THE NARRATIVE:

Articles and Essays on Building the Case for Change

Introduction:
'It is not enough for education to produce individuals who can read, write and count. Education must fully assume its central role in helping people to forge more just, peaceful, tolerant and inclusive societies'
(UN's Global Education First)

Education is at a cusp. We constantly hear is that we are still educating children in essentially the same way as several generations ago, with a curriculum that, in some subjects and delivery, has not significantly changed in fifty years. Our education paradigm is still based on linearity, conformity and batching people and is in danger of losing relevance and the support of its users.
While change for change's sake is to be guarded against, more recent developments in methods of assessment, a growing adherence on data and measurement, an different marketplace and changes in pedagogy are taking us in a certain direction which is narrowing the curriculum and becoming more results driven than ever before with all the associated consequences. There is the charge that we are making lab-rats of our children and destroying their childhood and well-being through conflicted messages and too much information. There are an increasing number of divergent theories and opinions about what we should do, from those who are adamant that tech is the answer to all problems to those who think that what is needed is no less than a revolution in thinking – everyone can see what's wrong, but few, it seems, know what's right. The changes in curriculum may be slight in some subjects and at some stages, but the change in mindset will need to be rather more radical. What is clear is that there is now a mandate for change.

1. Creating a New Curriculum – Answers on a Postcard

'All major systems in the world are experiencing disequilibrium. The challenge of the times we live in is being felt everywhere; but education seems to be faring worse than most, and is responding very slowly to the challenges.' Dr Lesley Murrihy

'The emergence of the digital age, the growth of artificial intelligence, and the huge social disruption that these entail have had fundamental effects both on our relationship with knowledge and on the world of work. Yet school-based education has hardly acknowledged this disruptive change.' GlobalNet21

Last October, Ofsted's Chief Inspector, Amanda Spielman, wrote a paper which discussed findings from recent research on the curriculum. In it, she provided her own definition viz 'at the very heart of education sits the vast accumulated wealth of human knowledge and what we choose to impart to the next generation: the curriculum.' Later, she alluded to a number of related issues - vocational education; teaching to the test; the narrowing of the curriculum, especially in Key Stage 3; and the importance of the Ebacc before ending with the observation that 'expertise in and focus on the curriculum had waned.'

The response was not slow in coming and debate has waxed ever since. Initially, her attack on the culture of teaching to the test and encouraging schools to show initiative by interpreting the curriculum was welcomed, but there were soon rumbles. It was noted, for instance, that her definition of the curriculum was not consistent with that given by her deputy, Sean Harford last year with its three stages of intent, implementation and impact / achievement. Crispin

Weston joined the debate with a paper entitled 'Why Curriculum Matters' (sub-titled a response to Tim Oates, Dylan William and Daisy Christodoulou) in which he criticised their views of the curriculum while offering his own, a process being undertaken in three articles under the heading of 'Untangling the Curriculum.' Apart from wrestling with the

definition, Weston was sceptical of the call for teachers to be more involved in helping shape the curriculum stating 'If the experts cannot sort out what curriculum means, there is not a cat-in-hell's chance that thousands of isolated schools will be able to succeed.'

All of which is a long-winded way of suggesting that it may be time to introduce some fresh thinking on the curriculum without the risk of being drawn into debates over data and definition in some naval-gazing twitter feed. Perhaps it is time to approach the curriculum anew, even if it involves dismantling and rebuilding the education paradigm we are comfortable with. We have waited long enough for experts to sort out a workable model moving forward, but too much research and data has been focused on improving the current paradigm, rather than looking at ways of reinventing it in a form that may better meet the needs of children here and now. Dr Lesley Murrihy, in advocating such a change, recently wrote 'It is time for those of us in education to stop simply commenting and to start creating proposals, to test models and to look to hybrid solutions that take account of the complex nature of the 21st century and of education and create positive sum outcomes' asking the question 'If we, ourselves, cannot demonstrate this very same creativity by creating solutions, how can we model this for our students?

How indeed? When we follow the education debate on social media, it is hard to escape the view that a great deal of energy is being wasted along the binary spectrum of skills vs. knowledge, growth mindset vs. fixed mindset, STEM subjects vs. the arts or numerous similar debates, or by mining down into cognitive bias, the place of technology in assessment, parenting and so on, each thesis invariably accompanied by a new book for the exhausted teacher to read at their leisure. Perhaps, just perhaps, it is time to stop dealing in the finer points of interpretation, with nuances of meaning, shifting stances and arguments about what is research and what is opinion sidestep the jargon and hyperbole with such clichés as 'smashing glass ceilings' or 'levelled playing fields' inhabited by helicopter parents and the snowflake generation. Perhaps it is time for a more imaginative vision.

Does much of the current education debate we find in social media help? In filling in the detail, yes, but in the larger sense, not so much. I am not alone in hearing the fingernails on the chalkboards as teachers scream for something more than endless analysis and proselytising? Something that recognises why our curriculum is not working for too many of our children, why its obsession with data and grades is distorting our teaching and why the numbers of teachers leaving the profession keep increasing for reasons that seem obvious, but for elucidation include ever-expanding workloads; more bureaucracy; more pressure for results and assessment targets; greater social and pastoral roles; the failure of successive governments to offer sufficient separation between education and the state; and the lack of support and status accorded to the profession.

So what am I suggesting? Not another curriculum review, or more think tanks and debate over definition and degree, but a return to the essential question, 'what is the best education we can give our children'. It should not be an exercise in semantics where we get hung up on debating what is 'best' (or ideal), in the first instance, but it should challenge us to risk suspending, even abandoning our views on whether our curriculum works or not. It may be that we need to establish some fresh foundations, thereby embedding a different attitude towards education, towards the environment, towards community, perhaps a whole new ethical framework or paradigm, that identifies the impediments to change (which includes funding, inevitably, as well as vested interests of the sector, inertia and uncertainty brought about by the advances in nanotechology, brain research and technology; social stratification (as pernicious as ever); and political will). We need to address the inequality of opportunity, the shortcomings in teacher training and the adversarial nature and irrelevance of education to too many children. What is needed is not merely a bank of ideas to dip in and out of, but the answer to the question, 'what values, knowledge, understanding, and skills do we want for our children? ' Putting our prejudices about selection and what constitues a good education to one side and uncoupling the carriages of curriculum and assessment may help us see just what works and what doesn't.

