

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

Gavin Williamson, the education secretary, has confirmed that next summer's GCSEs and A-Levels are to be diluted. This is intended to "boost fairness and support students." Although a 'pass' marks of below 20 percent is currently routine, the next round of examinations are to be marked even more leniently. To further reduce the demands placed on candidates, some syllabus requirements, such as the oral component of modern foreign languages, will no longer be part of the examination. In addition, vocabulary lists, will be provided alongside support materials in other subjects, such as formula sheets for maths. Pupils will be given several months' notice of which syllabus topics will appear on the question papers.

None of this is going to offset the real impact of several months of missed schooling for those millions of under-privileged children who have suffered most as a consequence of the Covid 19 lockdown. They are the ones whose parents cannot afford to purchase a house in the catchment area of a good school, let alone pay for private schooling or home tutoring. A devaluation of the examination currency cannot make up for lost learning. Nor will it be fairer. It lowers the attainment bar just as much for those children who have been least affected by the lockdown as it does for those most affected.

Mr. Williamson has his head buried in the sand if he believes that the 2021 version of GCSEs and A-Levels can possibly level the educational playing field or measure up to what they claim to be.

Margaret Thatcher pointed out in *The Downing Street Years* that "the purpose of testing [is] not to measure merit but knowledge and the capacity to apply it." Examinations are counterfeit educational currency if they do not actually examine. An evolution of the way things are going might be to provide examination candidates with answers and to assess them on their ability to suggest the question.

In effect, cheating is being boldly promoted by government as the best way forward in the interests of fairness and merit. Political expediency trumps all, even reality.

The Welsh government has decided to ditch exam papers altogether in favour of teacher predictions. Scotland is doing the same for its GCSE-equivalent National 5 exams. Their dishonesty will come from presenting unreliable and inflated teacher predictions as worthy of exam certification. English cheating or Welsh-Scottish hoodwinking? Do we want young people to be cheated or hoodwinked? Take your choice!

We teach children to be honest but whichever way one looks in the great examination game we find only dishonesty, fraud and chicanery..

Chris McGovern

02. When Eton falls, what is left?

As revolution exploded across Europe in early 1848, Metternich, the conservative foreign minister of Austria, is reputed to have said; 'We had planned for everything, except for a liberal pope.' He resigned and by late April was in exile at 42 Brunswick Terrace, Brighton.

Those currently holding the line against our Woke revolution might echo Metternich by opining: 'We have planned for everything except for a woke headmaster of Eton College'.

The sacking of Will Knowland, a teacher of English at Eton for the past nine years, has been widely reported. It reflects the current debate about the suppression of free speech in order to protect the sensitivities of those with of a 'woke' disposition.

An un-transmitted video lecture by the teacher questioned 'current radical feminist orthodoxy'. Entitled 'The Patriarchy Paradox', the lecture was intended to encourage critical debate about issues in the news. It was to be part of a course on 'Perspectives' for older pupil. The teacher uploaded the lecture to the school's intranet as part of the school's online learning programme, but permission was not granted for it to be shown

Schools have a legal obligation to promote so-called ‘British Values’ including a balanced curriculum. According to the teacher he was endeavouring to meet this obligation by balancing the notion that masculinity is ‘fundamentally toxic’.

The headmaster was, evidently, not amused. He felt ‘that some of the ideas put forward in my lecture – such as the view that men and women differ psychologically and not all of those differences are socially constructed – were too dangerous for the boys to be exposed to.’ Knowland was perceived as a counter-revolutionary before being awarded the ‘Order of the Boot’.

He has a wife and five children to support and now faces the prospect of being made homeless. An appeal has been made, of course, and, if necessary, he can take the school to an employment tribunal. The road ahead, however, looks bleak. Counter-revolutionaries have no place in modern education.

And where does the ignominious row leave Eton College – if not in disrepute? Simon Henderson, Eton’s youngest ever head, describes himself as a ‘normal sort of guy’; presumably, then, a typical product of his education at Winchester and Oxford. He boasts plenty of liberal credentials and seems proud to recognise that Eton has an ‘intelligence’ deficit

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/nov/11/eton-head-young-men-more-gender-intelligent>

This latest row offers compelling evidence that he is correct.

Like Metternich, the counter-revolutionaries have, indeed, planned for everything but this turn of events. When Eton falls what is left? Long live the revolution?

03. Cracking the code for university entrance

From splitting the atom to unravelling the DNA molecule, British universities have long been world beating. Members of a single college at Cambridge University – Trinity College – have produced more than three times (34) the combined total of Nobel winners generated by today’s educational superstars at school-level - China (8), Taiwan (2) South Korea (1) and Singapore (0).

Our underperforming state school system and public examination shambles is inclined to distract us from an indisputable fact. At its very best, in the higher stratosphere of education, academic achievement in the UK is world-beating. Even in the midst of the current pandemic, and for all the excitement surrounding the Pfizer vaccine, it likely to be a much cheaper and easier-to-store Oxford vaccine that protects the world against the Covid 19 virus. More often than not Britain is best when it comes to a crisis that needs solving by brain power; certainly, at an admirably elite level. Some of that intelligence is, admittedly and proudly, attracted to these shores from overseas.

