

THE  
EBOR  
LECTURES



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*Schools for One Nation*



## Schools for One Nation

I think I may be the only lecturer this year not to practice any particular faith.

I was brought up in a fairly militantly atheistic home. My father wouldn't even let me join the Brownies because it would have involved pledging allegiance to God and the Queen.

Instead I went to something called the Socialist Fellowship, which wasn't nearly as grim as it sounds.

It involved interesting trips to places with resonance in the history of the Labour movement like Tolpuddle for example.

If there was a force that generated a type of religious fervor in our house, it was politics and the Labour Party in particular.

I still cling to the belief that politics *can* change society and make the world a better place, though I accept that the wider public has grown weary and cynical.

And over time I have become more interested in how other institutions and individuals; social enterprises, charities, campaigners and faith organisations, can effect change.

As a parent, governor and journalist writing about education I spend much of *my* time thinking about the role education can play in creating the sort of society *many* of us want to see whether we are believers or not.

How government can create the climate for that.

And how schools can influence, shape, reflect and sustain their local communities.

Before coming here tonight, I read the recent Church of England Bishops pre-election letter to its members ["Who is My Neighbour"](#).

It talks of:

"The deep contradiction in society which celebrates equality but treats the poor and vulnerable as unwanted, unvalued and unnoticed.

It highlights our "unhealthy focus on personal consumption, " and the risks of social Darwinism.

It points out the need to create strong social bonds, reciprocity, trust in society.

And it challenges the politicians to understand how faith can enhance the common good.

I would agree with all that.

But schools can also strengthen those powerful social bonds of which the Bishops speak.



They can fuel a fairer more cohesive society

Or they can become exclusive places that exacerbate division, breed ignorance, resentment and inequality

My interest is unashamedly in how we create the former, which I would consider to be the schools for one nation

I believe many of us in this room, whether we are of a faith or not, believe in those principles of fairness and opportunity for all.

So my talk tonight will explore

**Do we have schools fit for “one nation” philosophy?**

**If not why not**

**And what can we do about it.**

## One Nation

This is a phrase that is currently back in vogue, and also misused

Googling the history of One Nation online I discovered amongst other things that it is a shopping mall in Paris and a far right party in Australia.

We know it to be the dominant philosophy of the Conservative Party from the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards.

A philosophy that arose from the concerns expressed by Benjamin Disraeli, in his novel Sybil - A tale of two nations.

Written almost two decades before he became Prime Minister, it explored the divisive state of Britain in the 1840s, known as the hungry 40s, and the inequalities that sprang from industrialization.

Perhaps the most famous passage is when the leading character Charles Egremont is told by the working class radical Walter Gerard, father of Sybil

“Two nations; between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other’s habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding, are fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws.”

Egremont replies “ THE RICH AND THE POOR.”

Disraeli’s view that society needed to be less divisive evolved into the pragmatic, organic paternalistic One Nation conservatism that prevailed for much of the subsequent century.

The more radical and aggressively pro individual culture of the 1980s, epitomized by Margaret



Thatcher's slightly misquoted phrase "there is no such thing as society", did change the political weather.

But since then we have seen our politics struggle between competing visions.

On the one had the common good with a clearly defined role for the state. On the other championing of individual choice and market solutions.

The rhetoric surrounding Prime Minister David Cameron's Compassionate Conservatism, the Big Society, and the appropriation of the term One Nation by Labour leader Ed Miliband, suggests a cross party desire to reconcile personal autonomy, responsibility and self help with the greater good.

This has been a tussle at the heart of education policy too.

There have been conflicting views about how to best to give parents choice.

How to allow schools autonomy while seeking to narrow the gaps in attainment between rich and poor children.

When I went to look at my own rather battered 30-year-old copy of Sybil, I found it had an introduction written by RAB Butler, a One Nation Conservative who was also the architect of our modern system of free state education.

He wrote: "There is still wealth and poverty in Britain but fortunately the social and economic gaps between the rich and the poor have lessened considerably"

It is true that people don't live in the grinding poverty and insanitary conditions of the 1840s.

We no longer send children down the mines or up chimneys.

