

# Campaign for Real Education

[www.cre.org.uk](http://www.cre.org.uk)

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

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## Newsletter

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### Editorial

#### Looking back and looking forward

A happy New Year to all of our readers and supporters!  
Let us hope that it is happier than the year just gone by.

2018 turned out to be a rather dismal for education but not for lack of warnings by the Campaign for Real Education. Once again, these proved well-founded. This has, invariably, been the case since the Campaign was launched in the 1980s. We were, for example, the first to blow the whistle on how phonics-free teaching methodology were promoting illiteracy. It took governments around thirty years to get the message. Only recently have phonics started to be restored. As a consequence, we are beginning to see a belated recovery in literacy levels at primary school.

As much could be said of the ‘knowledge-lite’ curriculum and public examination system that was imposed on schools in the form of the GCSE examination in 1988 and, indeed, the subsequent National Curriculum. As Education Secretary, a few years ago, Michael Gove tried to restore some confidence in the exam currency by adding a little more rigour to syllabuses. Any hope that he might succeed has now diminished.

The integrity of the entire system collapsed at the first sitting for most of the new GCSE and A-Levels last summer. It came to light that grade boundaries had to be manipulated in order to ensure that the pass rate of previous years was maintained or bettered. Around 20 percent of the marks ensured a ‘good pass’ in GCSE Mathematics. Anywhere else in the world this would be regarded as a certificate of incompetence.

Another generation of pupils is paying a high price for the slow-learning curve of successive governments and for their failing to act intelligently despite the failures evident across a wide spectrum of educational performance. Morale within the profession is reported to be at an all-time low. Teachers and would-be teachers are now marching with their feet. Teacher recruitment and retention was a bigger problem than ever in 2018. Schools were faced by a critical shortage of well-qualified graduates in several subjects.

Meanwhile, issues of mental health, bullying and addiction to digital technology have become even greater concerns as we enter 2019. Furthermore, schools seem to be drowning in a flood of political correctness. Accusations of political indoctrination of children have also emerged.

At the 2018 Labour party conference, one teaching assistant delegate reminded the party that a 'proper education' would mean that there would not be 'any Tories because we'll have brought our kids up properly'. The closing down of freedom of speech on university campuses only underlined the politicisation of education.

It was the funding crisis for schools, though, that most hit the headlines last year. Teachers marched in protest and even headteachers took a day off to besiege parliament and Downing Street. Many parents added their voice – appalled that they were being asked to chip in for everyday school essentials, ranging from toilet rolls to lined-paper.

As we look ahead to 2019 it is, surely, important to recognise the inconvenient truth that in recent decades, successive governments have mostly been generous spenders on education. If money could solve our educational problems, we would have solved them by now.

Indeed, according to the authoritative Organisation for Economic and Co-operation and Development (OECD) the UK actually spends a higher percentage of its income (gross domestic product) on education than most other developed countries. Only Norway and New Zealand are ahead of us.

And spending around eight times as much per pupil as comparatively under-developed countries such as Vietnam has not made our children eight times better in terms educational attainment. Almost the opposite! We trail behind that country on the international PISA tests for 15-year-olds in both maths and in science and are only marginally ahead in literacy.

Not that our literacy standards are much to boast about. In 2016 the World Economic Forum Report noted:

England's teenagers have the worst levels of literacy [amongst developed countries] coming in last place with more than 1 in 5 having a low level of literacy. The country doesn't fare much better in numeracy, coming second to last with more than a quarter of 16-19-year olds lacking basic numeracy skills.

The OECD has made it clear that beyond a basic level, educational attainment is not related to spending. Estonia spends not much more than half of what the UK spends per pupil but is a long, long way ahead of us in terms of attainment.

In 2019 our schools need to stop blaming its problems on a lack of funding and to explain where all the money is going. How many parents are aware, for example, that, these days, over half of staff in schools (53 percent) are not actually teachers. Teaching methods have become more and more 'child-centred' with the consequent demand for more and more classroom assistants and other ancillary staff.

