You can get away with anything these days, it seems, provided it is ‘woke’, enough. Unsurprisingly, there do appear to have been any complaints from within the educational establishment about lesson plans promoting ISIS.

The treatment of Will Knowland is an outrageous attack on freedom of speech. His career and livelihood must be saved.

04. Gavin Williamson - The Worst Education Secretary Ever?

The education secretary, Gavin Williamson, cuts a beleaguered figure. A recent survey of Conservative Party members makes in him, by a long way, the least popular cabinet minister.

<https://www.thelondoneconomic.com/politics/conservative-league-table-of-cabinet-ministers-makes-for-sobering-reading-for-gavin-williamson-219126/>

Last summer's exam results debacle appears to have sealed his fate and his current tenure in office is unlikely to continue for too much longer. Peter Wilby, writing in The Guardian, asked the question: "Is Gavin Williamson the worst education secretary ever?"

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/nov/21/is-gavin-williamson-the-worst-education-secretary-ever>

Williamson, certainly, has some stiff competition. If one wishes to evaluate the quality of education secretaries in recent decades, one need only to look around at the school system that is their legacy.

05. Demonising Winston Churchill and J.K. Rowling

SEAFORD Head School, a state comprehensive in East Sussex, is rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted. 'Students mature into thoughtful young adults,' its most recent inspection report concludes. Is this maturity exemplified by the decision of Seaford Head 'students' (aka 'pupils') to [expunge the names Churchill and J K Rowling from two of the school houses?](#)

As part of the school's commitment to 'understanding democratic practice', the pupils have judged Churchill to have been 'a figure who promoted racism and inequality, unfairly imprisoning and torturing many'.

This, presumably, reflects the 'mature' thinking that Ofsted regards as characterising Seaford Head pupils. It, also, gives an insight into history teaching at the school. The pupils appear to have been taught to evaluate the past through the perspective of today . . . but only if it suits today's Cultural Revolution UK.

To point out, however, that woke icons such as Jamaican 'nurse' Mary Seacole had a remarkably similar worldview to Churchill and to many of her white contemporaries is not permissible.

In a recent interview on Channel 4 News, Professor David Olusoga explained to us that 'having memorials that validate and legitimise the lives of people who did terrible things is inappropriate'. He was commenting on an audit being carried out by Historic England regarding the transatlantic slave trade. This [seems to be the line taken by pupils at Seaford Head School](#).

Olusoga wants us all to face up to the truth about our past. He seems to think, however, that people of different races are innately different in their propensity to do evil.

When it comes to man's inhumanity to man, West Africans do not have a monopoly on suffering. The million or so UK citizens who starved to death across a few years in the 1840s is but one illustration of the broader perspective. Even the abominable 'Zong' massacre of 1781, when 130 African slaves were thrown overboard to allow an insurance claim, was not a uniquely British atrocity. The North African Barbary Corsairs, for example, did much the same, as the historian, Roger Crowley, narrates in an award-winning book **Empires of the Sea:**

In the summer of 1544 Barbarossa took some six thousand captives from the coasts of Italy and the surrounding seas. On his way home the boats were so dangerously overloaded with human cargo that the crews threw hundreds of the weaker captives overboard. He entered harbour in triumph to the firing of cannon and night-time fires . . .

Truth is an elusive commodity, and it is rare for there to be only one version of it. In J K Rowling's Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone, *Hogwarts headmaster Albus Dumbledore sighs:*

The truth . . . It is a beautiful and terrible thing, and should therefore be treated with great caution.

How sad that this wisdom has not been passed on to the pupils of Seaford Head School or, indeed, embraced and promoted by Professor Olusoga. Seaford Head pupils have, instead, decided to outlaw Rowling, as well as Churchill. Her name, too, is to be removed from a school house.

The words that Rowling penned for Dumbledore matter much less, it seems, than her ‘words on the trans community’.

A Telegraph leader states that these words are ‘thought to refer to her suggesting that there are such things as women.’

So many truths!

06. Catching up on COVID. How Should We Claw Back the Lost Teaching?

The provision of online teaching for children during lockdown has been uneven, at best. Anne Longfield, the out-going Children’s Commissioner, has pointed out that 850 million teaching hours were lost by school closures for Covid, up to March 8th. She has warned:

‘It’s impossible to overstate how damaging the last year has been for many children – particularly those who were already disadvantaged.’

<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/2021/02/17/building-back-better-reaching-englands-left-behind-children/>

Ofsted has reached a similar conclusion.

Can the lost teaching be clawed back and, if so, how? A longer school day and a shorter holidays are being considered by the government.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-56311723>

The response from union bosses, though, has been predictable. Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, told *iNews* that headteachers were “not persuaded that a blanket approach to extending the school day, or school term time, is the right way to deliver catch-up support.

Negativity over the capacity for British children to catch up on missed teaching time is misplaced.

When Singapore achieved independence from the UK in 1959 and from Malaysia in 1965, most of the population was illiterate, uneducated and unskilled. There was no compulsory education.

In educational terms Singapore was hundreds of years behind the UK and commenced what the Singaporean government described as the “survival” period. Today, Singaporeans, are up to three years ahead of the UK on OECD tests of educational attainment.

A longer school day and shorter school holidays, however temporary a measure, may be necessary for our own educational survival on the world stage.

Much can be achieved with a ‘can do’ attitude alongside effective and traditional teaching methods. The lesson of Singapore’s “survival” needs to be learnt by the UK in 2021.

07. No Comment

University of Birmingham biostatistics professor John Deeks said: "Anybody who thinks that using [lateral flow] tests is going to make the schools completely safe is being misled," after he flagged that there was a "very strange" lack of positive cases being detected in schools.

TES News 11.03.2021

The young and people of colour are overwhelmingly supportive of Meghan Markle, perfectly able to recognise racism . . . Trapped in a make-believe past, we are unable to recognise how our real history shapes our culture and our attitudes.

David Olusoga, Order of the British Empire, The Guardian, 14.03.2021

English teachers are increasingly expected to use their reading lists to promote active anti-racism. That pressure finds its source in a political outlook that shifts the terms of the debate from its usual dichotomy – wavering between the poles of understanding/expression and rule-bound linguistics/literary techniques – to put its entire focus on representation.

Alka Seghal-Cuthbert, Schools Week, 07.03.2021

Almost 50 university chiefs have kept their fat cat salaries . . . despite devastated students suffering months of lost learning.

Mail Online 11.01.2021

Under the leadership of one of Tony Blair's education secretaries, Estelle Morris, Labour's Bright Future Taskforce is charged with developing "a national strategy to ensure all children recover the learning and social development lost during the pandemic." The taskforce includes a secondary head teacher, an NUS vice-president and a number of education sector worthies — most of whom have extensive experience based in big cities. It prompted this comment from a comrade "...good people, but no-one who you would describe as being on the left."

Tony Rea, Morning Star, 13.03.2021