And the standard of living for most people in society has risen

But we still have a deeply unequal society. Those inequalities start very young and in spite of 70 years of reform since the Butler act, they still stubbornly refuse to disappear.

Latest research suggests a 19-month gap in cognitive development between the best and worst off children when they start school

The Social mobility and Child poverty commission estimates 2 in 3 children eligible for free school meals are not "school ready" at 5.

Children who grow up in the poorest families face a higher risk of multiple deprivations later in life

This means they are more likely to suffer poor mental health, depression, low qualifications, low waged work, or no work at all, life in poor housing.

In spite of all the recent education initiatives the gap in GCSE scores between the children eligible for FSM and those who are not is just over 27%.

It has gone up this year as certain qualifications were knocked out of the performance tables reflecting also our failure to get to grips with the meaning of good vocational and practical education.



2015 started with just over 13% of 16-24 year olds not in education employment or training – that is almost a million young people

It is a waste of talent, unfair, certainly doesn't depict one nation

And we all pay a price. As Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett's work in [The Spirit Level](#) shows wealthy but unequal countries tend to have poorer outcomes overall for their citizens

It is unrealistic to suggest that schools alone can resolve these inequalities

The roots of many of these problems lie outside schools in dysfunctional families, poor housing, lack of adequate mental health provision, poverty and income inequality. Too much for a 50 minute lecture.

And there is no doubt that investment in the early years is vital if we are going to successfully narrow the gaps in attainment later on.

The [EPPE and EPPSE](#) studies at Oxford University, have been following three thousand children from pre-school through secondary school from the mid 1990s until the present day.

Their evidence repeatedly shows the positive impact of good pre school education, a strong home learning environment and support for parents shows clearly how the benefit of good pre school education.

But alone that is not enough, so I am going to try and focus on the things our schools could and should be doing if we want them to play a part in a more cohesive society .

### The Hierachy

Start by telling you about a speech I made at one of our prominent public schools a few years ago.

It was on the state private divide.

At the end a young man in the front row – a sixth former at one of the country's most socially and academically elite institutions - stood up and asked why the divide mattered. "Surely we need people to sweep the streets." He said.

That is not an apocryphal story and the head teacher did apologise on behalf of the school afterwards.

A few months later Channel Four broadcast a programme called Rich Kid Poor Kid depicting the lives of two girls who lived on the same street.

The private school pupil was frank with her views. She felt superior to her state school educated neighbours, who were mostly chavs because they lived in council houses.

She had absolutely no connection with them, apart from when, as she put it, 'they are stealing our bikes'



There was a similar lack of empathy or understanding on the part of the other child.

I used these two examples in a speech I made at the Cambridge Union shortly afterwards.

One of the very pleasant young officers of the Union told me apologetically that his London independent day school instructed pupils to use a different tube station to the one used by the local state school.

So even though we don't send children up chimneys or down mines it is possible that they can be educated in the school equivalent what Disraeli described as different planets.

The Butler Act did open up the entitlement to a free education for all.

But it also established a rigid hierarchy, not just by saving the private schools but also by establishing the tripartite system of grammars, technical and secondary modern schools.

This was a structure in which people openly talked about gold, silver and metal children in justification of the 11 plus divide.

No one would dream of talking in those terms now

But more recent reform - 25 years of choice, diversity and competition - mean that we now have ever more subtle and insidious ways to "sort" children into different schools according to class, faith and ethnic background.

Researchers like Stephen Gorard at Durham University have charted the increase in social segregation between schools in areas where diversity of school type is more pronounced.

The hierarchy is now, in the words of the former London Schools Commissioner Sir Tim Brighouse, "dizzily steep" and militates against inclusion and social cohesion.

At the top of the pyramid we have schools that cost around £12,000 a year for a day place and £27,000 a year for a boarding place, educating virtually no children eligible for FSM or the pupil premium.

In spite of all the talk of means tested bursaries only around 1% of pupils get full fee reduction.

Bursaries are mostly awarded following an academic test, in itself discriminatory given pre school gaps to which I alluded earlier.

The Daily Mail carried a [story](#) a few months ago about a single mother from West London who spend almost £7,000 in four months on private tuition to make sure her son won a place at a coveted prep school.

He was reading classic novels by the age of four, speaking French, Romanian and Italian at seven while also learning the piano and violin.