At the risk of sounding philodoxical, in looking for answers to some very elemental questions, it is always better to put something down for others to flay. There are too many raised voices for us to do otherwise. We should rightly be concerned about the decline in the influence of the family and church and commensurate lack of values and ethics exhibited by many of our 'well-educated' leaders (it is shameful they can still talk about 'good schools and bad schools' without blushing). We should recognise the needs of the increasing number of children for whom school is a holding bay because it isn't giving them the courses, the skills and knowledge or the future they need. Citizenship, values, attitudes, environmental awareness - what we would broadly see as constituting ethical behaviour should be an implicit part of learning from the first day of school, so that they come to the more formal part of learning better prepared. Instead of the push for longer schools days, we could look at shorter and more targeted teaching time (I often wonder at those who advocate longer school days when so little classroom time we have is used effectively). We need discipline in our classrooms and schools, preferably greater self-discipline and higher expectations, but conversely less pressure and fewer parents and adults over-complicating their world by too much information. Children don't eschew hard work, but they tend to avoid it when they see it has little relevance to their lives or is done at the behest of the teacher and school rather than in their evident best-interests.

We all accept technology will play an ever greater part in teaching and assessment, and that all courses will soon be available to students on-line and that with more blended education, teaching may be shared between teachers and facilitators or specialist tutors. We

should examine what we mean by a knowledge rich curriculum in subjects such as History where the selection of what history we choose to teach is hugely significant. We should even question the value in dividing learning into subjects at all levels of schooling. We should push for the end of academic selection (nothing is more irritating than those who equate selection with academic rigour) and provide for more opportunities for

SEND children by recognising and meeting their specific needs. We should recognise such attributes as a sense of purpose, manners, good communication skills and a good work ethic as trumping the data that sometimes sits on children like a straightjacket. And we should focus on the cause of issues such as the current mental health epidemic and address them at their roots rather than just offering aftercare.

Six years ago, Laura McInerney suggested a rolling curriculum review, an idea which might be worth revisiting, but before we even get that far we need to ensure we have in place a new philosophy of education that can sweep children up and inspire them, that will help them see education as useful and relevant and help make better citizens. We have dumped so much on our children - stress, ambition, guilt, pressure. Now, we need to change the goals which centre around money, jobs and individual achievement to recognise the diversity of human types, qualities and abilities and extol the value of living well in a new world in which 'every person matters.'

2. Time for a Revolution

"If I live in an area where there is gang warfare among my peers, why would I care about Pythagoras's theorem?" Akala

"Indeed, when did we just roll over and accept that there is nothing to be done about the way things are? Why do we fret over a Progress 8 score that will always put certain demographics to the back of the table? Why is it now commonplace for some schools to refuse to admit children with SEND (especially the more difficult types) because of the cost implications and the impact on outcomes? Why have some schools steadfastly refused to consider that flexible working may be one solution for the recruitment and retention crisis, or that going part-time is something you can do as an effective leader? Keziah Featherstone

It is difficult not to feel angry at what is happening in education. Whether it is in the paucity of Government funding, falling morale and teacher

shortages, especially felt in comprehensive schools, the pledge to increase places in grammar schools and the inequity of provision in all sectors; or whether it is in the excessive amount of testing, the lack of appropriate pathways for school leavers, the lack of resources; the overload of bureaucracy and data or all the endless proselytising by experts, treading an endless cycle of conferences promoting their books and research, I often wonder where are the children in all of this?

I wonder also how stark the mental health figures have to be to make government sit up and take notice. How many more suicides does it take for someone other than those offering palliative care to acknowledge that its obsession with testing may be a contributing factor and that while sitting 20 – 30 examinations spread over a month that have been upgraded in difficulty over a month may be fine for one section of the population, it is not so for others. Moreover, to argue, as one Minister did recently that exams were as stressful 'back then' is to completely miss the point, which is that we have made exams toxic by the language we now use and the importance we have given them whose drip-down stress from schools to teachers burns our children. The fact that 35 children are being excluded from school each day and others are being turned away because they will damage schools' results at the end of GCSE (an estimated 19,000 "disappeared" just prior to GCSEs) is abhorrent or that schools spend time seeking out the easiest examination boards or are caught inappropriately helping their charges should tell us something about the pressure they are under. The business model that extols the value of Social Darwinism, that puts a price on success, that makes every educational institution scramble for children, for money using whatever inducement in their power (including the awarding of 1st class degrees) is not one serving children.

This is not the fault of teachers - far from it. They are the ones having to carry the load for family breakdowns, a dysfunctional care system, failed government initiatives, an examination system run by private providers and held to account by league tables and examination boards and universities vying with each other for custom. Rather, the fault lies elsewhere, with

politicians and educationalists who have forgotten to ask themselves the simple question, 'what is the best education we can give our children?'

The fall-out of our focus on examination results can be seen everywhere as is our obsession with raw marks. It is a scandal that we openly court doctors and teachers from the third world to staff our schools and hospitals. The fact that 40% of our doctors only last in practice for more than five years tells us many things, one of which is that our measure of entry may be wrong. In our obsession to cream the top performing students, we are missing those other students that would (a) be quite able to handle the academic requirements and (b) have a better range of skills, (listening, empathy, observational, recording) and who would make better doctors without compromising their professional standard skills. Our first past the post system has a lot to answer for.

We know the fierce competition in London for school places has little to do with what is the best education for our children and everything to do with how do we filter these children for the convenience of schools. It is no wonder that the tutor industry is thriving on the back of selective schools trying to get the students through the door of the most selective schools and hypocritical indeed for the same schools to criticise parents for seeking extra help. Tutors are responding to a demand when they would no doubt rather be helping students in different ways. Selective education, and the need to attract children to schools and to universities has resulted in a push to achieve academic results at whatever cost, to fill places and courses, however inappropriate, to survive as educational institutions, even at the cost of the children's well-being

And where are the children in all this? Where indeed! Mere pawns in a game, I fear.

3. The New Education

'What does education do? It makes a straight-cut ditch of a free, meandering brook.'
Henry David Thoreau

At a time when the function and role of schools is under the cosh like never before, it is somewhat sobering to reflect upon those that avoided school, in part or in whole, those self-taught, creative and unfettered thinkers who lacked the benefit of a formal education, and still came good. A list of such autodidacts may include Benjamin Franklin, Mark Twain, George Bernard Shaw, Albert Einstein, Charles Darwin, Stanley Kubrick, Thomas Edison and Margaret Mead - all highly talented and successful in their respective fields who had the opportunity to work creatively and imaginatively without the shackles of a formal education. And of course, to this list we can add a vast array of women who were both denied a formal education and a credible platform, and who still triumphed, women such as the Bronte sisters, Mary Wollstonecraft and Flora Tristan. And they knew how lucky they were, speaking up against the limitations of formal education, with Bertrand Russell arguing that *"m e n are born ignorant, not stupid; they are made stupid by education"* and author and autodidact Helen Beatrix Potter being even more explicit in her criticism noting, *'Thank goodness I was never sent to school; it would have rubbed off some of my originality.'*

It is possible to see similar disdain for traditional education today amongst some parents although usually for quite different reasons. As schools move further to the left, and become narrower in their breadth of curriculum and assessment in an effort to standardize educational outcomes, we see more and more parents who have the means to do so, voting with their feet, to draw on the best resources in themselves, in their communities and off the web, to go it alone.