This approach is the opposite of the teacher-led lessons that are the norm in the educational super-star states of the Asia Pacific. They were also the norm in the UK when today's grandparents at school. Is it any coincidence that we are the only country in the developed world where grandparents out perform their grandchildren in basic skills?

Some classroom assistants are necessary, of course. A minority of children, certainly, do require extra support. If, however, we were to reduce the number of assistants by around fifty percent it would require teachers to use those more effective whole class teacher-led lessons that are the norm in most high performing education systems and that were once the norm here, too, when standards were higher. Such methods are, also, much more conducive to good order in the classroom and, consequently, children learn more easily and teachers are less stressed.

All of this creates a virtuous circle and school budgets ceased to be over-stretched. Indeed, some of the savings made could be channelled back into higher pay for good teachers. This in turn would aid recruitment and retention and, surely, boost morale.

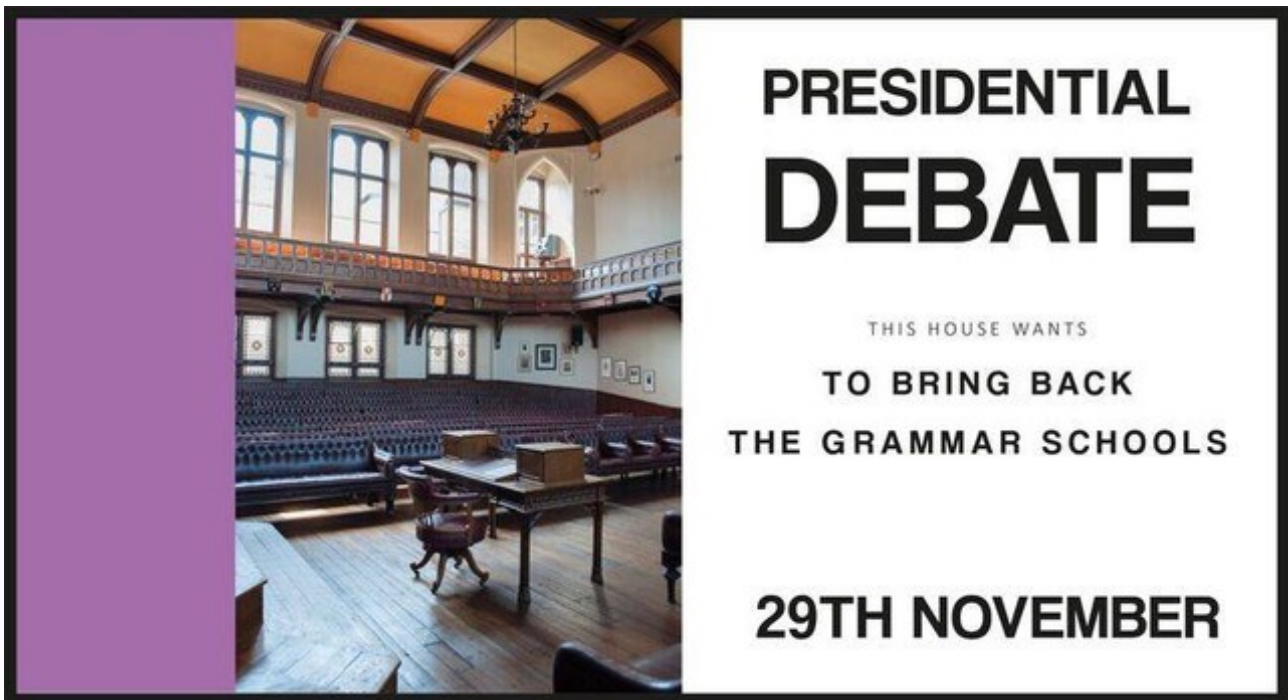
It is not lack of spending that has caused so many problems for our school, it is wasted spending. According to the Institute of Fiscal Studies, overall spending on education increased in real term terms by an incredible nine times, 900 percent, between 1953 and 2009 and yet, alone amongst developed countries, standards of pupil attainment fell.

2019 must be the year when we face up to some inconvenient truths about our school system. The Campaign for Real Education will continue to speak truth to the power of the educational establishment and to the supine politicians whom they control.