"If that makes me a Tiger Mother then so be it. Yes, it's a lot of money but please put that in perspective too..."

That perspective is clear if you read The Sutton Trust's report on "The Educational Backgrounds of the

Nation's Leading People" – these are the 8000 people who appeared in the birthday lists of the daily and Sunday papers in 2011.

44% of the Leading People had been to independent schools, which educate seven per cent of the population

Ten prominent public schools produced 12% of these "leading people".

The blunt truth is that our school system lavishes advantage on the already privileged. It entrenches inequality and means that real social mobility is a distant dream.

The young man from that school to which I referred is as likely to end up sweeping the streets than I am to fly to the moon

And it is not just the grand public schools that contribute to this divide.

The grammar schools are also fuelled by a private tuition industry that can cost thousands.

They educate far fewer children on free school meals, from ethnic minority backgrounds or with special needs than their local communities

As HMCI [Sir Michael Wilshaw](#) said they are "stuffed full of middle class kids"

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These schools skew the intakes of other schools around them

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They brand thousands of children failures at the age of 10 or 11 with a knock on effect for their personal aspiration and motivation.

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They reduce choice for many parents.

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And they widen rather than narrow gaps. The gaps in attainment between rich and poor children in many selective areas is often much greater than in non selective neighbouring counties.

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Then there is the covert selection in the non-selective sector.

A substantial body of evidence from within the DFE, and from organisations like the [Sutton Trust](#) and the [British Humanist Association](#) shows clearly that the highest performing non-selective schools also take relatively few disadvantaged pupils.

There are various reasons for this

Often they have ingeniously complex admissions arrangements.

Banding schemes ostensibly to create a more balanced range of ability but when run independently can be used to manipulate the intake.

Cleverly drawn catchment areas.

Admission determined by points for faith, home address, aptitude in singing, dancing or playing



the piano.

A recent report from the [Children's Commission on Poverty](#) described the "hidden costs of state schools."

These included expensive uniforms, pricey school trips, and expectations that children will have their own personal computers.

All also subtly used to encourage a form of self-selection amongst parents

Only last week [the London comprehensive school](#) to which the former Education Secretary Michael Gove, and the Prime Minister, are sending their daughters was exposed for having asked parents to send a cheque to the school for £96 along with their letter of acceptance.

During a particularly fierce argument on this subject I challenged the head of one prominent and highly successful London school about these practices.

Her reply was blunt: "If you expect us to work in a market then don't blame us if we use the tools of the market to succeed"

In the secondary sector the rapid expansion of the "independent state school" like academies and free schools means that over 70 per cent now have new freedoms over who they admit.

This has led to a growth in the number of non-denominational schools that control their own admissions when in the past they might have shared a set of common local authority criteria.

Not all choose to use these freedoms, but some do.

Then you have simple residential geography. The ability of some knowledgeable and resourceful parents to move, rent, or even cheats the system.

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At the bottom of the pile you have schools in the poorer neighbourhoods, which aren't engaged in this sort of manipulation.

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Very often these schools educate a disproportionate number of poorer children from challenging home backgrounds with complex problems and low prior attainment.

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Many of those schools do an exceptional job.

But they may lack that favourable school composition, the critical mass of able and aspirant pupils that help all children do well.

And in certain parts of the country they often struggle to find and retain the best teachers.

In spite of all the talk about diversity and choice, the quality of teaching is still the single most important factor when it comes to raising standards, improving achievement and narrowing gaps.

Yet teacher recruitment will undoubtedly be one of the big challenges for our schools in the next decade.

The number of applicants to teacher training dropped by 16 % in the last four years, and there will be one million more children in the system in a decade.

We talk at length about the need for new school places but there will be no point having new schools if there aren't enough teachers to work in them.

In a dog eat dog market situation the struggling schools in the most urgent need will find it hardest to recruit, further exacerbating the hierarchy.

The league tables, along with the inspection service, were devised to lubricate the incipient market in education in the late 1980s and early 90s.

My own local activism started when I became a governor in that era.

Our children's primary school was one of the first to be failed by Ofsted.