There are many reasons for choosing to do so. These include concerns about behavior (bullying, disruptive classmates); how technology is being used (or not being used); and the shrinking of the curriculum through the EBacc, in particular, reducing time for the creative subjects. Families also have more personal reasons, founded in religion or culture, (or exclusions), or from a growing number of parents who just want to protect their children from the world and all its horrors, however naïve this may sound. More recently,

parental concern has reacted to the changes in the function of education from the pursuit of academic and social outcomes to societal ends, pushing a liberal social agenda which many parents do not want foisted on their children. Nor may they agree with government moves to 'educate the whole child' even in matters that deeply concern them such as teaching children about relationships, especially sex and gender, at a young age. While not all reasons are logical or even excusable, they are symptomatic of a growing disillusionment with the current school system and a belief that there are other, better ways of educating children.

The effects of this loss of confidence can be seen in the growth of home schooling. While not the same as being 'self-taught', there is no doubt that the freedom home schooling affords, allows children to follow passions and interests. It can cater for the increasing numbers of families taking gap years and wanting education for their children in-transit. While we might question the premises, the reality is that the trend is accelerating and that in the last school year, some 30,000 were home schooled in England and Wales, double the number of six years before.

Undoubtedly, it has also got easier to opt out of formal schooling with the advent of the internet. Technology is a driving force with so many courses and resources available on-line that parents can access almost all they need anywhere in the world. By opting out, they find the extra time to devote to the development of special talents in music, drama, sport, or specialist interests from coding to chess. With whole university courses available on-line and blended education becoming a reality in many countries, the means are there for children to gain a first class academic education without ever attending school. What is not so clear is how the social and cultural education, which is compromised from not being part of a community of peers, is managed and compensated for. Nor is it easy for government to monitor the children who are flying under the radar, largely

unmonitored and unchecked, and in danger of becoming isolated from their peers and communities or worse, radicalised.

Allied with the growth in home-schooling is the increase in tutoring. The proportion of pupils who have had a private tutor at some stage in their education went up from 18% in 2005 to 25% in 2016 (42% in London). While there are many firms offering bespoke tutoring services, to the dismay of many head teachers, a survey of more than 1,600 state school teachers found that 43% of them have earned money as private tutors outside school, which considering the pressures currently on teachers, is a substantial 'extra' workload, probably indicative of their relatively low pay and the satisfaction derived from one to one tutoring.

Tutors were once seen as anathema by many schools and you do not have to dig deep to find criticism of the industry with schools suggesting that agencies 'trade on insecurity' or worse, that after-school tutoring is a 'form of child abuse,' as Gail Larkin, President of the National Association of Head Teachers said in 2014 - an interesting comment when schools still demand entrance tests for children as young as three and who eject students who might damage their performances in league tables. The truth is the world is changing and tutoring for exams is only one part of an industry that is moving into the mainstream of education, where tutors support parents who want a different form of education by working in a more holistic way, assisting learning, by helping developing good study habits, pointing the child in the right direction and engendering the confidence that comes from 1:1 support.

Home schooling is not an ideal alternative to state education in any country, despite its suitability for the few. What we need is a system that caters for a wider range of abilities using a wider range of providers. New Zealand has begun to allow students to construct their own curriculum, which often involves accessing some subjects from home. As blended education proliferates in different forms and guises and the role of the teacher changes from classroom teacher to mentor and facilitator, it is likely we are seeing the future, in which the responsibility of education is shared, when education without walls becomes a reality. We are entering a time when, to paraphrase Yeats, things are falling apart because the centre cannot hold and that is not

altogether a bad thing. We should not be frightened of the prospect, but instead prepare for it and embrace it.

4. Let's Start Again (published in the Daily Telegraph on 20 December, 2016 as 'What has gone wrong with our schools? We need to get back to basics and start again.')

'*Everyone who remembers his own education remembers teachers, not methods and techniques. The teacher is the heart of the educational system.*' Sidney Hook

'20,000 pages of on-line guidance overwhelms Scottish teachers.' Glasgow Herald headline, 1 December, 2016

What is wrong with our schools? What is this malaise that is affecting so many of our teachers and driving them from the profession? And

furthermore, how is it, despite all our legislation and political push, we have ended up with a system that, according to PISA, still lags behind similar countries? By what process have we arrived at a system smothered in a mish-mash of requirements, wrapped up in endless policies and bespoke language that obfuscates and frustrates: in essence, a rampant bureaucracy that is slowly suffocating our schools. Why is it that so much of what schools are required to do has become unnecessarily complicated and time- consuming? Why can't we get rid of the dross and start again?
To answer these questions, we need to strip our system back to the bones, to a simple, common-sense and pragmatic approach to education without all the meaningless debates about school types, whether we should call boys and girls 'children (or he and she, ze as Oxford suggests). We need to get our focus back to where it should be, on the education of children (and adults, for education will need constant renewal in this brave new world). We suspect that much of what schools are now required to do is pointless, layered over the years, adding to, but never subtracting. But how can we do it differently? How can we change what has become an ever-more complex, label-laden, bloated and anachronistic system into something that actually works?

First, we must get teachers back to spending more of their time teaching children. We need to work at reducing the excessive, time-wasting requirements placed on schools and, if that does not work, then appoint administrative support to take care of the work that does not need to sit in the teachers' domain, ie inputting data, filing, collecting, manipulating and extrapolating information, managing parent concerns and e-mail traffic. To make best use of our greatest assets, teachers must spend more time engaging directly with children rather than sitting in front of a screen, dealing with a surfeit of administrative tasks that can be dealt with elsewhere.

To make our schools work for all, we need to bury the myth of selection. Every time selection is mentioned, there is the downside, which is what happens to the rest, those who at eight years old or eleven or thirteen cannot jump over the bar, but who will be able to in time and need to compete with those who can? What we want, surely, is rigour for all schools, where streaming and setting through a semi-permeable membrane allows for each to be taught according to their stage of readiness and need.

Rigour is not the preserve of selective schools; indeed, selective schooling often dilutes rigour, softens the edges and leads to complacency on both sides of the divide. What is needed in all schools is for children to develop a sense of purpose, through self-discipline, clear goals, outstanding teaching and an appreciation of the gift of education.