# Cambridge Union Debate

## This house wants to bring back the grammar schools

CHRIS MCGOVERN



This house wants to bring back the grammar schools' was the motion I proposed in a debate at the Cambridge Union in late November. Historian and journalist Simon Heffer was alongside me but the third proposer, Graham Brady, chairman of the Tories' 1922 Committee, had to pull out at the last minute. Presumably, deciding who should be prime minister took precedence even over an issue that is so important to him. Happily, a late replacement was found in a first-year student from an Indian immigrant background. He introduced the motion with a knowledge and passion that would have much impressed any supporter of grammar schools.

Against the motion was Baroness Shirley Williams, who did so much to promote and justify comprehensive education during her time as Education Secretary (1976-1979). Now in her late 80s, she remains as alert as ever. Mary Bousted, joint general secretary of the National Education Union, was also in opposition to the motion. More significantly, though, this was the Cambridge Union Presidential Debate with the Union's charismatic and super-popular outgoing president, Charles Connor, both determining the motion and choosing to oppose it. Backed by a phalanx of fervent supporters there was never any doubt that grammar schools would get the thumbs-down.

Calling for grammar schools to be brought back is, in educational circles, akin to calling for the return of the Black Death. Encouragingly, though, a high percentage of 'don't know' abstentions meant that the final vote did not provide the anti-grammar schools side with an overall majority. Perhaps some of those present did take note of Simon Heffer's suggestion that at Cambridge, the most selective of educational institutions, opposition to 'selection' was a touch hypocritical.

Sadly, the prime minister's precarious political position has ensured that grammars are no longer on the Conservative Party agenda. They should not stay off it for too long. Contrary to what comprehensive school zealots would have us believe, the demise of grammar schools has brought less, not more, fairness to our society. 'Britain has the lowest social mobility rate in the developed world,' David Cameron informed his party conference in 2015. He could have added that this is the crowning achievement of Britain's version of 'comprehensive' schooling.

Those opposing the motion at the Cambridge Union were unwilling to recognise that all that comprehensive schools have brought us is entrenched social apartheid based on school catchment area and house price. This was [pointed out by the Left-leaning Sutton Trust](#) as long ago as 2010. Recognising the inadequacy of the

‘free school meals’ label to identify ‘disadvantaged’, the Trust formulated a far more accurate measure based on those families supported by ‘income benefit’.

Their results showed that in better-off areas only 4 per cent of comprehensive school pupils were disadvantaged as opposed to 70 per cent in deprived areas. Remarkably, amongst the hundred most socially selective state secondary schools, ninety-one were comprehensives, only eight were grammars and one was a secondary modern. Equally telling was the finding that the most socially selective comprehensives take around 9 per cent of children whose parents are on income support as against 13 per cent for grammars.

Evidence for this social apartheid is now piling up. In 2016 the Social Mobility Commission, chaired by Labour’s Alan Milburn, reported that a ‘child living in one of England’s most disadvantaged areas is 27 times more likely to go to an inadequate school [than a child living in one of the least disadvantaged](#)’. As recently as last August, following an analysis of Ofsted data, the Labour Party reported that pupils from poor homes are [nine times more likely to attend secondary schools rated ‘inadequate’ than children from advantaged backgrounds](#).

Nor are things going well for us in terms of academic standards as a consequence of going comprehensive. According to the OECD, we are the only country in the developed world where grandparents, many educated under the old grammar school tripartite system, outperform their grandchildren in terms of the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. Employers have consistently made it clear that, as a result of poor schooling, around 20 per cent of school leavers these days are in effect unemployable. We rely on immigrants to fill the recruitment gaps.

It is small wonder that the UK has slipped down the international rankings of educational attainment. The OECD PISA tests place our fifteen-year-olds three years behind the likes of Singapore where most pupils still sit our old grammar school exam – the GCE O-Level. Yes, we ban it here but export it to our economic rivals and educational superiors.

