

One Nation Recovery Papers

The Future of Education

Flick Drummond MP

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Introduction

As One Nation Conservatives ‘we believe that everyone in our country – whoever and wherever they are from – has an equal right to a fair chance in life, and that bold reforms to welfare and vocational skills are central to tackling social injustice and creating an opportunity society.’

With regards to education overall it is the One Nation Caucus’ solution is to ‘Eradicate illiteracy from the UK for good. A Conservative Government can start by ensuring that no pupil who leaves primary education leaves without competency in reading and writing. By 2030, it should be eradicated that students are leaving primary education illiterate.’

With this in mind and the Government’s agenda of levelling up throughout the country, we believe that education is the key to unlocking Britain’s potential. Education is devolved in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland so this paper focuses on England.

The Challenge

In the UK it is still the case that the poorest and most vulnerable still struggle to reach beyond the most deprived areas that they grow up in. Only 1 in 8 children from low-income backgrounds is likely to become a high-income earner as an adult, and private schools still disproportionately dominate entry into Oxford and Cambridge.

Consecutive governments have tried to tackle the low levels of social mobility across the UK, but challenges remain. It is still the case that opportunities are not open to all to get to where their talents can take them. There is a postcode lottery that, depending on where you are born and educated in the UK, you can be destined for lower life expectancy, poorer quality education, less investment in infrastructure and worse health conditions. This cannot be right in 21st Century Britain.

One of the ways of identifying how well England is doing in the international league tables is taking part in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) organised by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). PISA takes place every 3 years, with 80 countries participating, and assesses the abilities of pupils aged 15 in reading, mathematics and science. Pupils are assessed on their competence to address real-life challenges, and each round of PISA focuses on one of the three main areas – reading in 2018, which was the last testing year.

In PISA 2018, mean scores in England were significantly above the OECD averages in all 3 subjects. The mean scores in reading and science in England have not changed significantly over successive PISA cycles, but in mathematics, England’s overall mean score showed a statistically significant increase compared with PISA 2015. This is good news as it means that the Government’s focus on improving education is being successful.

However, the attainment gap between England’s high and low achieving pupils in 2018 was only similar to the OECD average. If we want to make sure that every young person has the best chance to succeed, we need to look at how to reduce the attainment gap fast, especially given the impact of the coronavirus crisis.

We must ensure that every pupil from a disadvantaged background has the same access to opportunities as their more fortunate classmates. A useful definition for disadvantaged pupils are those on Free School Meals (FSM). At Key Stage 4, those on FSM make up 26.3% of all pupils, around 137,000 pupils (Sutton Trust, Making the Grade) with an average of 15% of those showing higher levels of prior attainment at Key Stage 2.

In her section, Cherilyn discusses Early Years education for children below the age of four. Early Years education has a positive impact on the life chances of disadvantaged children, and yet disadvantaged children spend significantly less time in pre-school than children from more affluent backgrounds. In the second section, Flick looks at whether we need to change the exam system and extend the school day so disadvantaged children and young people can receive a broader education.

We have put forward our thoughts, not all of which will be agreed with by others in the One Nation Caucus, but we hope that it will create greater debate about whether we should look again at some of the long standing aspects of our education system.

Recommendations

- Ensuring that there is a BEd/PGCE specifically for Early Years which includes, not only teaching, but also child brain development, the science of play and skills for spotting issues requiring early intervention.
- More targeted help for families to emphasise the importance of daily interactions with their baby/child.
- Continue pupil premium alongside the £1bn coronavirus package
- Recreate a rigorous teacher training system which gives confidence to teachers and parents
- Promote and properly resource continued professional development, raise the status of teachers through the professional body such as the Chartered College of Teachers.
- Start formal education for pupils aged 6
- Extend the school day to fit in with modern working patterns
- Restructure the school year with variation between different local authorities
- Replace GCSEs with academic, technical exams and apprenticeships at 18
- Review SAT testing at 11
- Incorporate National Citizens Service into Year 10 to Year 13
- Continue to share good practice around the country.
- Take careers into primary schools and improve technology to access careers advice.



1 – Early Years

Cherilyn Mackrory MP

Why is Early Years Foundation the key to all this?

The first five years of a person's life is key to their prospects. It is essential that every child has a good start in life and that means giving families the best support they can possibly receive when their children are young.

Continuing with necessary improvements to Early Years education is crucial for parents, for providers and most importantly of all the children.

The Government committed to spending over £3.6 billion helping families with childcare support a year, providing further free childcare for eligible working parents. These working parents can now receive 30 hours free for 3 and 4 year olds, benefitting nearly 350,000, children as of January 2020. Parents using the full 30 hours could save on average up to £5,000 a year per child.