We need to revisit the whole rationale of inspections. Why are Heads Teachers perpetually frustrated and nervous about inspections? Why are they seen as ambushes? Why should Schools have to be subject to constantly changing, and often contradictory requirements? (I remember being told to put glass windows in dormitory doors one inspection (safety) and take them out at the next (privacy) Simplify, simplify! We all know just how spurious and petty inspections can be, with so many pointless requirements and reams of documentation that cannot possibly be managed by teaching staff – except that in small schools, without a bevy of staff members employed to deal with human resources, it actually is – and decry the waste of time and resources.

Safeguarding, Child Protection and Health and Safety have, likewise, become industries, generating work, necessitating the employment of armies of advisers, consultants, spawning inset days, conferences, articles and books.

Of course, the safety of children must be a paramount concern yet, in many ways, our excesses have made children less safe. Constant tweaks, wasted days going over revisions of revisions, generic comments when there is nothing sensible to say, so much content, piled up and constantly changing does little for safety. Policies should not have to be tweaked by individual schools at ridiculous cost, often flying blind, advised by expensive outside agencies. Regulations need to be simplified so that inspections work for schools, not to justify the cost and excessive bureaucracy of an inspectorate.

Ideally, the key points (and there are usually only a few KEY points in each policy, i.e. who is the LADO, what do you do when approached by a child in confidence etc) should be on flashcards that can be carried about and referenced as appropriate. Safe-guarding is too important to risk losing the focus in the detail and yet the reality is we are in danger of doing just that. The same may be said of PREVENT which has created an industry of its own. And through it all, despite the excessive attention to detail, have we actually made our children safer: many fewer walk to school or take exercise; many are more risk adverse, have had their initiative and competitiveness stunted, are more dependent, more vulnerable, more unhappy than ever before. Somehow, we need to restore the balance. Let's focus on areas that matter: the fact that nearly 19,000 children were admitted to hospital after self-harming last year in England and Wales – a rise of 14% over the past three years; the fact that 62% of 13 – 20 year olds have experienced cyber-bullying; or the fact that most children have begun using a mobile phone or are on-line by the age of eight. How have we protected them? How have we taught children appropriate values and behaviours so they don't use the internet as a weapon of choice? How have we protected them from themselves?

Which leads us onto the elephant in the room, technology. Having wasted billions experimenting with anything from raspberries to whiteboards, we must revisit the place of the internet in our schools –quite distinct from the teaching of computer science and coding.

Marc Goldman recently wrote *'I am increasingly concerned about the ubiquity of computing in our lives and how our utter dependence on it is leaving us vulnerable in ways*

that very few of us can even begin to comprehend.' We need to look at the whole way we teach about the internet. Here we should consider a new subject – 'The Internet and Social Media' or suchlike – that teaches children how to use the net, and includes such sub-topics as using social media, identifying fake news, internet safety, cyber-bullying, the dark web and how to use the net to its potential, all under-pinned by a robust, ethical framework. Without some rules, some self-regulation, we are placing our children in danger.
In teaching, we should focus on teaching and deal with the small stuff, such as handwriting, in the classroom, keeping learning support staff for those who have more significant learning difficulties. We should put more emphasis on writing, in sentences, paragraphs and essays, to learn how to reason, argue and communicate. And let's take seriously the proposition that philosophy and ethics should be compulsory from a young age to underpin nanotechnology and science, to guard against the inducements of the Net. Teaching values and ethics, responsibility and community, is the best way to keep them safe and protected from the selfishness of money, power and prestige, which is what young children are inadvertently being tempted to pursue.

We need to make education more attractive and relevant for all and raise its profile (and promote it as a life-long commodity). To do that successfully, we must engage more with parents and guardians and educate them too – to say they need help and guidance is not condescending, but a reflection of the helter-skelter world they live in, assailed on all sides by so much misguided and contrary advice from parenting sites and magazines that cannot help but make them insecure in wanting to do their best. And for their sake, let's move children away from the centre of the universe, placed there by doting, well-meaning parents and put them back in their families, in their communities and other social groups so they learn to share, socialize and take some responsibility.
Let's get rid of the shameful distinction between good school – bad school, in fact, let's forget about school types and treat schools according to need. Let's look at where we are spending our education pound, and work on training, procuring and looking after the best teachers. Let's not get hung up on class sizes or resources and be properly cautious of all the extraneous

advice offered by experts, the quality of in-service training we buy into and keep asking ourselves, 'is this going to improve the education (or safety) of our children?" And we should celebrate those schools that demand more from their students through discipline and standards and stand up to those 'experts' who view such methods with opprobrium.

We should look after children by helping them through each stage of development and ask 'is anything more likely to cause mental health issues than those experts who tell us children need to know every detail of drug abuse, death, disease and sexuality before they are 'ready' – yes, readiness again – and nothing of the joy and adventures of life? We should prioritise Mathematics and English, but not through testing alone which determines the learning process and ignores how learning – deep learning –happens; we should stop being in such a hurry by trimming our curriculum, removing the colour and floss, or by closing doors early through selection, separating children from other children for reasons of IQ or maturation and producing the stratified society that does us such harm.

We need simplified inspection frameworks; we need teachers to get back teaching; we need easily understood and simple guides to safeguarding and child protection, we need risk assessments to focus on real risks, not some meaningless compliance or box-ticking. We need to get rid of the legalese that permeates our schools, do a time and motion study and see how much time, especially teacher time, we are wasting. Let's give inset days back to improving teaching rather than an endless succession of first-aid, fire-training, prevent and compliance courses. Let's simplify our schools and get some rigour and pride back into the classrooms and make sure they are places that are both relevant to children's needs and where teachers and pupils want to be. Let's start again.

5. What are Schools for and where are they heading? (published in the Daily Telegraph on 27 August, 2016 as '*School's out forever; New Zealand's plan to allow children to study on-line raises the question, 'what are schools for?*')

As we debate whether the increase in the number of grammar schools will improve social mobility, or even if selection at the age of eleven is a good

thing or not, education elsewhere in the world moves on. In a presage of the future, last month the New Zealand Government outlined legislation that will allow any school-age students to enroll with an accredited online learning provider who will have the responsibility for determining whether their students will need to physically attend for all or some of the school day. The radical change that allows any registered school or tertiary provider such as a polytechnic or an approved educational body to apply to be a "community of online learning" (COOL) has met with an equally cool response from the primary teachers' union. As well as potentially undermining their own livelihood, the idea of young children learning some or all of their lessons out of school, has prompted educationalists to revisit the question 'what are schools for?