Nor should we write off, entirely, our failing school system. It is not by chance that some of the wealthiest parents in the educational superstar school systems of the Asia-Pacific seek to place their offspring in British independent schools. These are the very schools that our educational establishment loves to hate. Westminster, Wycombe Abbey, St. Pauls, Winchester, North London Collegiate and the rest of our shining success stories in schooling, need to stop apologising to the Blob for being global success stories.

Given our admirable, awe-inspiring and commendably brainy educational elite at the top end of both our schools and our universities, how strange it has been to witness years of abject failure when it has come to managing university entrance. Our best brains have been unable to cope with the challenge of working out a fair and reliable system.

Sub-atomic physics and cracking the DNA code are as nothing, it seems, when compared to the challenge presented by sorting out the quality of applicants. For long, the best that our finest brains have been able to come up with for sixth-formers (Year 13) has been to base offers on teacher-predicted A-Level grades. Our cleverest university brains have, at least, been able to work out the accuracy rate of these predictions. It turns out to be 16 percent across a candidate’s three best A-Level grades!

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2020/aug/predicting-level-grades-accurately-near-impossible-task>

For decades, many young people have suffered from, or been unfairly advantaged by, the grade-prediction system for university entry. Those from low socio-economic backgrounds have been most likely to be under-predicted. Now, finally, we have a breakthrough. After eighteen months of review, university leaders have come to the conclusion that applicants to their universities should be based on real exam results rather than predicted grades.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-54908150>

Yes, our educational boffins have finally cracked it! Another UK Nobel prize must, surely, be in the offing.

04. Going backwards via the Covid 19 lockdown

Ofsted reports that the Covid 19 lockdown of schools and nurseries caused children to regress. Some potty-trained infants, for example, have reverted back to nappies and other young children have forgotten how to use a knife and fork. Amongst many primary and secondary school pupils, literacy and numeracy skills have gone backwards. Children's mental health, too, has been suffering.

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/news/pupils-forget-how-to-spell-after-months-out-of-school-2jhtpfp2z>

A research project by school assessment company, No More Marking, involving Year 7 pupils [ages 11-12] suggests that the situation may be even worse than Ofsted is reporting. The company's director of education, Daisy Christodoulou, concluded:

'The results are quite stark. The mean score of the Year 7 pupils is almost exactly the same as the mean score from our most recent Year 5 assessment, held in November 2019. So, Year 7 pupils are 22 months behind where we would expect them to be.'

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8925387/Children-started-secondary-school-September-22-MONTHS-writing.html>

None of this should come as a surprise. It is, indeed, reassuring to know that, when open, most schools exert a positive influence on their pupils. Take schooling away and children suffer. This truth, which should be self-evident, exposes the self-seeking hypocrisy of teacher union leaders. It was their stance of political war-mongering that made it easy for government to close schools in the first place. Mafia-style, a National Education Union boss even threatened to name and shame any headteachers that sought to keep their school open.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/05/19/bma-drops-opposition-schools-reopening/>

Nor are threats and intimidation confined to headteachers. The Campaign for Real Education has recently felt the need to remove certain contact information from its website in order to protect its committee members from intimidation. Lengthy, pro-school-closure, teacher diatribes on the telephone have blamed the Campaign for sending children to their deaths! Barmy, yes, but some teacher 'crazies' are certainly out there, exerting a baleful influence on open debate and freedom of speech.

Most teachers choose not to join a union <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/education-union-membership-drops-to-lowest-point-in-a-decade>

but the grip of union bosses and agitators has been at strangulation point for too long in our schools. It explains, in part, why British pupils still lag well behind those in the most successful education systems around the world, even if there has been some recent improvement.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7750329/British-teenagers-MISERABLE-world.html>

Our pupils have long failed to keep up with those in the likes of in Singapore, Estonia and China. The regression that has happened as a result of teacher unions getting their way and closing schools for several months has now brought our schooling and, hence, our economy, to 'Situation Critical'. This is made clear in an article for the 'businessfast.co.uk' website:

‘Even before the pandemic we were not in great shape, with only one in four Britons of working age said to be functionally numerate. Half the population has low confidence in making decisions to do with money, according to research by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), and 50 per cent have problems understanding credit card repayments.

It gets worse. In 2016, the UK was ranked joint bottom for adult financial literacy in a league table of 17 OECD nations, putting it on a level with Albania, and was the only OECD country where the numeracy skills of 16- to 24-year-olds were lower than the over-55s.

“Every other country is becoming more numerate over time, yet our young people have fewer skills, and that’s super relevant right now as younger people are bearing the brunt of the Covid crisis,” says Andy Haldane, the Bank of England’s chief economist.’

The current regression, then, is not new. Educational standards has been falling for decades even if our educational Blob claim the opposite. By closing schools at the behest of the teacher unions the government made catching-up less likely than ever. It is now insisting that schools stay open. It has, perhaps, learnt from its error of judgement. ‘Too late’, is the plaintive message from this latest Ofsted report.

