

# Campaign for Real Education

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## NEWSLETTER

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### Exam fiasco

The widely reported fiasco surrounding late changes to grade boundaries for GCSE English is rather more than a story of incompetence by Ofqual. One can understand the upset caused to youngsters and their parents. More puzzling, is why the 'great and the good' of the educational establishment are howling so loudly after remaining so silent about grade inflation for the past twenty five years. Only now, with a marginal fall in GCSE exam grades for the first time in a quarter of a century, are we hearing them complain. And only because the grade inflation has been arrested! This is shameful.

At least, our politicians are, finally, admitting that something has to be done about 16+ exams and not only because of grade inflation but also because the GCSE is not up to the mark. But why have we had to wait twenty five years for the truth to emerge? Why have we been subjected to a lie, year on year? To paraphrase Edmund Burke, corruption flourishes when good men remain silent. At best, too many well-meaning people have remained silent for too long. At worst these 'good' folk from the world of education have aided and abetted the great lie of ever improving standards. International comparisons, of course, tell a very different story about our educational performance.

The Coalition decision to introduce a new 'all-ability' exam is fraught with danger. Is it going to be possible to produce a maths paper, a foreign language paper, a science paper, for 80% of the school population? If it offers little else, GCSE does offer some differentiated papers. It might have been more sensible for the Government to keep GCSE, albeit properly regulated, and simply lift its 'ban' on GCE O-Level, allowing our youngsters the same right to sit it as children abroad. Sadly, meaningful choice in education never appears to be on the agenda for politicians.

### Establishment's destruction of geography exposed

'As more people have come to question the value that academic subject-knowledge has to children, so they have filled schooling with alternative social concerns. Ralph Fevre describes this process as *demoralization*: the hollowing out of a social institution's moral purpose and replacing it with a rationale derived from a different social activity.'

So writes Alex Standish in his new book, *The False Promise of Global Learning: why education needs boundaries* (Continuum, 2012). Currently associate professor of geography at the Department of Social Sciences, Western Connecticut State University, Alex Standish spent over ten years as a primary and secondary teacher in the UK. He also wrote the seminal *Global Perspectives in the Geography Curriculum* (Routledge, 2009).

His latest book is another seminal exposure that should be read care by all education ministers and their officials, many of whom should be ashamed of what they have done. It explains how the Department of Education and Skills (now the Department for Education – DfE) along with the Department for International Development and numerous high-profile charities such as Oxfam and Christian Aid, funded and encouraged the subversion of the school curriculum, and physical geography in particular, in order to replace traditional content with a mish-mash of cross-curricular skills intended to produce young people who were bound into a new system of moral values based on relativism.

*The False Promise of Global Learning* is essential reading for everyone interested in the formation of educational policy and/or the teaching of geography. It costs around £20 at good bookshops; or from [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)

### The Curse of Politicians

On 12<sup>th</sup> August 2012, *The Sunday Times* reported that Teach First, the charity that encourages bright graduates to enter the teaching profession, was almost scuppered when it was taken over by Gordon

Brown in 2005. In a new book, *Success Against the Odds - Five lessons in how to achieve the impossible; the story of Teach First*, the charity's founder Brett Wigdortz describes how Gordon Brown decided to 'take over' the operation as a government organisation. But no money was provided and officials had no idea how to implement the project. Yet, they told Wigdortz he was legally obliged to deliver on Brown's promise. The demands were softened only after intervention from other ministers and prolonged negotiation. *Success Against the Odds*, published by Short Books, is available from Amazon and all good bookshops for around £9.

### **Schools Network goes bust**

*The Times Educational Supplement* (6 July 2012) estimates that 1,000 organisations may be out of pocket following the bankruptcy of The Schools Network, formerly the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT).

At its peak, SSAT employed around 400 staff. The rent for its Millbank Tower office in London was around £1.4m a year. It was a typical DfE quango which, among other things, used taxpayers' money (paid to SSAT by schools in the form of membership fees) to organise overseas conferences for headteachers, thus providing a captive audience for trendy, 'progressive' ideology. Many SSAT and Schools Network leaders seemed to delight in inventing new jargon, such as 'deep learning', to enhance their guru status and impress teachers who are unable to think for themselves.

Thanks to a management buy-out deal, led by chief executive Sue Williamson and thought to be worth around £150,000, the Schools Network hopes to continue operating under its former name, the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust. Whether or not its debts will be paid remains an unanswered question.

### **Cost cutting in Whitehall?**

On 1 August 2012, The Taxpayers' Alliance (TPA) published figures comparing the numbers of staff employed by various government departments against the numbers they employed last year. Within the disgracefully wasteful DfE 'family', staff numbers fell from 7,436 in December 2011 to 7,341 in December 2012 – a mere 1.28 percentage reduction in the headcount. Whatever do they all do?

### **Core Knowledge**

The "anti-knowledge ideology" identified in the US by Professor Hirsch led to him setting up the Core Knowledge Foundation in 1986. His core knowledge curriculum for younger children is now taught in a number of US schools. Civitas has adapted the curriculum for UK schools and it is to be used by two new free schools – the West London free school and Pimlico Academy Primary. Central to its aims is the imparting of 'cultural literacy' alongside core subject knowledge.

### **Local news**

**Greater Manchester:** Well-advanced plans by Tom Burkard and his colleagues to open a new 'free school' staffed by former service personnel has come to a halt, thanks to opposition from the DfE and local authorities.

**Wiltshire:** When Westbury Leigh Primary School showed Channel 4's vulgar cartoon video, *Living and Growing*, to children as young as five, governor Keith Miller resigned. The DVD is so explicit – even for sex education lessons – that it has been withdrawn from sale. It has also been strongly criticised by numerous parents and schools minister Nick Gibb. 'This film was showing far too much to children at far too young an age', commented Mr Miller. Meanwhile, a Wiltshire County Council spokesman neatly passed the buck by claiming that 'Individual schools select the resources that they feel best meet the needs of their children.'

### **Recommended publications**

*Twenty-two Things Excellent Schools Do* by Jo Saxton, Ph. D., published by Temple Grove Schools Trust, is a study of best practice in the independent sector at preparatory and primary level.

### **Snippets**

**Half of the juveniles arrested during last summer's riots in Britain were educational failures who had not mastered the basics by the age of 11. An official report showed that 48 per cent of the young people arrested by police were unable to read or write properly by the time they left primary school. About the same amount couldn't manage simple sums.** *Times Educational Supplement*, 10 August 2012. [But had the pupils failed or had their schools failed them?]

We are immensely sad to report the death of Dr Vera Dalley on 21 July at King Edward VII Hospital, London after a brief illness. She was a totally selfless lady who, in 1987, as one of our founding members, beavered away behind the scenes without ever seeking personal recognition or gain. Indeed, in the early days of CREd, it was Vera who did much of the hard work to keep us going, and build us up, as a recognised pressure group/voice of common sense on behalf of parents and 'consumers'. She firmly believed, and never stopped saying, that our work was invaluable and must, at all costs, be kept going. It is up to us to ensure it is!