The state of crisis in standards brought about by Britain’s comprehensive schooling was well summed up in a [2016 ‘World Economic Forum Report’](#):

‘England’s teenagers have the worst levels of literacy, coming in last place with more than 1 in 5 having a low level of literacy. The country doesn’t fare much better in numeracy, coming second to last with more than a quarter of 16-19 year olds lacking basic numeracy skills.’

The Blob’s PR background to falling standards is that, according to Ofsted, 88 per cent of our schools are ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ and that exam results are better than ever, even with new and tougher public exams. Indeed, the government’s examination regulator has told the Sunday Times that ‘all our kids are brilliant’. She omitted to say that the manipulation of grade boundaries has enabled such universal brilliance.

Teachers, of course, know the truth and around half of recruits leave the profession within five years. The dumbing down of standards and classroom disorder, consequent on our version of comprehensive school ideology, are much to blame. So, too, is the silencing of dissent. If teachers wish to retain their livelihood they need to conform.

As I told the students at the Cambridge Union, prospective applicants for teaching training are likely to be automatically excluded if they confess to any sympathy for grammar schools. Even teaching children according to ‘aptitude’ is something of a no-go area on the basis that it is ‘discriminatory’. This was made very clear to me by the sanctified ‘Teach First’ charity with whom I debated on a separate occasion.

Perhaps the only way forward in terms of enlightening the beneficiaries of selective education such as that provided by Cambridge and other elite universities would be to make these universities, too, comprehensive. How about a catchment area for Cambridge? Would not that make admission fairer?

There is, too, a way of offsetting the advantage bestowed by expensive local house prices and by being the intelligent offspring of university dons. We could bus off to Luton the brightest and best school leavers from Cambridge. They will discover there an outpost of Bedfordshire University. Welcome, brothers and sisters, to the super-fair comprehensive education system for the 18+ age group.

Should we ‘bring back’ the grammar schools? Decide for yourself. Here is the film recording of the debate:

# Vacancies

It been widely reported that we have a teacher-recruitment crisis.

‘Oh, no we don’t!’ claims the government.

‘Oh, yes we do!’ respond the teacher unions.

And, for once, it really does look as though the unions have got it right.

An internal government email leaked to the *TES* (formerly the *Times Educational Supplement*) admits that ‘challenges in teacher supply have worsened’. The number of teachers fell, albeit slightly (1.2 per cent), during 2016-17, the latest year for which there is data. A major challenge is, therefore, facing the Department for Education. Secondary school pupil numbers are forecast to rise by 534,000, around 20 per cent, between 2107 and 2026. [An extra 47,000 teachers will be needed to cope with this increase.](#)

Publicly, of course, the Government is in denial that there is a problem. It points out that in 2018 the number of recruits for teacher training were slightly up on 2017. Generous bursaries – aka ‘bribes’ – are slightly boosting the number of punters. Unfortunately, according to a Times survey, 11 per cent of bursary recipients either reject a teaching career altogether or do not end up in a state school. The higher the bursary received, the more this is likely to be the case.

The very lowest estimate of bursary money wasted on trainees between 2009 and 2016 who did not end up in a maintained school classroom is £44million. The real figure is almost certainly a great deal higher since the calculations were based on the lowest bursaries (£4,000) not the highest (£25,000-plus). One hears that even DfE officials acknowledge, privately, that bursaries can be a ‘nice little earner’ for those with enough ‘nous’ to play the system.

The sad truth is that, too often, teacher recruitment in the UK has been about scraping the barrel and offering sweeteners. In contrast, the world’s best performing school systems accept only the brightest and the best of graduates. Singapore, for example, recruits its teachers from its academic top third and has an acceptance rate of one in eight. Closer to home, Finland’s high-flying school system rejects 93 per cent of primary school teaching applicants.

Things could hardly be more different here. Not only have we been scraping the barrel for years, the leaked DfE email suggests that even deeper barrel-scraping is seen as the way forward. Contractors are to be invited to bid for a research contract exploring the extent to which teaching assistants can be persuaded to become teachers. Given that teaching assistants and other ancillary staff now constitute 53 per cent of staffing in schools, this has some obvious attractions – an army of potential recruits on site. What is more, support staff are much easier to recruit than teachers. They do not need any specific qualification, although teaching assistant diplomas are available and can be taken online.