On-line learning is hugely important in making available subjects to students that schools could otherwise not offer, or for those unable to access school or university, for social, health or geographic reasons. Yet while a part of everyday life, its extensive use in schools, particularly primary schools, has been greeted with caution. Not surprisingly, therefore, the suggestion that children not be required to attend school for part or all of their learning has been seen as having huge ramifications for families concerned with the monitoring and supervision of their children. While one assumes common-sense will prevail and that the Government will insist that most remote learning takes place in a supervised physical community, (perhaps dependent on age), it invariably poses the question about what will be the role of schools in the future as more and more subjects and courses, delivered with increasing levels of sophistication, will become available on-line.

Schools will argue, rightly so, that they are not only about learning, and the imparting of knowledge and skills, but provide a holistic view of education,

with other equally important priorities, mainly linked around the socialization of pupils, developing their EQ, social and communication skills and team work and community. And yet, clearly the idea of a school offering 'blended learning' where students spend part of their school time accessing specialist subjects on-line, already well-established and growing exponentially, needs to be managed. The question is then how do we define education and what

purpose and new functions our schools will take on. One finding that is reassuring for the teachers' union and teachers generally is that evidence from New Zealand suggests that students learning remotely do worse than those learning in face-to-face environments, suggesting that the role of the teacher will continue to be pivotal in the future, even if significantly changed from that of today.

As technology continues to provide opportunities and challenges to the education sector, the internet-based virtual learning model will continue to encourage us to re-think how schools can make best use of the opportunities provided and how they are best developed and delivered in schools as well as their impact on the organization and physical environment. There is an inevitability about change per se that highlights the need for more forward planning and a review of what we are doing now – including whether continued innovation through technology will negate the need for more selective schools as schools become providers for all according to their needs and stages of development. The provision of education will continue to change dramatically in the years ahead, with more and more learning delivered remotely, even if under the auspices of a teacher or facilitator, but we still need to be careful that we manage such change appropriately and don't hand over our children to the VLE for their academic sustenance without considering what our schools do for their social, physical and emotional well-being.

6. Making the Connection: Changing the way we see Education

(published in the Daily Telegraph on-line on 21 June as '*We've tinkered with education for too long – what we need to do is start again from scratch*)'

"The will must be stronger than the skill' Mohammad Ali

"I think the difficulty is the aspirations that anyone can have placed in front of them can only be based on what you see." John Bishop Desert Island Discs 29 June, 2012

In Question Time last week there was an animated discussion about the failings of white working class boys. According to a report published last year by the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, poor white boys are now the lowest-achieving group in Britain, with just 28 per cent getting five

GCSEs at grade C or above and being 10 per cent less likely to participate in higher education than any other ethnic group. It is a growing problem that sits alongside the increasing gender gap in higher education, Britain's disappointing PISA rankings, and even the debates over shorter holidays, longer school days and the taking of holidays during term time. In each of these areas, the response is that spending more time at school will solve the problem. It most surely will not. Rather, the greatest challenge we face as a society is motivating large numbers of our school population to take education seriously, to see it as relevant to their future and especially, to their job prospects, but we are not going to do it without some radical attitudinal changes. Many students see our current model of education as obsolete, not talking to them in any way or form. How do we change it? How do we get a better fit? How do we make education something they want rather than something they have to

endure? How do we engender the will to learn and give a purpose to going to school? The dice is particularly loaded against young children from lower socio- economic backgrounds who have grown up in families where unemployment has become a habit, aspiration crushed by the shortage of opportunities and worse, the value of education is not promoted in the home. What relevance does the current system have for them? Where is the incentive to learn when schools have geared their teaching towards exams rather than getting the best fix for their students (or even, for the inherent value of learning for learning's sake); where, also, when most internships and many of the best jobs are swallowed up by insiders, able to pay the piper? Where are the extra apprenticeships, the new skills, the new curricula with their greater relevance, encouraging creativity and enterprise?

But it is not just the lower socio-economic group that is currently being disadvantaged by the current education system although their marginalization is the most catastrophic. It is a crisis facing all the young, locked into a school system still influenced by a curriculum that is still steering students towards careers that are fast becoming redundant. Increasingly, there is a contradiction in pace and direction, between where education is headed and where the world is going to be by the time children leave school. The report

this week by the Commons Science and Technology Committee, that the United Kingdom needs 745,000 workers with digital skills by 2017 highlights the parlous state of teaching Computer Science in our schools, with a shortage of teachers and a shortfall of adequate equipment. The reality is that our schools are in danger of becoming obsolete and that technology, in particular, is still a tag-on in schools rather than helping define the curriculum and the process of learning. Schools have traditionally reflected the needs of society, which worked well when change was gradual and predictable. Today, it is neither. There are too few people looking at education with fresh eyes: all we do is tinker, when what we need to do is deconstruct the existing paradigm and start again. One of the most quoted clichés of recent times is that the world is changing four times faster than our schools. Since first uttered some 24 years ago, what have we done to address the gap? Not enough because we have not looked outside the box, but have reverted to upholding a system that tries to mold children to the shape of the school and its curriculum instead of looking at what children and society might need. Where to start? Libby Purves is right to focus on the home, especially when we know that 50% of a person's ability to learn is developed in the first 4 years of life and another 30% by age 8. If we accept that the home, not school, is the most important institution for early intervention, then we need to promote and elevate the status of education in the home. To do so, we need to convince everyone of its value, not only convince, but demonstrably prove. Schools can't work on the promise that education is important. More than ever, we cannot cajole people into education; rather, we have to show them the point of it and its benefits which, sadly, are too often invisible. Education works best when children want to learn. When talking about a love of learning or education for life we run the risk of dealing in clichés,

but then clichés become clichés because they have legs. It is helpful to look at education through children's eyes: there needs to be a point to it; it should be something you want to do as well as have to do; there should be some positive outcome; it should be fair and equitable at the point of delivery, (for if not, disillusionment and cynicism follow); it should have a in life; and if it isn't working, and it isn't in so many instances, we need to look at ways to fix it. Children need to possess a sense of purpose and the will to succeed and

that is what we must try and engender, for any other approach is no more than a band-aid fast losing its stick. At present, there is a disconnect between the problem and the outrage, between the cause and the effect. It is the failure of an education system no longer connecting. Too many young don't see its relevance. They don't see the spoils as evenly distributed. They don't see what it can lead to, especially when they come from a culture where work is not a given. They don't see the opportunities it creates, because they are beyond their life experience. In order to make education desirable and sought after, relevant to job opportunities and life choices, it has to become more relevant and responsive in order to be seen as something valuable and desirable. We cannot keep blundering on in a school system with a curriculum (and assessment methodologies) that have been extensively tinkered with without being fundamentally changed, in content and process, since the mid twentieth century. We cannot just allow educational and vocational opportunities to go to those who can afford them and closing the door to those who cannot. What we teach and how we teach, how we connect to purpose and be seen as in a positive light as central to all else that happens children to make schooling relevant to them and the new world of work and leisure requires some very considerable work in the years ahead.