This investment also means further free childcare for disadvantaged families, which can also receive 15 hours free for a 2 year old; benefitting over 850,000 children already.

This means the Government can deliver tax-free childcare – saving parents up to £2,000 a year.

There are also plans to create a new £1 billion fund for more high quality, affordable childcare round the clock, before school and during the holidays. As a result, the Government says that a record proportion of children are starting Year 1 with a good level of development and that 96 per cent of all Early Years settings are rated Good or Outstanding, up from 68 per cent in 2009/10.

However, Government statistics also show that 28% of 4 and 5 year olds finish their reception year at school without the early communication, language and literacy skills they need to thrive. Indeed, there is still much more to do to achieve true levelling up in this area.

Teacher Training

Importance of Teaching

One school of thought is that the quality of teaching in Early Years is just as important to outcomes as it is in other stages of education. There should be a review of staffing ratios (up or down) and the recruitment and retention of well-trained professionals. The Government must remove barriers to progression for Early Years teachers in order to encourage the recruitment and retention of a skilled early years workforce. The Government has a significant role to play in increasing the status of the Early Years teacher to that of a Primary teacher.

Problems

Problems around recruitment and retention have been widely reported in the sector and are well-known. Nurseries are struggling to retain well-qualified staff, while recent research found that many early years practitioners have left for better-paid jobs with less responsibility such as retail.

There are a lot of challenges of working in the Early Years Sector. Some working in the sector speak of being pushed out of the job they love due to a combination of low pay, low status and increasing workload. Early Years staff have experienced a real terms pay cut of 5% since 2013 and round 44.5%. According to a report by the Low Pay Commission, more than 40% of childcare staff who should be on the national living wage were underpaid in 2018.

Furthermore, the sector is largely reliant on a female workforce. Women are increasingly saying that they cannot stay in the profession whilst supporting their own families. At a time when families are generally reliant on two incomes and there is greater pressure on parents to be in work and many argue that working in the Early Years sector is becoming increasingly financially unviable.

Most Early Years staff have the passion and desire to do a great job and we should thank them all for their commitment to our children. However, they speak of poor pay, a lack of status and a lack of recognition for the job that they do.

A notable comparison can be made with certain Scandinavian countries, where jobs working with babies and small children appear to be highly sought after and most staff are graduates with higher degrees in child psychology. Qualification levels for Early Years workers in the UK remains low in comparison and access to ongoing training is very limited.

It is important that Early Years staff are properly trained to understand the brain development of babies and young children, to work through the science of play as well as possessing some of the same skill set as family social workers or health visitors. Helping to spot issues such as this early in a child's life can be integral to early intervention and therefore helping to improve a child's eventual outcomes.

Solution

One Nation Conservatives must put forward solutions to this in order to support the Early Years workforce and ensure that they are recognised as the highly professional, talented and committed individuals they are. There needs to be a long-term sustainability of the sector, which plays such a crucial role in our society and economy. This includes significant investment from the sector, universities and Government to ensure that the pay, responsibility and status of the Early Years teacher begins to resemble that of the primary school teacher. This is key.

The Department for Education maintains a [full list of qualifications](#) that those working in the Early Years sector must meet in England. Qualification requirements depend on the type of setting and the specific work the person is undertaking. For example, Early Years (reception) teachers in maintained schools need Qualified Teaching Status (QTS), but there may be different requirements for individuals working with younger children in private nurseries. Other examples include early years

teacher status (EYTS) or early years professional status (EYPS). EYPS was replaced by EYTS in 2013. EYTS allows an individual to specialise in working with children up to 5 years old only. A trainee Early Years teacher must have a degree, a Grade C/4 in English, maths and science GCSE (or equivalent) and pass the [professional skills test in numeracy and literacy](#) (though this was replaced from April 2020 with provider-led assurance of new training entrants).

One solution could be a BEd/PGCE, specifically for Early Years with the same entry requirements as Primary, with a similar training bursary and Qualified Teacher Status achieved. It would be beneficial if this course could include much in the way of child psychology and child development as well as the specialist teaching aspects required for smaller children. Whilst it is important that play is at the heart of a child's Early Years experience, teachers have a duty to ensure our children are also developing socially and are ready for primary school.

Careers advisers should include Early Years teaching as an option for all who wish to teach, therefore promoting this profession to be as desirable an option for school leavers as becoming a primary school teacher. These professionals are some of our most important teachers and their responsibility is great. Potentially, each Early Years setting could have at least one Early Years Teacher with this improved level of qualification. To do this could lead to a greater number of children per ratio, with a number of lesser qualified assistants in attendance.

