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Published: October 20, 2009

13 comments

Primary Schools: Suppressing the data won't solve the problem

Nick Seaton, of the [Campaign for Real Education](#), says the "progressive" educationalists are still seeking to stop parents knowing about primary school failings.

Last week's publication of the Final Report of the [Cambridge Primary Review](#) received media coverage way in excess of its importance.



A Facelift Without Surgery



For almost 24 hours, from midnight on Thursday to just before midnight on Friday, radio and television programmes were awash with discussion about it. All this did was to add to the confusion and, arguably, allow the 'progressive' minority to befuddle a few more parents and teachers.

Led by Cambridge University's education department and funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, the review has taken three years to complete. The report runs to 608 pages and the team emphasises that it drew on over 4,000 published sources, plus evidence from official data, written submissions and face-to-face interviews.

Yet all that time, effort and expense were almost certainly wasted, because the report is so long-winded and ambiguous. Instead of just criticising the currently imposed 'state theory of learning', wouldn't it have been better honestly to explain the state's socialist (Marxist) theory of learning – exactly the same for all children with emphasis on socialisation and politically correct values at the expense of subject knowledge?

The final conclusions suggest that primary education is 'in general, doing a good job'. Would the thousands of youngsters who, each year, complete their primary education and move up to secondary schools without being able to read, spell, or do simple sums, agree with that?

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Would the growing number of state-school parents who have to pay for private tutors to teach areas of the curriculum that their 11-year-old children have not covered, but will need if they are to have a fair chance of passing a common entrance exam to join an independent school or the 11-plus exam to enter a grammar school, agree? I doubt it.

The Cambridge Review's response to such concerns is more socialisation and more play-based learning for five-year-olds. Labour's Early Years Foundation Stage, the review suggests, should be extended to age six, and the primary phase should be reduced to the ages of 6 to 11. And, of course, primary school accountability should be removed by making national tests less objective, using only sample testing, and halting central publication of school-by-school results.

The report also recommends that the 'prevailing concept of standards should be re-assessed', because it is 'restricted, restrictive and misleading'. So does the boss of Tesco, Sir Terry Leahy, not understand what he described last week as 'woefully low' standards in schools?

Presumably, the Cambridge proposals were too 'progressive' for Labour ministers or Conservative shadow ministers. They immediately denounced them.

But should the future of primary education be a matter for national politicians, or educationists, who would rather debate the issues than do something practical? Unless parents are offered clear information and genuine choice, surely this is more a matter for local politicians and their officials who know their area's schools?

Sensible parents know what they want. The real problem is that too few local authorities have the sense to do what is needed: leave good schools alone and rapidly improve the bad ones.