7. What are they Teaching? A look at the complexities of the modern curriculum in our schools. (Attain Magazine, Issue 10, Volume 30, Summer, 2016)

It is not difficult to find any number of parents who worry that something has gone badly wrong with our education system. So many of the previous benchmarks seem to have fallen away: the ability to write with a legible cursive script; a knowledge of times tables; being able to spell (or at least having the pride to consult a dictionary); an ability to read and to write – all once seen as foundations for all that followed. The claim, oft-made by universities and employers, that too many children are leaving school almost innumerate and illiterate, only adds to the disquiet. But is this concern justified?

We have all had the experience of going to school at some point in our lives. It gives us an insight into how schools work but also lulls us into thinking we know more than we do – after all, the vast majority of us have only experienced schools as pupils, not teachers. As we get older, and especially when our own children go to school, we draw on this experience of our own school days and all the things we learned, in order to measure our own children's learning. From knowing their tables and essential mathematical formulae or how to head up a letter, through to being able to recite poetry from memory, a list of kings and queens, and so on. It is not surprising, therefore, that parents ask why schools do not ensure the basics are in place before trying to teach other subjects and question what, exactly, is being taught?

The short answer is that a lot more than was taught in the past – and often under more trying circumstances. The role of schools has moved from its traditional function of imparting knowledge and skills. It now focuses on a curriculum looking at the whole child, including their social and moral development. Schools are tasked with providing more childcare as well as taking a much greater responsibility for well-being, health and safety, gathering data for assessments and compliance or even identifying radicalization in our schools.

In recent years, there has been a very significant change both in what is taught and how it is taught. Reading provides one example of the latter. The 'look and say' approach – where children learnt to memorise words and that held sway until the late 1960s – seemed to most parents to work just fine. Now the trend is focused on phonics-based teaching, where children decode words by sounds. The Teaching of Mathematics has also fragmented. If you follow the debate about what methods we should be using, it is like a geography lesson, with Singapore Maths competing with systems and methodologies imported from Shanghai and Finland. Experts debate the value or dangers of learning tables and the battle of methodologies between East and West. No wonder parents are confused. Your school, however, will have a programme of study – usually working towards Common Entrance, scholarship or some entrance exam – and while your children might not know all you learned at school, I venture they will know a lot more besides. As well as the blurring of how to teach the basic subjects, other traditional

subjects such as History, Geography, Science and Languages, have all evolved and in some ways are better for it. History was traditionally the domain of a relatively small group of white academic historians, but is now as concerned with asking questions as with learning facts by rote. Geography now has a much more practical element and the same is true with Modern Languages. Other subjects have also evolved – Religious Education now has to cover all the major religions, not just Christianity, and science is increasingly involved in its practical work and applications. But it is the other things which have been layered on top which are particularly significant: Computer Science, which is such an important part of modern life; Design Technology; Physical, Social and Health Education (PSHE); 'new' languages such as Spanish or Mandarin; philosophy; well- being; Forest skills and so on. Schools are also charged with all manner of new tasks from providing nutritional school meals, teaching sex education, providing extended day care, monitoring health and safety through risk assessments and rafts of record keeping and bureaucracy. Little wonder there is such frustration and misunderstanding amongst parents about what is going on education. Schools struggle to satisfy two masters. On one hand, the need to educate children to be imaginative and creative, possessing good communication skills, self-confidence, an ability to think independently and be able to show initiative. On the other, the need to prepare them for the barrage of tests they will face as their privilege for being educated in the most over- examined country in the western world. Yet while schools do their best to deal with a conveyor belt of new statutory requirements and curriculum changes, so parents' also have to learn to modify their views and expectations on education. Parents need to be well-informed about what is going on in the classroom, as ever, and have some understanding of the curriculum, but they must also accept that education is dynamic and ever-changing. While I suspect some might still feel their children are not as accurate or knowledgeable as they were at the same age, (which may be the case in a very few subjects), they should celebrate the fact that their children are being prepared for life in a way that earlier generations were not.

8. Curriculum at the Crossroads

'*In the past ten years, changes in society mean it's vital to have children who are much more resilient and psychologically strong than before. They need new learning-to-learn skills. But we only measure academic outcomes. Why don't we measure the things that matter. Every other society is talking about these things. Why aren't we?'*

Alison Wolf education author and professor of public sector management, King's College, London. (TES, July 11, 2008)

'*The internet is changing the very nature of human memory. Erudition and experience, the store of knowledge built up by an individual over years, is becoming less important than the ability to focus and edit: extracting information from the machine has superseded the ability to recall it unaided.*' Ben McIntyre The Times January 28, 2010

'For two centuries, the school curriculum has been a collection of subjects and its main aim to transmit subject content to students. Other aims, such as the development of competencies – thinking, creativity, communications etc – have been essentially, by-products, assumed to emerge from the proper teaching of subjects. As knowledge expanded, extra subjects were added to the curriculum. The National Curriculum attempted to define what students needed to know, an attempt doomed to failure by the impossibility of balancing the claims made for subject coverage against limitations of time and space. But there is no longer any way – if, indeed, there ever was – to define a package of subject matter that will do all this. At the same time people need an increasingly complex range of competencies to manage their lives, and their education should develop these. Something has to give.'

From 'The Education Agenda for the Next Parliament' 28 March, 2001 – a collaboration between the Campaign for Learning, the Centre for the Study of Comprehensive Schools, the Lifelong Learning Foundation and the Royal Society of Arts.

'*The problem is that the subjects are still sacrosanct. We shouldn't be hidebound by them. Why do we need algebra or geometry? The answers aren't blindingly obvious. At government level, we need a curriculum based on skills, rather than on knowledge*'

John White, Emeritus Professor, Institute of Education, London (TES 11 July, 2008)

Since the National Curriculum was first introduced in 1988, neither its purpose or content has been subject to a vigorous review. Instead of reflecting changing educational aspirations, the curriculum has kept the country anchored to an education system that is 'monolithic, interconnected and inflexible'.

This claim made by Alison Wolf in 2008 formed part of the backdrop to the recent primary curriculum review, requesting that it redefine its purpose and significantly modify its content to include the skills required for 'learning to learn'. While arguably the new curriculum represents a change in direction, it is evident that the significant deemed necessary for the curriculum to keep pace with societal needs and aspirations has not been achieved; as result, it is likely that more drastic surgery is still urgently required.