Importance of Home Learning Environment

The Home Learning Environment (HLE) is an important factor in the development of early speech, language and communication. This not only impacts on a child's development in the Early Years but can persist until their GCSEs and A-Levels.

The HLE is related to child emotional and social development in the Early Years and the benefits continue until age 16 and beyond. The quality of the HLE is as important to intellectual and cognitive development as parental factors, such as education and occupation, suggesting that what parents do with their child is just as important as who they are.

As early as 2-3 years, the HLE is predictive of verbal ability and effective in differentiating both over and under achieving groups from children achieving at the level expected for their age 10.

It is important to highlight that whilst focusing on the HLE is critical for all children, a significant percentage of children and young people will have persistent and long-term speech, communication and language needs and will require access to specialist help, including speech and language therapy.

A good quality HLE can moderate the impact of socioeconomic background on cognitive skills and socioemotional difficulties.

Problems

Self-reported parental engagement in home learning activities has increased within the last generation for all social groups. However, studies do continue to show that a number of income-related inequalities nevertheless persist.

Low-income children often have language skills that are below the age-related expectations at the time they enter reception – putting them at an educational disadvantage from the start.

Enriching home learning activities are consistently associated with family income and parental education. In particular, middle and upper-income children are more likely to be read to daily and go on educational outings in comparison with their low-income peers.

Middle and upper-income children are also more likely to experience 'language rich' home learning environments involving frequent parent to child conversations that reflect the child's personal interests.

Various barriers exist with regards to the HLE including Capability, Opportunity, and Motivational Barriers (listed below).

Capability Barriers

- Lack of awareness among some parents around why it is important to communicate with your baby and how best to go about it – this is regardless of income. Most parents believe that they do enough play and learning with their child.
- A lack of understanding of early development and the activities that can support it. For example, talking to babies from birth, bi-directional speech, importance of contingent, shared reading, and guided play.
- Qualitative research indicates that, although some types of activities can suffer from parental embarrassment or concerns about skills, such as singing or reading, for some parents a barrier may be not appreciating the types of communication activities that are relevant at different stages of a child development.
- Parents may have low literacy skills themselves and those with poor literacy skills are more likely to have lower incomes or live in more deprived communities.
- Some parents do not see a need or gap in skills and do not proactively seek information or assistance. The experiences of early parenting differ according to social grade: there is a need to ensure that information, activities and support are accessible to parents from all income groups, but particularly to those on the lowest of incomes.

How to overcome these barriers

- Integrating simple messages about the ease and importance of chat, play and reading on everyday products and services around daily routines where parent child interaction takes place such as mealtimes, bath time, bus journeys, play parks, bedtime.
- Embedding nudges in places and spaces parents spend time such as supermarkets, shopping centres, buses, workplaces. Also, by channels they already access and media they

consume such as print social and broadcast. Examples of good practice include the Government's [Hungry Little Minds](#) campaign and the BBC's [Tiny Happy People](#).

Opportunity Barriers

- Families with limited financial resources are restricted in the provision of age-appropriate books and toys, and family days out.
- The physical environment can also be a barrier to both inside and outside activities. Limitations such as living in cramped conditions can restrict a variety of one-to-one engagement activities.
- Living in areas with poor housing and anti-social behaviour can make it difficult to go outside to access stimulating child-friendly activities such as going to the local park.
- Lack of time or importance placed on parent to child interactions compared to other commitments such as work or other children.
- Parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds have been found to be less likely to access enrichment opportunities in their child's first year of life, particularly those types of activities intended to improve parent child interaction and communication.

How to overcome these barriers

- Again, integrating messages and prompts into everyday routines such as bus journeys or trips to the shop can address parents lack of time.
- A lack of resources can be addressed by distribution of free resources through commercial partner channels such as with a popular magazine or the purchase of a child targeted product, and the distribution of free resources via existing media channels.
- By targeting interventions and campaign activity in poorer communities we will increase the support for parents using both the existing workforces already interacting with families, and volunteer to deliver and support prompts, messages, resources and opportunities such as play sessions.

Motivational Barriers

- Some parents are unaware of the benefits of early literacy, so it is not a priority for them.
- Parents' motivations to engage with their child and beliefs about their capability may also be limited by aspects of their environmental context which may leave parents feeling stressed, unhappy, anxious and emotionally drained. Often this is because they are consumed by other concerns, particularly in relation to finances and related issues such as housing.
- Parenting is typically influenced by communities and networks. Those on low incomes are often vulnerable, isolated, young and single – typically without a network of support or without positive role models.
- In some cases, parents may not have been played with or talked to when they were children, meaning they are without a suitable parenting role model to emulate. This links back to barriers associated with capabilities.