And in those days that meant being publically named and shamed

The process of lionizing successful schools, or demonizing those that were failing, was an essential element in helping parents exercise choice

Being failed by Ofsted and then spending several years bumping along the bottom of the performance tables was a powerful incentive to improve.

But this type of public accountability and the perverse incentives it places before schools to pick off the children most likely to succeed and to reject others may have gone too far.

The pursuit of individual self-interest, personal choice, the "best for my child" philosophy has been allowed to trump the common good.

There is nothing wrong with parents wanting the best for their children; it is a natural instinct.

But the job of the state should be to want what is best for ALL children.

Knowing affluent parents will always be able to work the system on behalf of their children.

To put the less powerful at a relative disadvantage.

But we must start to reconcile the ideas of diversity and choice, public accountability and individual school autonomy with fairness and social justice.

If we weren't starting from here, would we?

Have schools that can charge up to £30,000 a year allowing parents who can afford it to purchase a deep and lasting competitive advantage for their children?

Allow other schools to reject the majority of their applicants based on a test that can also be manipulated by wealth?

Create schools that can select children covertly by cultural or social class background?



Educate children of different faiths separately?

The answer is no – we probably wouldn't

Yet in spite of the return of One Nation rhetoric, barely any of these vital policy areas is up for discussion at the upcoming General Election.

### Faith Schools

It would be odd to be standing here today talking on this subject and not to mention the role of faith schools in particular

Founded originally to educate the children of poor families, many still do.

They are a long-standing, important part of our state system. And that is not going to change

There are now about 7000 schools with a religious affiliation – just under a third of all schools.

Mostly these are Church of England and Catholic schools. But there is also a small but growing number of schools with other faith designations as different parent and community providers emerge.

The fact that some faiths have the lion's share of these schools makes it hard to argue against the tax-payer funding schools for any or every faith that may want one.

Islamic schools, Jewish schools, Buddhist Schools, schools for Scientologists or Jehovah's Witnesses.

Where would we draw the line?

The role of faith schools in society needs scrutiny.

The Bishops report states:

"All schools should try to model a community of communities and not a society of strangers."

Seems to me that the key question is:

If we are to have a plurality of schools often with a different faith ethos

Do they?

Educate all comers in their local community, i.e any child who wants to come.

Or do they educate only children of a particular faith, effectively barring entry to children who can't demonstrate that faith?

The scientist and prominent humanist Richard Dawkins questions how you can label a child with the faith of his or her parents at the age of 3 or 4.

Was I a socialist child aged 7 or 8 as I pressed flowers in Tolpuddle?

Parents are of course entitled to bring up children as they wish and in the faith of their choice

But should that be allowed to determine entry to a particular school?

[The Cantle report](#) in 2001, following the disturbances in some Northern towns, took the view that single faith schools could undermine community cohesion.

In the last year, we have seen further growing concern about the possible impact of schools with a single faith ethos.

But in the case of the Birmingham Trojan Horse schools that ethos had emerged not through a religious designation but through the dominant local residential population.

Schools with this type of student body are not unique to Birmingham; they are now common in other parts of the country like Luton, Leicester and Tower Hamlets.

This has raised questions not just about community cohesion but also about the curriculum, internal culture and behaviour.

Is it OK to ask girls to sit at the back of the class, or unilaterally remove certain questions from exam papers; to teach creationism rather than scientific evolution?

For much of the last 25 years faith schools have been held up as being special and different because of their ethos.

But you could argue that all schools have a unique ethos.

The school where my sons went and where I still chair the governing body was also established 150 years ago but by a committed utilitarian and social reformer called William Ellis

He pioneered a broad and balanced, in particular scientific, education for the children of working people, at a time when the great public schools were focused on the classics.

He believed in educating for good character but within a secular setting.

He wanted children to be able to learn independently and to become happy, useful members of society, who could mix intelligence and application with "sympathy, kindness and humility."

These are ideas that still preoccupy us today.

But I would argue that our ethos is no less strong or valid than that of our neighbouring girls Catholic school with which we share a sixth form.

The outcome of the Trojan Horse saga is that all schools are being asked to spell out and to be accountable for common values and culture..

Now known as British Values, these include democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance, enabling children to know the difference between right and wrong

You could add to that the opportunity to develop and learn as a result of their own critical thinking and reasoning, rather than being indoctrinated to instil a particular set of beliefs.