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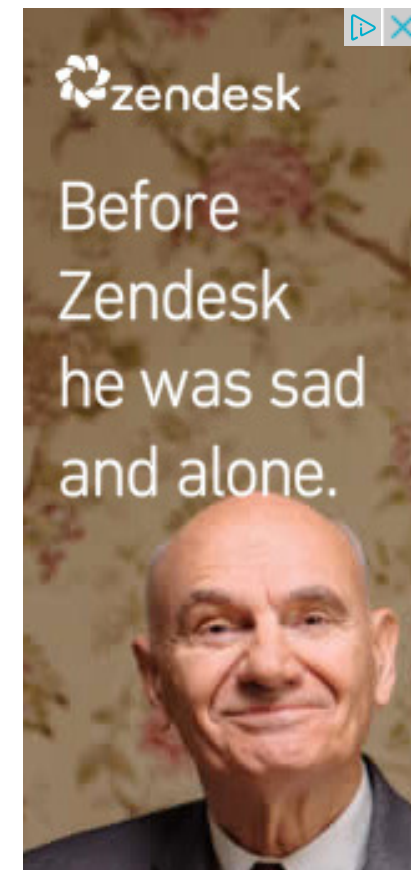
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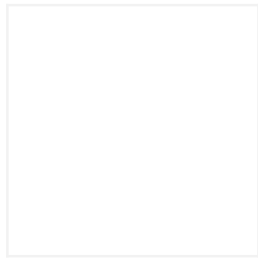
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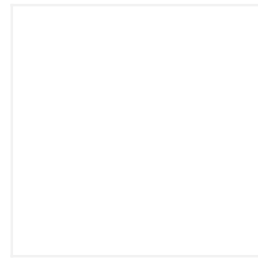
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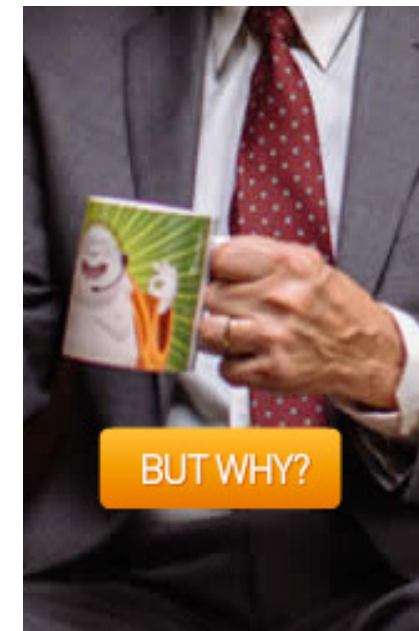
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 [Angelo Basu](#) · 248 weeks ago

"who have to pay for private tutors to teach areas of the curriculum that their 11-year-old children have not covered, but will need if they are to have a fair chance of passing a common entrance exam to join an independent school or the 11-plus exam to enter a grammar school, agree? I doubt it."

I don't believe that it is in any way part of the state primary sector's role to prepare children to sit the CE exam for independent schools!

It did surprise me that some primary schools in areas which have grammar schools do not prepare or provide support for their pupils who wish to sit the 11+ as I can't see any sane justification for a state school not supporting children to enter other state schools within the same education area. This does need to be dealt with, but is only an issue in a proportion of primary schools in the limited number of areas where there is a selective state option.

Reply

Report

[John Moss](#) · 248 weeks ago

If vouchers are good enough for 11-18 year olds, why not for 3-11 year olds?

The "Education Establishment" - The Blob as Chris Woodhead so eloquently called it - an never be ruled my a minister from above. No matter how hard they bash The Blob or how big the stick they hit it with, it just quivers a bit and bounces back.

Death by a million cuts from below, from empowered parents wish cash in their hands, will end the dominance that they crypto-communist anti-learning brigade have enjoyed for 40+ years.

Vouchers for ALL!

Reply

Report

[Rupert Matthews](#) · 248 weeks ago

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Decisions about a child's education should be a matter for the child's parents - not for a government minister, educational expert or local councillor. Every child in different - some may benefit from formal learning, others from play learning and some from a mix of the two. Give power to the parents in the form of vouchers, the ability to top up if they wish and then let them get on with it. The process will take a while to work through the system, but we should end up with education that is responsive to the needs of the users not to the pipedreams of politicians and academics.

Reply

Report

Rupert Butler · 248 weeks ago

"I don't believe that it is in any way part of the state primary sector's role to prepare children to sit the CE exam for independent schools!"

It is the state primary sector's role to teach the more important of the subjects that the CE exam tests. For too many children, not only does it fail to teach to the level of the CE exam but it notoriously fails to teach large numbers of children even to the target levels it has set itself.

Reply

Report

Nick Singer · 248 weeks ago

Whether or not a primary school provides pre 11+ support and guidance for pupils in areas where grammar schools still exist seems to depend to a great extent on the attitude of the school concerned. In Kent, some schools devote a fair amount of time and effort, others avoid anything but the minimum, practice tests the week beforehand.

This (political?) arbitrariness makes a mockery of the aim of grammar schools which was to give opportunity to academically able kids from 'less advantaged' backgrounds. What a tragedy that even the Conservatives have abandoned John Major's(?) ambition for a grammar in every town!