- Social influences within communities can also impact on motivations – For example if people around the family lack jobs and aspirations, this can limit a parent’s perception of the benefits of education.
- Parents across the income-spectrum rely heavily on their mobile phones. Social media can provide an online network of support, but the information may not always be helpful and risks playing into a parent’s beliefs about their capabilities in a negative way.
- Children’s happiness, rather than academic attainment, may be a more immediate motivator for these parents.
- Dislike of reading and other educational activities may inhibit action. A survey of families from C2DE backgrounds for the National Year of Reading campaign (2008) found that books were associated with hard work in school, and to an extent were viewed as antisocial as reading was an “individual activity in the main” while families preferred to “relax and share their leisure time as a unit”.
- Lack of confidence in their own literacy skills or fear of embarrassment.
- Often, some parents decrease the number of home learning activities once the child starts a funded childcare place, believing that their child has become more independent after starting childcare or that is it’s the childcare setting’s role to provide these activities.
- Although difficult to find the literature, consultations or research to develop and assess, the campaign may present an opportunity to explore whether families from different cultural backgrounds hold diverse views about the role of parents as their child’s primary educator.

How to overcome these barriers

- Using ‘celebrity’ parents that have a similar background to influence and motivate those families, using targeted media to share the message of chat, read, play and its importance.
- Focusing strongly on play and positive messages for families who may be less motivated by an attainment message.
- Use both celebrities and local champions to role model and normalise behaviours in the community.
- Working with partners to role model positive behaviours in everyday situations such as frontline retail staff supporting parent/child communication.

Recommendations

- 1) Ensuring that there is a BEd/PGCE specifically for Early Years which includes, not only teaching, but also child brain development, the science of play and skills for spotting issues requiring early intervention.
- 2) More targeted help for families to emphasise the importance of daily interactions with their baby/child.



2 - Primary, secondary and sixth form education

Flick Drummond MP

Covid-19's impact on Education

Covid-19 has had a big impact on education especially for those who may not have access to online learning and parental support. The Education Endowment Foundation's report on the 'Impact of Schools closures on the attainment gap: Rapid Evidence Assessment June 2020' found that even if the 'strong possible mitigatory steps are put in place' school closures during the pandemic will have widened the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their peers probably reversing the progress made since 2011.¹

The Sutton Trust survey found that 47% of middle-class parents felt confident home-schooling their children compared to 37% of working-class parents. Many parents have had to juggle jobs as well as childcare during the pandemic and lack of internet broadband and computers, particularly in disadvantaged families, will have had an effect on children's learning throughout the 6 months. Most teachers have worked extremely hard in difficult circumstances but contact time with pupils is reported to have varied throughout the country.

The £1 billion coronavirus package, including £350 million for the National Tutoring Programme (NTP), will provide access to subsidised high-quality tuition to help deliver mentoring for the most disadvantaged pupils. While this will provide them with intensive support, this must come from qualified teachers to ensure that it is well delivered. This is a good opportunity to attract back retired teachers especially those that have recently left.

The existing £14 billion given to schools over the next 3 years will also help with many of the effective strategies put in place to help disadvantaged pupils catch up after Covid-19.

Where the pupil premium has been strategically targeted, it has already made a huge impact on the outcomes of disadvantaged children. The pupil premium should continue alongside the extra money for Covid-19 as it allows schools to focus well directed interventions at those pupils who need them.²

That said, while pupil premium money is excellent where it is used to help raise attainment throughout the school, not all pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds need extra support. Schools should therefore be allowed to use it to promote overall standards where appropriate.

Teaching and leadership

Teaching and leadership are crucial for a good education system. Good leadership by a headteacher can turn around any school regardless of the structure or type of school.

¹ Education Endowment Foundation, Report, [12.06.20](#)

² Education Endowment Foundation, Guidance, [link](#)

After parents, teachers have the biggest impact on the life chances of children. Everyone can remember a good teacher and the not so helpful ones. Many young people are turned on to a subject by an inspirational teacher or drop subjects because of a teacher, which can have a big impact on their future.

“Evidence suggests the quality of teaching is the most important lever schools have to improve outcomes for poorer pupils and that high-quality professional development for teachers has a greater effect on pupil’s attainment than other interventions schools may consider” – Education Policy Institute, 2020.