This magnitude of change will not be easy to initiate let alone carry through. As we have seen in the lead up to elections, any discussion about changing the curriculum is bound up in political dogma and expediency, more likely to favour the status quo or even a regression. Recently, Michael Gove launched the Conservative education manifesto centred round a revival of traditional subject matter which he argued had served the country so well in the past. In it, he cited the value of learning the kings and queens of England, the times tables, the value o correct spelling and punctuation and being able to recite poetry by heart to replace the child-centred learning evident in our classrooms in which children vote with their feet to study such subjects as media studies in preference to anything more rigorous. His statement caused considerable comment at the time, yet it was frightening in its timidity and its pitch to nostalgia. The fact that it assumed that nothing has changed in the interim, that technology had not altered our landscape, that the body of knowledge has not expanded exponentially, that the tools available to us have not altered the way we should think and deliver education verged on the irresponsible. It was

Luddite in its advocacy and while unsurprisingly it garnered some considerable support from conservatives and the elderly, largely because it reflected something that they knew as a 'good traditional education' (for it was the same they had experienced), it was, in truth, a pretty poor offering.

The new primary curriculum, released last year for implementation in 2011 starts to move the curriculum forward by identifying six key areas of learning designed to 'capture the essential knowledge, key skills and understanding' that children need, these being: understanding the arts; understanding English, communication and language; historical, geographical and social understanding; ,mathematical understanding; understanding physical development, health and well-being; and scientific and technological understanding. While light years from the Gove curriculum, even so, it is sobering to think that by the time it comes to be implemented, it may also be out of date.

The education manifestos of the major parties and the current curriculum, of course, only serve as appetisers to the real debate, the seminal issue as to what form our curriculum should take in the future. It is this question that may still well lead to the most drastic overhaul of the curriculum in more than a century, the unravelling of our long-held ideas about what a curriculum should be and the dismantling of its traditional subject-based infrastructure. It is possible, even, that all subjects will be subjugated to a curriculum built around competencies and skills with its focus on teaching pupils how to learn, how to adapt to different systems and patterns, how to learn to access and process information and better utilise technology as the basis for learning in order to make judgements and decisions.

Of course, nothing quite so drastic may happen. Change in national education is historically conservative, reacting to, rather than anticipating, the needs of its constituent society. And it is possible that the new primary curriculum, in spite of its reviews and amendments, will plug the gap even if it, too, is in danger of falling further behind the accelerated changes in technology and aspiration. As the voices for change, dramatic and far-reaching change become more shrill and prevalent and the clamour grows,

so we must be prepared to look at what we do, not with an eye looking back to what we've always done, but to what we need to do in order simply to keep up.

9. (Un)natural Selection

From the book, The Ins and Outs of Selective Secondary Education: A Debate edited by Anastasia de Waal published by Civitas in March, 2015

It is naïve to approach the subject of selection without recognising that the process of selecting the most able children for admission to high- achieving schools has long been a mainstay of our education system. The culling of grammar schools in the 1970s and subsequent fall in Britain's standing in international rankings over recent years has reinforced the views of those who feel we need to become more selective, not less. After all, the argument runs, in any society, selection by a pre-determined set of criteria is an inherent part of life's process, whether it be in determining university places or securing jobs. That journey is inevitable and happens using criteria applied competitively through some form of assessment – unless, of course, that society resorts to social engineering or giving preference to particular social or ethnic groups according to factors other than the ability to do the job (or fulfil the demands of a course). It is what we are used to.

Except that having spent half of my teaching career in New Zealand, it was not what I was used to. There, almost all schools, state and independent, are non-selective and, even though independent schools have much the same percentage of pupils as in the UK, they provide no tangible advantage in terms of future job success over their peers from state schools. Even though the first examinations that have any significance are not until Year 11, this system has produced many leaders both at home and abroad, including a significant number of prominent academics now based in this country, who have all benefited from the greater opportunities afforded from being allowed to develop at their own pace.

In addressing the subject, I will focus on three key issues. First, to ask the question as to how long the process of selection can be delayed in order to allow children to mature and develop and for other factors to even out before making the decision to divide a cohort. In asking this question, it is important to note that it is not selection per se that is on trial, for that is an inevitable and necessary part of life, but whether selective entry based on academic testing when used by schools (and especially in the primary years), best serves our children and our society or is anything other than a convenience. Second, to look at the criteria used in such selection and ask whether the end result of entrance tests caters for children and young adults who are carefully prepared and able to pass examinations, but which fail a large percentage of the population without such advantages. And third, to look at the social, emotional and physical cost of driving children too far, too soon, and the toxic underbelly that can result from early selection, something too rarely acknowledged especially by selective schools.

To address all three issues, we need to look at what passes as 'education' and what we have come to accept, often unwittingly, as a process of selection for reasons of expedience. It is not an easy argument for those used to associating selection with academic rigour and can be used to fuel our prejudice against any change by labelling it as 'dumbing down'. We all deal best with what we know which makes it difficult to consider that the system of selecting children for schools by a series of tests as young as three may be inherently flawed. Such a process is particularly widespread in independent and grammar schools, where pressure for places can mean that the level for entry can be as high as the marketplace will tolerate, (whether this is in the best interests of the child or not). Not only do we accept this as normal, but we celebrate those schools that produce the best results, regardless of how easy their journey has been. Those that defend selection use a range of arguments as to why this process is necessary, usually centred around the contention that it enables the most able to be taught at a level that maximises their natural ability and that each and every

child is offered an education commensurate with their ability. Which sounds sensible at first glance, but on closer examination is anything but.

Any system based on selection presupposes that ability is fixed in time and that it can be easily measured. We therefore have the situation in London and the South East, where children are often selected at pre- school age when their abilities have more to do with the level of maturation, of readiness, and the home situation than anything else. It presupposes, amongst other presumptions, that such results wouldn't be achieved by a system of setting and streaming in otherwise non-selective schools. It also presupposes that such a system of educational apartheid produces better all-round students rather than the expected high grades and has a wider benefit for society.

In essence, the selection criteria used in almost all instances are there to help identify the brightest and most able pupils, regardless of other considerations, including socioeconomic factors, maturation or dependence on external factors such as tutoring. It is a process with no defined ceiling that ultimately produces children layered in different strata based, in the main, on examination or test results. The pressure placed on children, parents and schools at each point where selective criteria are involved is often irrational and can have little to do with education per se, but everything to do with enabling selective schools and universities to sort the wheat from the chaff. Except it doesn't. What it produces is children and young adults who have been placed in schools where expectations and the standard of teaching are high and examination results are impressive, but that often lack the ability to intellectually scrap with or learn off children with different abilities. Of more concern than those it isolates and benefits, however, is that the system rejects those whose trajectory is slower, who take longer to mature, who lack the support and preparation yet who, in time, could well be better students, given a greater opportunity and lead-in time. Children don't need to be pushed as far as they can endure at an increasingly young age since this often results in considerable collateral damage, usually not recognised until later. This is not education.