So, what’s not to like? Replace difficult-to-recruit graduate teachers with easier-to-recruit classroom assistants. A bit of top-up training may be necessary and, it is true, some classroom assistants are well-qualified and could, indeed, make excellent teachers. These are, however, a minority.

The army, too, has a recruitment crisis and has come up with a poster campaign based on senseless, directionless and pitiful slogans. They are ‘focus-driven’ and ‘target-driven’, intended to appeal to the mindset of school-leavers:

SNOW FLAKES: YOUR ARMY NEEDS YOU AND YOUR COMPASSION

SELFIE ADDICTS: YOUR ARMY NEEDS YOU AND YOUR CONFIDENCE

PHONE ZOMBIES: YOUR ARMY NEEDS YOU AND YOUR FOCUS

Potential recruits to teaching, however, could do with something a little more honest and rather more suited to the real battlefield these days – classrooms up and down the country. This once great profession needs to face up to some hard truths.

## Situations Vacant

There are employment opportunities in the teaching profession

Make a difference!

If you are idealistic and seek an opportunity to solve all of society's problem this could make the perfect career choice for you.

Is the promotion of gender diversity and the eradication of gender-specific pronouns important to you?

Are you prepared to use the curriculum as a vehicle for social change?

Do you believe that the curriculum is too white, stale and male?

Are you aware that all women and all racial minorities are oppressed?

Do you hate the Tories?

Do you hate grammar schools and private schools?

Are you ashamed of Britain's imperial past?

Are you ready to teach children about the folly of Brexit?

Do you believe in child-centred learning backed up by lots of classroom assistants?

If you can answer 'yes' to these questions you should consider teaching as a career.

To qualify you require a 'good pass' in GCSE English and in mathematics (15 per cent for mathematics GCSE 2017 and 21 per cent for 2018)

A degree in any subject

One year's teacher training in political correctness

Bursaries of up to £28,000 now available but with no obligation to become a teacher.

### **Unqualified and looking for an alternative way into teaching?**

Experience of being a classroom assistant may allow other qualifications and training to be bypassed.

Ability to read, write and add up will be helpful but recruits to the profession can be assured that grade boundaries in public examinations will be manipulated to cover up an alleged failure by the profession.

Candidates are advised that a safe working environment cannot be guaranteed. Random violence by pupils and parents towards you should be embraced as a learning opportunity.

### **What others say**

A teacher has told the BBC she considered driving her car into a tree to avoid going back to the classroom.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-england-hampshire-46738447/a-teacher-s-story-eat-sleep-teach-repeat>

**'If we give [children] a proper education . . . we'll probably not have any Tories because we will have brought up our kids properly'**

– Sion Rickard, a teaching assistant, [at the Labour Party Conference 2018](#)

**'All our kids are brilliant'**

– Sally Collier, head of Ofqual, the Government's exam standards watchdog

# Lions led by Donkeys

BY CRE CHAIRMAN, CHRIS MCGOVERN

(ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN THE DAILY TELEGRAPH ON DECEMBER 18<sup>TH</sup> 2018)

In any school classroom, someone is going to be in control. It helps if it is the teacher. Should this not be the case, however, it will be school bullies and loudmouths who run the show. Teaching quality and pupils' learning will, of course, suffer and so will the teacher's sanity. As teaching unions are fond of reminding us, 40 per cent or more of new teachers leave the profession within five years. How to keep control should be the first lesson of any teacher-training course. All too often, it is learnt only after new recruits start their first job. By that time it is, for many, too late.

For once, we have an educational analysis that lifts the lid on what is really going behind classroom doors up and down the country. It Just Grinds You Down, a new report from Policy Exchange, should be top of the reading list for anyone involved in teacher training. "Lions led by donkeys" may have been an unfair assessment of our Armed Forces during the First World War, but it is a fairly accurate description of today's teaching profession.