However, 53% of teachers would not recommend teaching as a career, 61% of the public think that teachers are valued less but 78% agree that we need to do more to recognise the work of teachers.³

Therefore, it is vital that we have excellent teacher training colleges to train every teacher and have the best professional continual development with time and resources to put this into place throughout their career. There are now several ways of entering the teaching profession directly and we seemed to have moved away from specialised teacher training colleges with rigorous programmes covering pedagogy, child development alongside other skills. We should be moving back to a training system which gives confidence to teachers and parents.

Continued professional development

Since raising attainment is all about good quality teaching, it is paramount that teachers continue their own professional development throughout their career. Other professions such as doctors and lawyers have professional colleges to maintain standards, often with continued training throughout their careers. It should be no different for teachers and the Chartered College of Teaching set up in 2017 is a welcome resource and (in their own words) ‘should be promoted further to raise the status of the teaching profession and improve the quality of education for all children and young people across the UK. By raising the status of teaching as a profession, we aim to create a world where highly skilled, passionate and competent people become the visionary and inspiring teachers of the future.’

Professional development can only be achieved by allowing teachers time off to pursue their studies. At present, there is an entitlement of less than 35 hr of professional development a year which is often not taken up because of the financial impact on schools especially smaller schools.

The EPI report for the Wellcome Trust on the cost-benefit of professional development states that it ‘has the potential to close most of the gap between the effectiveness of novice and experienced teachers’ and has nearly the same impact on teaching as an experienced teacher with a decade’s experience. One-to-one tutoring is also effective but costly, but overall it is clear that professional development is effective in improving teaching. The courses have to be well directed to increase

³ Chartered College of Teaching, [link](#)

teacher's subject knowledge but also confidence and self-efficacy to keep them in the school or the profession.⁴

91% of teachers in primary and 82% in secondary schools said that professional development had a positive impact on their teaching practice but all teachers surveyed said they were open to improvement and further learning.

Retention is a big concern, with the latest statistics showing that:⁵

'of the teachers who qualified in 2018, 85.4% are still in service one year after qualification. This retention rate is slightly higher than the previous year when the one-year retention rate was 85.1%. In general, one-year retention rates have declined slightly in each year since 2011, with this year being the first increase. Of the teachers who qualified in 2014, 67.4% are still in service after 5 years. This is lower than the five-year retention rate seen in the previous year, when the figure was 68.0%.'

This is especially a problem in subjects such as maths and physics where there is a shortage of teaching – it costs a school £12,000 each time a teacher leaves with the cost of recruitment and training of new teachers. Teaching is a hard job, it is long hours and difficult especially in challenging schools. Therefore, initial training and continued support and development are important to retain valuable staff.

This indicates that professional development must be carefully targeted, well designed and rigorous; another reason for having a well-respected College of Teaching looking after the registration and needs of teachers.

There should also be a College for leaders of schools. Headteachers learn how to manage a school during their career as a teacher. There is a programme for leadership in schools but no college or qualification. The same applies to Governors. Governors have a huge and vital leadership role in schools and there is access to training but it is not compulsory. It is a time consuming and unpaid role but invaluable as it brings an outside influence into the school which is helpful. The National Governance Association is an excellent resource and would be a good start to providing formalised training and certification for governors.

When should children start Primary School?

Primary school in England starts in the September after a child's 4th birthday. Some children are school ready and some are not depending on the background of a child and what nursery provision they have been attending.

Most education systems in other countries start after 5 and some as late as 6 or 7. For instance, in some of the top performing PISA countries such as Finland, Singapore and Shanghai children do not start formal schooling until 7. They concentrate on social and cognitive skills and learning

⁴ EPI, Report, February 2020, [link](#)

⁵ DfE, Statistics, [04.09.20](#)

routines in a more relaxed setting although they are learning informally through play. In some disadvantaged areas, the majority of pupils in England are not school ready at 4 despite having been to nurseries and although YR is considered part of the Early Years Foundation Stage, perhaps a later start of formal schooling and an extension of the Early Years curriculum to the age of 6 would be more appropriate.

The new focus on Mastery throughout the National Curriculum is welcomed as is the Government's focus on helping every child with extra help to master each subject. Every child's intelligence and talent develop at different rates throughout their school life so we should either be more supportive during the year and keep them motivated when they are struggling or allow more flexibility in year groups.

A longer school day

Primary school and secondary schools finish between 3.00pm and 3.30pm. Most schools have some provision for after school clubs but many children go home or to a childminder. Older children may be at home alone at the same time school buildings are largely empty. This is out of sync with our present working patterns and a waste of capital resources with empty school buildings.