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Reply


Report

 Richard of England · 248 weeks ago

Is this chap a Conservative member?
Seems to get a lot of space on the site
Is he just using Conservative Home as a platform for his campaign?

Reply


Report

 Millian · 248 weeks ago

How exactly is the National Curriculum "politically correct"?

Reply


Report

 Kingbongo · 248 weeks ago

This representation of the Cambridge Review is a travesty and is simply a polemic driven by the amazingly restrictive and deeply depressing view of too many on the right of the nature of learning.
I hope Michael Gove will live up to his promise so this tired old model of preparing kids for factory work can finally face competition from an education model geared more to developing independent critical thinking and engagement with subject material. I'll happily place my academy of knowledge construction up against his grammar school of drill and kill any day of the week. My students will be entrepreneurial thinkers, pragmatic in outlook and flexible in approach. His will need to be told the correct answer and what to do next.

Reply

Report

 Marjorie Baylis · 248 weeks ago

Oh dear, what goes around, comes around. In the seventies education was pretty much left to the teachers (no core curriculum) and the result was too much variation in

standards and a great deal of child centred learning, leaving it until the child was 'mature' enough to learn. So the Tory government decided to take Education back to the centre to impose the same standard nationally. The Labour government have taken this much further, completely lost the knowledge base for children and and want the schools to take on more of a parental role ensuring the children are better socialised. Now we are back to the seventies if these silly people have their way. I do wish that someone could devise some schemes to ensure that most children leave school in a fit state to enter the work place.

Reply

Report



Stephen Elliott · 248 weeks ago

John of England. Perhaps your difficulty arises because Cameron's policy on education differs little from the Blair/Brown policies. The failure to adequately teach numeracy and literacy in primary schools is a problem for all politicians.

Parents are being conditioned to accept self-assessment by teachers as evidence of attainment for their children.

If a primary school adequately teaches the primary curriculum, including the numeracy and literacy elements, it shall have prepared pupils for any test. The test result remains a parent's source of independent objective results of the pupil's learning and the teacher's teaching.

Your motivation for raising concern over the provenance of the contributor suggests an underlying concern within the Conservative Party over its incoherent education policy.

In Northern Ireland, where the Conservative Party hope to gain inroads, the party's abandoning of support for selective education and the 11-plus will not play with the parent voters of the 42% of pupils who attend grammar schools. After imposed deregulation the DENI introduced Incas assessments as part of an annual report. The first set of results issued via parent teacher meetings have been incorrect. The software is not fit for purpose and the errors were detected by parents not the

education authorities.

I, for one, don't really care about the background of contributors so long as they have something useful to contribute. Now John of England what's your story?

Reply

Report

 Richard of England · 248 weeks ago

I'm Richard of England not John

I am the handsome one not the horrible old git.

This guy keeps on harping about education on the the Local government website.

We are heartily bored with him.

Why doesn't he go and play on his own URL

Reply

Report

 Nick Seaton · 248 weeks ago

Note to Richard of England: no-one is forcing you to read it, unlike many parents who are forced to accept what they're given and don't know where to turn.

That said, there are some very sensible comments here.


Genuine accountability is the only serious way forward.

All except the very poor pay taxes. So why don't politicians give all parents their money back in the form of an annual voucher and let them spend it at the state or independent school of their choice? If they are dissatisfied, they take their money elsewhere.

That would remove the bureaucracy, bring genuine competition and make all schools directly accountable to their parents. What could be simpler?

Reply

Report

 Jacqui D · 247 weeks ago

Well said Nick! People do not value what they do not pay for directly. Let the funding

follow the child, with a bit extra for the underprivileged to pay for the extra resources necessary. Public schools are beholden to their fee-paying parents, so why can it not be the same for state schools? Schools would have to deliver or face losing their funding. As you so rightly say, what could be simpler? You just need to persuade Michael Gove to implement it!

Reply

Report



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