Embattled and battle-wearied from classroom encounters with disruptive and sometimes violent pupils, only the brave or the barmy are surviving. A form of classroom shell shock is becoming the norm. And word is getting out. As pupil numbers increase, we have a real teacher recruitment crisis. The new report is as timely as it is worrying.

Ofsted claims 86 per cent of our schools are "good", or "outstanding". We know from international comparison data that such claims are on a par with the exam regulator chief Sally Collins telling us last year that "all our kids are brilliant". Her quality assurance body, the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation, last year verified 15 per cent as officially a "good pass" in GCSE mathematics. This year the "good pass" mark rose to 21 per cent – surely a certificate of incompetence rather than the license it is to enter the professions, including teaching.

And this brings us to what is implicit in the new report. Good teaching leads to far fewer problems in terms of classroom behaviour. Poor teaching, on the other hand, is a central reason for disruption. Over a third of last summer's 11-year-olds left primary school without attaining the Government's "national expectation" in basic literacy and mathematics. Failure breeds failure and is often a trigger for trouble in the classroom. The Policy Exchange report recognises the root cause of much inadequate teaching – that a child-centered approach to pedagogy simultaneously plays down the importance of teachers' superior knowledge – which of course calls into question the basis for their authority.

There is no great mystery as to why the Asia-Pacific superstar education systems have comparatively few problems with disruption in the classroom. True, part of the explanation may be cultural but at its heart is also an approach to teaching – teacher-led, whole-class – that is much less "child-centered" than that in British schools. Such methods were once the norm here. This may go some way to explain why, according to the OECD, we are the only country in the developed world where grandparents match or even outperform their grandchildren in terms of basic skills.

A few years ago the BBC sent five Chinese teachers into a comprehensive school in southern England that had been voted the best 'comp' in the land by the Times Educational Supplement. The Chinese teachers did succeed in raising levels of learning in the enlarged class of children they taught. They were, however, appalled by the standard of pupil behaviour with which they had to deal at this crème de la crème comprehensive.

The Policy Exchange report must be acted upon. What it identifies as "persistent" and "endemic" disruption in many classrooms must be confronted. The future of our children and, indeed, of our country will be built on our school system.

Teaching can be the most energising, rewarding job in the world. It is certainly the most important. Teacher-trainers and school leaders need to stop acting like donkeys.

# Our Age of Ignorance

Did you know that Nationalists and Unionists in Northern Ireland do not always get on too well? Are you aware that a fair bit of our foreign trade goes via the Dover-Calais route? And did you know that machine-gun bullets are a remarkably effective way of bringing down drones flying over an empty airport runway? If so, your knowledge base is some way ahead of, respectively, Karen Bradley, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Dominic Raab, until recently the Brexit Secretary and Sajid Javid, the Home Secretary.

‘I freely admit that when I started this job, I didn’t understand . . . things like when elections are fought, for example, in Northern Ireland – people who are nationalists don’t vote for unionist parties and vice versa.’

This admission by the Northern Ireland Secretary tells us much about the knowledge base of school-leavers since the 1980s when she was a comprehensive school pupil. It also informs us that ignorance, even stupidity, is no impediment to achieving high office or indeed any office of responsibility.

‘Hire someone for any job, you run them through things, make sure they know what’s what,’ said [one incredulous Northern Irish employer](#) in response to Bradley’s remarks. ‘I hire a driver, I check he can drive. Give a 16-year-old a job packing shelves in Tesco, you make sure he can pack shelves.’ A retired community worker in Belfast was ‘absolutely horrified that [Bradley] could be in a position where she was so terribly ignorant of a situation in which so many people were killed. It just baffles me.’ A third interviewee, a child care worker, added that it was ‘ridiculous that she could know nothing about it and still get the job. Usually you have to show knowledge to get a job. I did.’

In contrast, the Irish government described the new Northern Ireland Secretary as a smart and experienced politician. [There is an upside to her ignorance](#) from the Republic’s perspective.

And what are we to make of the former Brexit Secretary discovering the importance of the Dover-Calais route for UK trade? ‘I hadn’t quite understood the full extent of this . . . But if you look at the UK and look at how we trade in goods, we are particularly reliant on the Dover-Calais crossing.’