The school day should be extended to fit in with parents' work. 72% of parents now work with 45% of those in full time work.⁶

Wrap around school childcare can be expensive for parents. After school clubs depend on pupils being transported to different venues.

If the school day was extended, it would give the opportunity for schools to include more enrichment opportunities including, but not limited to, subjects such as sport, music, drama, art, computer skills and cooking. This would particularly benefit children from disadvantaged backgrounds as they would have access to more opportunities to learn about further subject outside the national curriculum. The Education Endowment Foundation has produced evidence which indicates that pupils make two additional month's progress per year from extended school time, and three months for disadvantaged children. It also shows in other ways such as increased attendance at school, improved behaviours and better relationships with peers. It would enable there to be more time during the school day to do targeted learning for those falling behind as well as allowing pupils to excel in areas at school amongst their peers when usually they would have to do this outside. It would give time for more able pupils to do extended work with others or provide independent learning opportunities outside the classroom.

In Canada, high schools provide a wide range of extra-curricula activities, many of which have been set up and run by pupils giving them responsibility but also an incentive not to leave education and at the same time learning leadership qualities. This is particularly helpful to those pupils who may not be shining in academia but are excelling in other areas.

⁶ ONS, 'Families and the Labour Market, England', [26.09.17](#)

Research from the Sutton Trust 'Subject to Background – What promotes better achievement for bright but disadvantaged students' March 2015, shows that both academic and other enrichment activities 'provides a significant boost in attainment for children at the age of 11 and help to counteract disadvantage' and it also means that they go on to achieving significantly better GCSE results, A levels and more likely to attend top universities.

A longer day would mean teachers could be given time during the day for planning and marking while their pupils are being looked after by specialist teachers. This is particularly important in primary schools where teachers are generally responsible for a whole class all day. It means that primary school pupils will get specialised teachers in subjects such as art, music, sport and ICT allowing primary school teachers time to do marking and preparation during the school day or continued professional development.

It would also allow for more breaks during the school day and a more relaxed timetable, education is not so rushed.

Pupils would have more informal play time and social development opportunities. Pupils would have time to do their homework during the school day or be involved in topics and projects that enrich their learning. There have been many successful initiatives with one-to-one or small group teaching for those pupils who are falling behind and a longer school day would allow this rather than pupils missing class teaching or having to stay after school. One-to-one will have to be provided for pupils who have fallen behind without taking them out of valuable classroom time.

The extended school day 9-5pm should start at Year 4 for the rest of their time in school. The extended school day should only be used for enrichment rather than extending the academic day. This would lead to a wider well-rounded educated population with pupils being happier in school particular if they have a role in initiating and running some of the enrichment programmes. It would help with the cost of outside activities for everyone. Less well-off parents would not feel so guilty about not providing the same opportunities as other children.

There is, of course, a cost implication in having specialised teachers in primary schools and asking specialist teachers in secondary schools to provide further classes or bringing in further teachers or providers. At present, UK public spending on education at 4.3% of GDP is 12th out of 34 OECD countries and is around average. In England, public spending on schools is £42bn or 14% of public spending. We need a public discussion on whether we want to put money into schools to improve the life chances of young people or look at other ways of funding extra-curricular activities within schools. There are two potential ways of filling this gap, either the government spends more money (and surely the long-term impact on the economy makes it worth) or we ask parents to help contribute. Most parents who are working are spending money on wrap-around childcare so they may be happy to pay a contribution towards extra activities bearing in mind that pupils on FSM would have to be subsidised. If we look at money spent post-school on mental health of young people, the justice system of those alienated from society and the overall education and physical health, it may be worth money being put upfront in schools to help future well-being.

The school year

The present school year is based on the old agricultural system and this may be an opportunity to review it, especially after Covid-19. Summer holiday travel is expensive for parents and some take their children out of school preferring to pay a fine rather than the expensive cost of a summer holiday. Others cannot take the time off during summer holidays so need one during the school year. The long summer holiday also means that disadvantaged children fall behind.

It would be better to restructure the school year and have more holidays spaced through the year so not all families have to take expensive holidays at the same time. Local authorities in regions could work together so that schools take different holiday dates.

Most teachers work during their holidays on planning but if we have a longer school day and different structure to the day, it should benefit teachers too.

Do we still need GCSEs?

There is an argument that GCSEs act as a gatekeeper to post-16 education routes and success in the job market⁷ but we now ask every young person to stay in some form of education or training until 18 so there is no longer a reason for having exams at 16. We should adopt a similar system to the Baccalaureate at 18 but our own British version.