I would prefer to call these universal or common values, rather than British values.

But if they are now at the heart of every child's entitlement at school- and Ofsted is enforcing this in a draconian way in some cases - the idea of simultaneously pursuing a plurality of schools with different values and ethos, and the segregating of children into different schools according to faith, may quickly belong to another era.

### What Goes on Inside our Schools

In the first Ebor lecture this year Professor Richard Pring chose the question

'What counts as an educated person?'

"I want to point to a central feature of being a person, namely the capacity and the disposition to pursue the 'good life', that is, a life which is shaped by both knowledge and virtues", he said.

Richard is someone who has shaped much of my own thinking on this subject, so I am proud to be following in his footsteps in this talk even if I am repeating some of what he said

The Bishops letter states:

"The purpose of education is not simply to prepare people to be economic units but to nurture their ability to flourish as themselves and to seek the flourishing of others"

I would say that it a pretty good definition of One Nation schooling

If we are to have schools for One Nation in which every child can flourish in a reciprocal way we must ensure that each can pursue the subjects that interest and engage them and to develop the skills that will enable them to lead happy fulfilled lives.

At the moment there are several reasons why, in spite of the best attempts of most schools, that isn't happening.

Our inability to find a common understanding of what counts as an educated person.

Then to agree on what we teach and how we assess success without smothering schools with bureaucracy, and I regret to say, fear.

Our failure to resolve the unequal status between academic, vocational, technical, creative and practical education has blighted the English education system for generations.



IN the last decade we have gone from a situation in which schools were encouraged, again by the performance tables, to direct their pupils towards some GCSE equivalent “vocational” qualifications to boost their league table positions.

In some cases though not all – and I do have sympathy with schools that urgently need high quality alternatives to GCSEs– this led to young people passing large numbers of exams which didn’t actually act as effective passports to the next stage in their lives.

Now we are witnessing the mirror image of that outlook in the current coalition government’s policies .

There has been a narrowing of the number of qualifications that count in the performance tables.

Schools have been incentivised to focus on a small number of academic subjects even at the expense of the creative arts, RE and some technology subjects.

In our haste to retreat from poor quality vocational education, the baby has been thrown out with the bathwater.

No thought is being given to what high quality practical education would look like or to what other pursuits and activities contribute to being able to enjoy “the good life”.

We do need to offer children from all backgrounds an entitlement to that academic rigour, to knowledge and skills to “the best of what is known or said” as the Victorian poet and school inspector Matthew Arnold put it.

But we also need to offer children, for whom that is not right, meaningful alternative routes

Meanwhile there are growing concerns that education policy is overly driven by tests and by that which can be measured.

For all the talk of diversity and autonomy we actually have a highly standardized curriculum.

Educators Michael Fielding and Peter Moss in their book [\*Radical Education and the Common School\*](#) describe the current landscape as:

“A mixture of social fragmentation and pedagogical normalization; the diverse school system and the school of uniformity”

Pring talked of the language of deliverology, a new Orwellian form of education “newspeak”

In this language inputs, outputs, targets, audits, efficiencies and performance indicators obscure the real person at the heart of schooling

They downgrade the real human relationships that are such an important part of individual social, moral, mental and spiritual development.

Organisations like the CBI to educationalists like the head teacher of Eton now voice concerns that the exam treadmill crowds out the development of non cognitive skills necessary to cope and function effectively in life.

And in spite of the tiger mum I mentioned earlier many parents weigh anxiety about ensuring their children get the right qualifications against worry about the stress they are under.

The new focus on “character education” is symptomatic of this.

Shadow Education Secretary Tristram Hunt has been talking about it for the last year.

And the DFE has announced a [Character Innovation Fund](#), which makes character “awards” to schools and other bodies.

The Department even says that England could become a “global leader of teaching character”, conjuring up a vision of schools and countries ranked according to which can produce the most virtuous pupils.

Schools are encouraged now by ministers to think about how their pupils can learn perseverance, resilience, grit, confidence, optimism, motivation, drive, ambition, curiosity honesty integrity and community spirit.

For some children schools have always been the only place where respectful positive values are modeled.