As part of the GCSE generation he will have to be excused. The morality of issues such as climate change and energy generation replaced geographical knowledge when Raab was at school. It is not so long ago that [25 per cent of the marks for GCSE geography were awarded for drawing cartoons and writing poetry](#).

So, on to one of the latest debacles – the drone trespass that brought Gatwick Airport to an on-off standstill for three days. The Home Secretary has ultimate responsibility for national security but appeared to suffer mental paralysis. Was it fear of health and safety regulations or simple ignorance? Shoot the bloody things out of the sky was the reaction of most people, even UFO enthusiasts. Drones and bullets don’t mix, Sajid!

But the Home Secretary has moved on. He has turned his attention, or lack of attention, to the cross-Channel trade in illegal immigration. Lives are being put at risk by his dithering and, indeed, by his ignorance. EU law is quite clear that asylum claims should be dealt with by the country of entry into the EU (Dublin III Regulation).

Riding on the tide of ignorance amongst our politicians, the government should, at least, be thankful for the input of Jeremy Corbyn. The Opposition leader has declared it our national ‘duty to reach out the hand of friendship to people who are in danger and seeking a place of safety’.

Yes, indeed, this is 1789 all over again! Welcome to the Age of Ignorance!

## How should we define ‘failure’?

This year, 51 per cent of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, as against 70 per cent of their better-off peers, left England’s primary schools having attained the ‘expected level’ in English and maths. Should we be celebrating?

Sir Anthony Sheldon, vice-chancellor of Buckingham University, is certain we should. He told the [Daily Telegraph](#), without a hint of irony, that this was a ‘genuine cause for celebration’. The schools minister, Nick Gibb, was quick to add his enthusiastic support to Sir Anthony’s diagnosis of success. He regards the results as a verification of his belief that ‘every child, regardless of their background, deserves a high-quality education and opportunity to fulfil their potential’.



Given that the achievement gap separating disadvantaged pupils from the non-disadvantaged, on the government's index, has decreased by 13 per cent since 2011, we certainly seem to be moving in the right direction. Some thanks, then, to Michael Gove and his restoration of a little more rigour into the curriculum.

It says much, though, about the state of schooling in our country that a failure rate of 49 per cent for disadvantaged children can be hailed as worth celebrating. It is not dissimilar to the government's decision to classify the gaining of 21 per cent of the marks on last summer's GCSE maths as officially a 'good pass' in the subject and part of a great leap forward in standards – a cause for more celebration.

A BBC analysis showed that at the current rate of progress it still will take 50 years for under-privileged pupils to [close the attainment gap completely](#). But does this statistical merry-go-round mean much at all when we can have any pass rate we want by manipulating the grade boundaries?

And how far has an over-concentration on the English and maths SATs distorted and impoverished the broader curriculum? Science is certainly being squeezed, as is sport, and one of our few areas of excellence internationally, the arts, has been reduced to Cinderella status in many state schools. This is extraordinary, not least because art, music, drama, dance and so on [contribute close to one hundred billion sterling to our economy](#) and most of that is earned outside of the EU.

One cheer, then, for the latest improvement in primary school performance. But with over a third of all pupils still failing to reach the expected level, we need to retain a sense of perspective.

We should not forget that amongst the Asia-Pacific super-star education systems, the current attainment of our 11-year-olds would be regarded as a national catastrophe. In Shanghai, for example, the bottom 10 per cent socially – the children of street cleaners and janitors, for example – are ahead of our top 20 per cent – the social elite. In other words, pupils attending Eton, Wycombe Abbey, Westminster, St Paul's and the like have some way to go if they are to catch up with the offspring of the guy [cleaning ashtrays in the Mandarin Oriental Hotel](#).

If the latest SATs results represent 'success' and are worthy of celebration, one wonders how 'failure' is to be defined.

## **Michelle Obama and getting it wrong about boys**

We shouldn't be sending messages to girls that there are things they can't do – because there's nothing a girl can't do,' opines America's former First Lady, Michelle Obama, in her recently published memoir, [Becoming](#). She would like you to know that when she was a girl [her dad even bought her a pair of boxing gloves to match those given to her big brother](#).