The Good Childhood Report August 2020 from the Children's Society which looks at the happiness and mental health of 15 year olds has seen 'a notable increase in the proportion of children with low well-being, 18% of children had low well-being compared to around 11-13% in previous years'. England ranks 36th out of 45 countries in Europe and North America. The report shows a sustained dip in happiness with school and there is strong evidence that 'fear of failure in 15 year olds is intrinsically linked to education'.

The English Baccalaureate (EBacc) which was established in 2011 as a measure to increase the subjects that pupils take at GCSEs is seen as essential for many degrees and 'open up lots of doors'.⁸ Research shows that a pupil's socio-economic background impacts the subjects they choose at GCSE and this determines their opportunities beyond school. Pupils are just 14 when they choose their subjects, so why do we not abandon GCSEs and continue the breadth of education until 18. Why are we putting 15-16 year olds through important exams when they are at one of the toughest periods of their childhood at a crucial time for personal and mental development. Taking away the pressure of exams at this age enables pupils to mature and make decisions at 15 (rather than choosing subjects at 14) towards whether they want to go forward to studying for A levels, T Levels or for an apprenticeship. White working class boys are significantly underperforming, the Children's Society report states that 'more boys have been unhappy with school in recent years than

⁷ The Sutton Trust, Report, [05.12.19](#)

⁸ DfE, Guidance, [20.08.19](#)

with any other measure' (although this is not reported via ethnicity). Giving boys longer to mature and find a sense of purpose through education which is relevant to them can only be a good thing.

The Sutton Trust Report on Making the Grade states that the reform of GCSEs in 2017 has widened the attainment gap in the 2018 results between pupils coming from affluent backgrounds and those from poorer families. That said, it really needs to embed in further if we are to assess the long term impact.

In 2018, 40% of disadvantaged pupils did not get the pass mark of a Grade 4 in English, and 48.8% in Maths (Sutton Trust Making the Grade) – 16.6% of the same group did not achieve a Grade 3 in Maths. Since 2015, it has been compulsory to re-sit Maths and English as part of post-16 study programme if you have not achieved a Grade 3 pass in Maths or Grade 4 pass in English. If you have achieved a Grade 3 and will be studying part time, you can take a functional skills qualification instead of a GCSE. It is not surprising pupils are feeling a failure and disengaged from school if they have to take exams again and again.

A Baccalaureate-type of education qualification could be either academic or vocational or an apprenticeship depending on what subjects within the Baccalaureate, pupils wish to study. It would include English and Maths but means that these exams could be geared towards the type of individual course that pupils are taking, for example, practical maths for T levels.

As the Rt Hon David Evennett MP mentions in his contribution to the One Nation Conservative paper 'The Overlooked Underachievers', and others have done, in some households there is a lack of family belief in education particularly amongst white working class families. If the education syllabus made more sense by a final exam whether it was an A level, T level or apprenticeships or a Baccalaureate, it would stop that element of failure at 16 when GCSEs are not passed. An exam at the end of the school career would make more sense as pupils steadily work towards their choices without interruption. Pupils are more likely to feel a sense of achievement if they have been focused on subjects that interest them by 18 and are more likely to be engaged in education. Pupils would have the maturity and interest if they see the relevance of English and Maths to their future career. The success of the Army at AFC Harrogate shows that it is possible to turn young people without any qualifications into passing Maths, English and IT. Small classes, one to one tutoring alongside treating them like adults with practical courses that are more relevant to why they are learning skills is important to engage those disaffected young people.

Much of the formal education for GCSEs finishes by the Easter holiday in March/April so that pupils can concentrate on revision. If GCSE were abolished, education could continue for another 4 months.

Applications to university should also be post results at 18.

Following Covid-19 and the threat of unemployment for 18-24 year olds, it is even more important that our young people are equipped with the strong skills, both academic and vocational, to thrive in the job market.

Do we need SATs?

SATS are a good indicator of progress but should there be more flexibility? At present they are largely used as an accountability measure for schools. We have Ofsted for evaluating schools. As mentioned above, the focus on Mastery of subjects is much welcomed but rather than having SATS, surely it would be better to evaluate a pupil's progress rather than national testing at 11. Similar to GCSEs, time spent preparing for SATS could be better used for teaching subjects in depth. Testing is good but should be designed as a tool for feedback to individual teachers and schools rather than being used to monitor and penalise schools. Local authorities, MATs and Ofsted could monitor this over time but it would leave it up to the schools to determine how to use the data rather than making it public. Children develop at different rates throughout their school career so tests and coursework can be used to monitor how the individual is performing.

