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Education letters

The government has too much control

The Guardian, Monday 26 October 2009

We've lost control

Mike Baker did an excellent job of tearing apart Michael Gove and his party's policies (It's a big jump from soundbite to policy, 20 October). But surely the lesson in current problems is not just the Conservatives' inability to comprehend the complexities of education, but the chaos that ensues when government takes control of any area of human enterprise. In Robin Alexander's primary review, we have just had the benefit of a superb report, with very constructive ideas as to how to improve things, from the centre of the academic world. Instead of automatically picking it apart, dismissing its proposals and suggesting something different, would it not be wonderful to see once again politicians who could honour the

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expertise of people who have spent a lifetime in their field, and allow the professions to govern themselves (which led to the high international rating in education that we have now lost), with the mediation of an elected body independent of both government and profession?

Grethe Hooper Hansen

Batheaston, Bath

No reason

Michael Gove signals that under the Conservatives our children are due for more of the same: high-stakes testing, streaming and strict subject demarcation, all from an early age (Another academic exercise divides opinion, 20 October). His argument consists less of reason and evidence than of a mixture of ideology, for example, the idea that Plowden downgraded knowledge and served the interests of an elite, and unresolved contradictions, such as reducing inequality of outcome based on social background while strengthening streaming and differentiation. There is no mention of schools like Bishops Park in Clacton, or Wroxham primary in Hertfordshire, achieving success without cleaving to Gove's narrow philosophy.

Gove implies cutting bureaucracy but increasing accountability, achieving the impossible of freeing teachers from constant monitoring while holding them to tighter targets.

If parents are to be drawn into an informed discussion about education, rather than the debased one of "choice" between "good" and "bad" schools on offer, politicians need to do a lot more to engage with important initiatives like the primary review.

Dr Clive Hedges

Teesside University, Middlesbrough

- I suppose we should thank Michael Gove for explaining Tory primary education policy: to take the very worst bits of New Labour policy and do everything possible to make them even worse. We can't say he didn't tell



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Keith Flett

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Model capitalism

In his article about going back to his old university 30 years on, John Crace informs us that "Marxism-Leninism is no longer taught as a viable political model" (Parallel university, 20 October). Let's just hope it doesn't take another 30 years until capitalism is no longer taught as a viable political model.

Gordon Vassell

Hull

Dumb and dumber?

Last week Rachel Williams reported on claims that a report on university standards was a 'whitewash'. Some comments from our website:

The claim that there is no dumbing down is such total and utter rot. At the last set of exam boards at my university, my head of department decided that, because the pass rate for my unit was so low, he would arbitrarily increase the marks for all students for the first piece of coursework by 10%. No discussion, no consultation – I was simply informed that it was in the students' interests. It did nothing to help the students overall, because most did not do all of the elements of coursework, so automatically failed.

IndependentLady

To say standards have not fallen is to say that students' IQs have risen by 30 points or that teaching methods have become 50% more effective. Neither is true.

HughManatee



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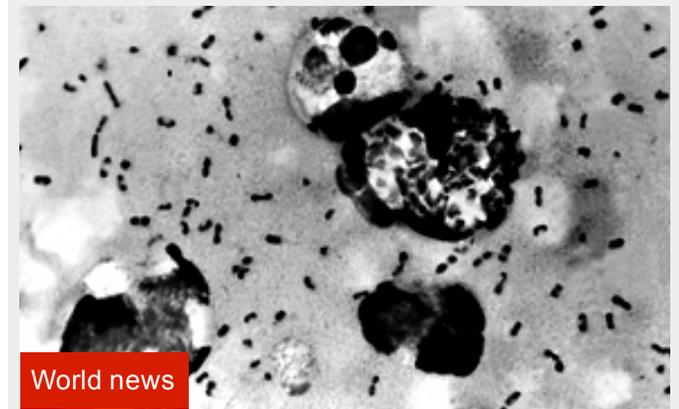
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