Most head teachers understand the need to ensure their schools balance academic success with the personal traits that guide the conduct of their pupils

But the focus on “deliverology” may impede those ambitions.

The recent Royal Society of the Arts report [“Schools with Soul”](#) suggested making the next academic year a period of reflection in which no new policies are announced and only the most essential inspections take place.

This would allow schools time to build social, moral, spiritual and cultural education into their daily lives.

In America the science of character education is a long standing academic pursuit. But their research tells us that character can’t be taught in a prescriptive way

According to [Marvin W Berkowitz, the inaugural Sanford N. McDonnell Endowed Professor of Character Education](#), at the University of Missouri-St. Louis,

“When schools focus on exhortations (announcements, posters, lecturers at special assemblies) or didactics (curriculum) as they are typically disposed to do, they miss the boat.”

The primary influence on a child’s character development is *how people treat the child*. And how they witness people treating each other

So school culture and the reinforcement of positive behaviour characteristics like trust, respect, honesty, empathy, inclusion, reciprocity go to the heart of the development of young people.

Yet the regulatory straitjacket around schools now may help to create institutions in which morale is low and teachers feel untrusted .



This can lead to a poor school culture.

I was amused to read in the last [HMCI report](#) that a particular school failed to flourish because middle leaders weren't trusted.

But greatest mistrust in the system may well be of Ofsted.

Whatever the good intentions behind a national inspection service, it has become a corrosive force for countless schools and teachers.

So we are at a fork in the road.

Many people at the moment are trying to work out how to meet the needs of all their pupils academically, spiritually and personally

How we can build school cultures that encourage resilient confident young people

How we can hold schools to account without driving out the wider purpose of education

And how we avoid narrowing schooling simply to what can be measured.

#### The C Word (s)

Comprehensive, common, curriculum , character

I am going to conclude by outlining what I would see as a positive vision of schools for One Nation and some policy ideas for how we might achieve that.

Probably gathered by now that I am a fan of comprehensive education, or the common school as the early American reformers called it.

Common values and culture usually lie at the heart of socially cohesive societies

Apart from in the family, there is no better place to nurture those common values than in schools

The Bishops letter says:

“Our educational institutions do much to foster a community of communities.

A good school nurtures each child respecting their individuality and the traditions and customs – including the religious faith – in which they are growing up in their family while introducing them to the practices of living among others with different backgrounds and histories”

My ideal school would be a place where the children of Muslims, Jews, atheists and Christians, the children of the rich and the poor, black and white, walk through the same gate every morning.

That does happen in some parts of the country and what a powerful message it sends - *everyone*



*valued equally*

How much more impoverishing it is for all of us to have “the hierarchy” gradually sifting children into different institutions along faith, race and class lines as they grow older

Comprehensive schools get a bad press. In her recent book [School Myths](#) my friend and fellow campaigner [Melissa Benn](#) trawled recent headlines.

No surprise maybe that she discovered that comprehensive *failure* more likely to feature in the news than comprehensive *success*.

She even discovered an article by the novelist [Tony Parson in GQ magazine](#) , which claimed that going to a comprehensive is ‘a start in life right up there with dying at the Somme.’

This is probably because, as she and I discovered when we investigated this for a journalistic assignment, most of the editors and commentators send their children to private schools.

They have a vested interest in talking down a system they have rejected for their own children.

However now more than ever the idea of the comprehensive /common school needs to be rigorously defended and re-defined in its truest sense.

The advent of comprehensive education led to an opening up of opportunities for children that didn’t exist under the old selective system.

It transformed the numbers of children getting good qualifications and going on to university.

Much is made of the OECD/PISA data, usually used to show that English schools are failing on the international stage.

But I prefer to look at PISA for what it tells us about the features of the most successful countries and regions in the world.

By that I mean those with good achievement across the board and narrow gaps in attainment. Countries where excellence is twinned with equity,

These countries tend not to divide at an early age in the way we do. In fact many of them shun the idea of setting and streaming within school.

Instead they focus on teaching quality, strong local systems of oversight and good all-ability schools

It would take a bold politician to champion the necessary reform,

To take on the vested interests in the private, faith and selective sectors,

To promote non-selective admissions and the use of random allocation, catchment areas and feeder schools to by-pass the issue of selection by house price.