If testing was more relaxed, teaching could be more wide ranging depending on the class interest or local area within the national curriculum.

National Citizens Service

After exams in June for GCSE, one in six take part in the National Citizens Service. NCS should be available for every pupil and should be incorporated into the curriculum from Year 10 – this would be easier with a longer day. NCS already covers areas such as citizenship, volunteering, financial capabilities and could be extended. The residential trip could continue to take place in Year 11, and not necessarily limited to taking place in the summer but could be at any time during the year, and a graduate scheme could continue through sixth form.

Sharing good practice around the country

Every child is an individual and should be supported to reach their potential through additional teaching and tutoring regardless of background. Sharing good practice is key to local improvement. The London Challenge has been very successful in raising attainment of every child and disadvantaged pupils there now perform the same as the average age pupil nationally showing that there are no excuses to hold pupils back.

There is a regional gap and the Government announced its Social Mobility Action Plan in December 2017 which outlines many of the issues affecting schools. If London can reduce the attainment gap through all partnerships working together, this can be replicated elsewhere but in a way that is relevant to the local area. Although there are now different systems with local authorities and multi-academy trusts, they should all work together for the benefit of the community to educate the local population.

London's education transformation since 2002 has meant that the borough of Hackney has gone from having some of the worst performing schools to some of the best. There was a culture of low expectation but also none of the secondary schools had a sixth form. They now all have sixth forms and secondary schools are over-subscribed, with their results amongst the best. In Hackney's case, the creation of the Learning Trust taking control away from the failing LEA was instrumental in its success. In other areas in the country, academisation has been transformational in improving

schools where LEAs are weak. One of the biggest achievements in Hackney was to bring the community along with them by asking parents what they wanted from their education system. The Building Schools for the Future fund enabled every school to be improved and made pupils proud of the buildings. All local schools worked closely together and were mixed, non-denominational and had the same intake. The Hackney Learning Trust is now run by the LEA again but at arms length, but LEA schools are dependent on local political leadership and the quality of officers.

Schools should be part of the local community and encouraging of parents who have been disengaged as it is the whole community that brings up the child.

The National Careers Service

One of the ways that that the community can become involved is through helping with careers advice.

The Careers and Enterprise Company is the strategic coordinating function for employers, schools, colleges, funders and providers but the network needs to be extended to all schools fast. By the end of 2020 it is expected that all schools and colleges will have access to an Enterprise Adviser. It would be helpful to have greater use of technology developed to inspire young people. In many schools there is nothing inspiring for young people at present and often advice is based on a chat with the careers teacher. The Government careers strategy is an important part of the place to make Britain fairer, improve social mobility and offer opportunities for everyone. Breaking down barriers to opportunities that pupils had not considered is crucial to ending the cycle of disadvantage and can transform outcomes. It is good that careers advice starts at Year 8 but knowledge of all the different possible careers should start in primary school before pupils, parents and teachers start getting fixed ideas rather than open minds to the possibilities. By bringing in local businesses, inspirational people, and people from the community who pupils can relate to, students will be open to a wider range of possibilities for future careers.

Conclusion

Everyone has some knowledge of education and has views on what it should look like as we have all been to school. Covid-19 has given us the opportunity to relook at other possibilities especially when it comes to ways of teaching and exams. We have not talked about structures of schools, we believe that all schools can excel as a good education is about excellent leadership and teaching rather than the setting, this has been proved in London as well as around the country. The fact that so many people leave teaching means that we have to look at how to support teachers to stay in the career that they had chosen, the recently established Chartered College of Teachers should give them that profession recognition. Society has changed with more parents than ever working so we need to look at ways of using our schools to support them. Lastly, mental health of our young people is an increasing concern, if we made school more fun and relevant to them with a wide range of experiences and interest, that would surely lead to a happier and more inclusive community.

Recommendations

- 3) Continue pupil premium alongside the £1bn coronavirus package
- 4) Recreate a rigorous teacher training system which gives confidence to teachers and parents
- 5) Promote and properly resource continued professional development, raise the status of teachers through the professional body such as the Chartered College of Teachers.
- 6) Start formal education for pupils aged 6
- 7) Extend the school day to fit in with modern working patterns
- 8) Restructure the school year with variation between different local authorities
- 9) Replace GCSEs with academic, technical exams and apprenticeships at 18
- 10) Review SAT testing at 11
- 11) Incorporate National Citizens Service into Year 10 to Year 13
- 12) Continue to share good practice around the country.
- 13) Take careers into primary schools and improve technology to access careers advice.