05. On the naughty step at Benenden School

Samantha Price, headteacher of Benenden School for girls, has been sitting on the naughty step. Some senior pupils at the alma mater of Princess Anne took offence when the head uttered the word ‘negro’ during a school assembly. She was explaining that the origins of Black History Month date back to 1926 in the United States. A “Negro History Month” was initiated that year by Carter G. Woodson, an African-American historian.

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/parents-back-head-over-offensive-word-at-black-history-assembly-3xjd6ctsq>

Price has chosen to apologise, and she has done so in these terms:

‘In hindsight I recognise that it was not necessary to use the specific word and I accept that by using this word at all I have caused offence to some pupils. Clearly, this was never my intention and I unreservedly apologise for that error.’

The protest at Benenden is the latest in a series of witch-hunt rebellions by advantaged pupils against what is termed, ‘white privilege’. Pupils at Nonsuch girls’ grammar, for example, have been praised by the Socialist Worker for ‘showing the strength that collective action has in the battle against racism. Their determination to fight for change is a powerful display of resistance.’

<https://socialistworker.co.uk/art/50810/School+students+organise+powerful+anti+racist+revolt>

Pupils at Wimbledon High (Girls Day School Trust) have been equally supportive of the anti-racist crusade, using their educational privilege to fight what they regard as ‘white privilege’. Leading anti-racist campaigner, Norwegian-born and Oxford-educated, Afua Hirsch, is a former-pupil of the school. Around the time she sat her A-Levels there, she recalls that tennis prodigies, Venus and Serena Williams, were her same-street neighbours and were black role models for her.

Her best-selling book, ‘Brit(ish): On Race, Identity and Belonging’ (2018) is a must-read for anti-racism warriors; not least for ‘right-on’ privileged sixth-formers who are have discovered their anti-racist calling. Surprisingly, though, Hirsch seems to be no great fan of Nelson Mandela. Is his donning of the Springbok rugby shirt – a symbol of apartheid - at the 1995 rugby world cup final to be regarded as unforgivable rather than as the extraordinary gesture of reconciliation that it represented?

The message that pupils need to learn, surely, is that there is no colour bar to what these days we regard as human wickedness. It is, sadly, one of the educational establishment’s greatest triumphs to have convinced educators and those being educated, that whites and non-whites are different beyond the colour of their skin. Whites, in particular, are the perpetrators of evil. Non-whites are the victims. Contrition and penance are,

therefore, required from the whites. Mandela, to his great credit, saw through the shallowness of this proposition.

By apologising for her use of the word, 'negro' the headmistress of Benenden has shown a lack of courage. Rather than apologising she should be educating the protestors about anti-white bigotry. Kemi Badenoch, the minister for women and equalities, has made it quite clear in parliament that teaching 'white privilege' as an uncontested fact is breaking the law.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/20/teaching-white-privilege-is-a-fact-breaks-the-law-minister-says>

How would the protesting pupils react, one wonders, if the head teacher were to read out some xenophobic, racist and imperialistic extracts from the autobiography of the woman voted the greatest black Briton - Mary Seacole. She used the n-word without apology and was happy to use the word, 'negro', too, but in a rather different context from that used by the head teacher of Benenden, as this extract shows:

'With what pleasure, for instance, could one foreign to their tastes and habits dine off a roasted monkey, whose grilled head bore a strong resemblance to a negro baby's? And yet the Indians used to bring them to us for sale, strung on a stick.'

Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands: Penguin Classics P37 Kindle Edition. First Published 1857 with a Preface by Times journalist and Crimean War correspondent W.H. Russell.

Seacole's racism is rather shocking but it was a reflection of attitudes at the time she lived. The responsibility of a head teacher is to stand up to bigotry in whatever form it comes. Appeasement of ignorant and bigoted fanaticism is a poor example to set, especially when it may be against the law.

06. No Comment

SINGAPORE - The four national examinations - the PSLE, N levels, O levels and A levels - will go on as scheduled from Sept 14 to Dec 2, but there will be special arrangements made to ensure that students and invigilators remain safe from the Covid-19 virus.

The Straits Times, 22.8.2020

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' [by wishing to keep schools open] in the latest Covid lockdown.

Mail-on-Sunday 22.11.2020

. . . perfect conditions are developing for the kind of uproar among teachers, students and school leaders about unjust and unexpected results that triggered the last three great grading storms.

William Stewart, News Editor, TES 2.12.2020

. . . A-levels: even if maybe they were harder back in [our] day, so what?

Adrian Chiles, The Guardian, 2.12.2020

' . . . parents, staff and boys have been shocked by your arrogance, laziness and most of all your utter disregard for the school in handling this affair and if you have any honour at all you will tender your letter of resignation to the Eton community.' Eton pupil's letter to his headteacher.

Daily Mail 2.12.2020

Gavin Williamson has long stood out as one of the least impressive members of an underpowered cabinet.

The Times, editorial. 4.12.2020