To hold the private schools more rigorously to account for their charitable status and bring the two



sectors together in a productive way.

It is worth noting that the education revolution in Finland, now one of the worlds top performing countries, started with far-reaching radical reform - the abolition of private and selective schools.

The latest neuro-science shows that young people's brains and intelligence continue to develop well into adolescence and beyond.

Dividing children up into sheep and goats, high achievers or low achievers, believers and non-believers in childhood should be consigned to the history books if we want an inclusive schools system that feeds into a socially cohesive society

The idea of the common school needs to be redefined away from being a bog standard, uniform environment in which aspirations are depressed.

A good comprehensive all ability school is a place where individuality is enhanced.

A place where creativity is nurtured within that sense of common citizenship that seems to lie at the heart of the favoured British Values.

I don't hold out much hope that we will see radical change soon.

But there are a few reasons to be hopeful

The Labour Party now has a policy to withhold business rate relief from fee-paying schools that aren't able to demonstrate effective partnerships with the state sector.

While I disagree with much of what Michael Gove said and did, his determination to hold out against the rump of his party that want a full scale return to grammar schools has significantly changed the terms of the debate.

His former advisor Sam Freedman, now Director of Research at Teach First says: "Perhaps Michael Gove's greatest achievement was to normalise comprehensive education for the Conservative party.

"To shift the argument from "saving" a few bright poor kids through grammar schools or assisted places to creating a genuinely world class system for all"

The establishment of so many academies and free school has caused problems with local oversight of schools.

But many of these schools are real comprehensives and those with a faith ethos have been required to limit their faith admissions to 50%.

Some go further.

It is heartening to see schools like the [David Young Community Academy](#) near here in Leeds and the [Walthamstow Academy in North London](#), the first school with a Christian ethos to win the Accord award for inclusivity.



Both these schools are underpinned by Christian values but have rejected any faith based admissions criteria.

Equally there is a small but determined fight back it comes to the re-definition of a broad, inclusive education for the whole person.

As I go around the country I am starting to meet head teachers who are fed up with having to constantly balance the needs of their pupils with the needs of their schools in terms of the league tables.

That has led to a ground swell of grass roots activity with groups of heads and teachers, some of whom are local to you here in York, trying to devise practical ways of re-defining the purpose of education.

They are experimenting with an assessment framework that would start in the early years and primary phase leading to a bacculaureate type qualification at 18.

This qualification would include the arts, creativity, sport, and civic engagement alongside academic and vocational qualifications.

It is aimed at ending the damaging academic vocational divide, at valuing personal development alongside exam passes while giving real status to practical and creative subjects

Many people forget that the highly esteemed International Baccalaureate diploma was founded after the Second World War with a view to using education as a route to permanent international peace.

One World if you like rather than One Nation

It includes an accredited personal development programme based on “creativity, action and service”.

The coalition behind the prototype English National Baccalaureate is establishing a trust to develop something similar here, quite independently of the politicians.

Other groups are looking at new systems of peer review to replace Ofsted once it becomes clear to the politicians that the current inspection regime has probably had its day.

These are *all* straws in the wind pointing towards a *better* future for all our schools.

We are facing a huge challenge in society with the gap between the rich and the poor stubbornly refusing to shift.

In spite of the Chancellor’s optimism today, many people are facing unemployment, insecure employment, cuts in public spending and pay freezes.

Yet they see those with advantage and money continuing to reap disproportionate rewards

It is breeding cynicism, resentment and division.



No one is pretending that schools alone can override the huge inequalities in society

But schools can create powerful bonds. Schools can help to overcome prejudice and lazy assumptions about class and ethnic background.

They can act as a mirror to the sort of society most of us would like to see.

One in which children and young people can share their common humanity rather than see each other as rich, poor, chavs or snobs with the inevitable ill will that breeds

Where each has a chance to flourish and become that bigger educated person than simply an 18 year old with a clutch of A grades.

A chance to lead Richard Pring's 'good life'

Matthew Arnold wrote that: "A set of good schools civilizes a whole neighbourhood"

A nation of good inclusive schools with common values, breadth of provision and shared purpose can civilize a country. And that should be our ambition now.

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