We should have no gripes whatsoever about girls taking up boxing. Indeed, one of the world's greatest current sporting heroines is our own UK flyweight champion, Nicola Adams OBE. She happens to be the first openly LGBT person to win an Olympic boxing gold but who cares about the LGBT bit? She is the first woman to hold Commonwealth, European, World and Olympic boxing titles – and that is what matters.

Boxing is not generally seen as a particularly 'girly' activity and was never pursued in earnest by Michelle Obama. Equally, ballet is rarely described as 'boyish' even if it does produce some great and athletic male dancers. Both boxing and ballet, to be sure, can inspire either sex and provide a wonderful source for personal development.

Michelle Obama's message, though, is sadly less than neutral. For her, the acquisition of boxing gloves exemplified a form of barrier-breaking for her sex. The feminist 'girls can compete with boys' message is as strong as it is wrong. These days, and certainly in the British and American education systems, the message should be reversed to 'boys can compete with girls'.

Mary Curnock Cook, until recently the head of the UK's Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) recently told a conference convened by the Men and Boys Coalition that:

'Britain's education system is failing to tackle the "astonishing" underperformance of boys as feminists have made the topic "taboo" . . . the fact that boys are falling behind in education is a national scandal – yet it is such an "unfashionable" topic to discuss that it has become "normalised".'

In around ten years, Ms Curnock Cook estimates, the gap between the achievement of girls and boys will be worse than that between rich and poor. Girls already out-perform boys at all levels in our education system – on age 6 phonics tests, on SATs at age 7 and 11, at GCSEs and at A-Level.

True, the BBC did report last summer that ‘for the second year running, boys outperformed girls at the top grades’. It did not, however, report that there were 81,000 more girls than boys sitting A-Levels. This offset the slightly higher percentage of boys overall gaining the highest grades. Indeed, 57 per cent of entrants to university last year were women. All of this is a long way from Michelle Obama’s feminist crusade that sees girls as under-achieving, even repressed.

In some areas of life, though, she is correct that boys are, indeed, ahead of girls. This is especially so amongst those young people who live in relative poverty or other forms of deprivation.

For a start the boys are way ahead of the girls when it comes to knife crime and street murder, mugging and molestation, burglary and car-jacking, punch-ups and hooliganism, drug-pushing and solvent abuse, vandalism and scooter drive-by robbery, recreational violence and rape, beating up the elderly and desecrating national monuments. They are also three times more likely to be permanently excluded from school and, although they are a minority at university, they are more than twice as likely to take their own lives.

Feminism? Want to know where it is leading, Michelle? Take a look around you! Open your eyes! Think outside the feminist box. Girls are going to need more than those boxing gloves to make their way through the gathering storm of under-achieving, alienated, disaffected, drugged-up and marginalised males roaming our streets.

## **No Comment**

**Scotland will become the first country in the world to embed the teaching of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex rights in the school curriculum...**

The Guardian 9<sup>th</sup> Nov 2018

**Thousands of Jews will leave Britain unless ministers back down from forcing faith schools to teach children about gay and transgender relationships and same-sex families...**

The Sunday Times 6<sup>th</sup> January 2019

**...up to one in four students are studying courses that are not economically worthwhile for them or taxpayers who are seeing millions wasted as a result.**

Daily Telegraph 7<sup>th</sup> January 2019

**A Scottish university is trying to encourage more men to consider jobs in childcare. Only 4% of those working in early years and childcare are male, according to the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI).**

BBC News 7<sup>th</sup> January 2017.

**Half of secondary schools in Wales are a cause for concern, the Chief Inspector of Education and Training says**

[Walesonline.co.uk](http://Walesonline.co.uk) 4<sup>th</sup> December 2018

**SINGAPORE - Students who sat the International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma exams in Singapore have performed better than their global counterparts. Almost all the 2,152 students from Singapore - or 97.99 per cent - who took the exams last November passed, compared with the global rate of 68.73 per cent.**

The Straits Times January 4<sup>th</sup> 2019