This is a form of Social Darwinism in which the strongest survive, but only while they remain in the comfort zone of the like-minded. Whether these children develop the resources or resourcefulness to cope once the tutors and teachers undo the ropes is far from assured; in essence, what they have been taught is how to maximise their performance in exams whether this is healthy or not or whether it curtails their intellectual development; what they have not been taught is how to relate to a range of intelligences and abilities, to mix with those not the same as them, whether in aptitude, background, ability or aspiration. Such a process does not allow the child to show what has been learned outside academia, offers few opportunities to share any original ideas or conversational skills and only a muted ability to engage beyond the four walls of prescribed thought. George Orwell recognised such entry tests as a 'sort of confidence trick' in which the student's job was to 'give an examiner the impression that you knew more than you did' dependent as much on the skill of teachers to teach the techniques required to pass exams than anything was, and is, the system that favours the advantaged rather than the able, and its cull of talented children is lamentable. If we are to get the best from all our children and thereby increase social mobility and raise aspirations, we should start by fixing a system of school entry that does huge damage to the social fabric of our society and, worse, discriminates against the majority of the school population.

Selection lies at the heart of this form of education. In itself, it does nothing to encourage reflective thinking, intellectual initiative, the ability to work in teams, the need for highly developed communications skills or to learn to relate to people of different abilities. Its focus is on outcomes, on producing results, on raising standards by a very limited measure, even if such results are not enduring and divide communities. In running a school for many years, I have always had one simple premise, one overriding question I have asked myself at any point in time, viz., what is the best education my school can provide for its children (that is, each and every child)? This is distinct from the question so often asked by heads which is: 'What are the best results I can get for my school?' While the two questions

are not mutually exclusive, between them there is a gulf that raises the one overwhelming question, of how we judge the success or otherwise of an education. Do we take it from grades achieved through a series of entrance exams, SATs, Common Entrance, GCSE and the like which measure a specific ability to pass tests, often under duress; or by an education that is inclusive and which produces successful, adaptable, globally aware adults committed to life-long learning? For one of the more disgraceful acts of selective education is the annual culling of students after GCSE on the grounds that either the school cannot properly cater for them (for which, shame on the school), or worse, that they will affect the school's results and therefore, its academic standing.

There are, of course, other ways to cater for a range of ability within institutions, notably by setting (placing students of similar ability in classes for particular subjects), streaming (separating students by class groups based on an average ability or predetermined criteria) or better differentiation by better trained teachers. And while I do not suggest that streaming should be seen in the same light as selection, (particularly if such systems are open, flexible and constantly reviewed), the practice does again tend to 'fix' students in bands, which directly affects progress, as research on how students and teachers respond to different expectations has clearly shown. Many of the arguments put forward in favour of streaming suggest, for instance, that children get better results in streamed schools; that they can be stretched, if able, and can be better supported if not (for instance, if they have learning difficulties); and that teachers achieve better results when teaching pupils of similar abilities. There is, inevitably, a corollary to each of these claims, but in essence the case for streaming is founded on the assertion that the process results in higher levels of achievement for all children, commensurate with their ability – which would be fine if ability was fixed, if the separation of children of different ability was proven to be beneficial to all and other factors such as work ethic, levels of maturation, attitude and background didn't tell us otherwise. And therein lies a multitude of problems, not least in determining what constitutes a good education and at what age these judgements can be made. Even as a means

of producing the best academic results, it is flawed, as evidence from non-selective, non- streamed school systems would indicate. Setting, in turn, has the merit of not separating students from their peers across the board, while allowing for specific abilities and talents to be nurtured. Unlike streaming, setting is more likely to be fluid, especially with common assessment across the entire cohort and has much to commend it as a way of meeting children's educational needs although, again, it should not be introduced too early in a child's schooling where separation can have a generally deleterious effect.

If we take a closer look at the process of selective schooling, which can start as young as age three, what we find is that selection usually reflects the degree of parental attachment and support rather than academic potential. Sadly, once these very first decisions are made which result in divisions being made between cohorts of children, it is hard to alter the template or reverse the process. These decisions could, in future, be aided and abetted by planned baseline tests in numeracy and literacy for four year-olds which is no doubt why they have received so much comment from the teaching profession. Tests and assessments that focus largely on targets and attainment at such a young age can have a huge impact on establishing the corridors of learning for children which will determine the rest of their lives. Yet the validity of this data is very questionable. With SATs tests the pressures are similar although the older the child is, the less impact the process is likely to have. This is even more so at age 13 when entry tests are widely used for gaining admission into many independent schools. The question, however, is not whether segregation works or is fair, but whether it is actually necessary? The rationale for many independent and selective state schools is simple: by demanding that pupils are at a high level prior to entering their schools, their schools are able to secure a disproportionate share of Oxbridge and Russell Group places by which measure they can actively market themselves. As a business case for schools, it is hard to dispute, even ignoring the obvious caveat that pupils need to have been extended through the early years even to be accepted by such schools. As a result, entry levels are at record levels, especially in London and the South

East, leading to a boom in tutoring and a commensurate rise in emotional and physiological problems amongst children as they strive to compete out of their comfort zone to achieve a measure that, sadly, has less to do with education than securing a place at an oversubscribed school.

So attached are we to league tables we often avoid asking the obvious questions about whether the process actually works. Does the business case, for instance, override the moral responsibility of schools to provide an appropriate level of education? What happens to those children who happen to reach their potential later in life? Is there any social fall-out caused by the separation of students based simply on their ability to pass examinations? What is the value-added measure of students at highly selective schools over less selective or even non-selective schools? Does selection produce better students – or better adults? Or is our examination system producing clones for the sake of expediency? Apart from the obvious flaw of using data based on examination results to determine what is a 'good' school for a particular child, league tables often show no more than how selective a school is. When schools advertise themselves by their results with no reference to their selection process, therefore, they are complicit in a process that serves to deceive. Of course, selective schools will do well, and the more selective the better. This is what selection delivers. Which is why they should not be judged on the number of places they obtain at Russell Group universities or the like, but how many graduate, how many go on to get jobs, and how many have the emotional intelligence to match their academic achievements to bring to their future relationships and families.

Schools use a variety of increasingly sophisticated tests to select their pupils although a few, such as Eton, now rely on interviews or other more appropriate means of assessment as much as data. Durham University's Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring has become associated with many of these often bespoke tests, but too often their services are sought by schools as a means of convenience because other measures would take more time and effort, even though using such data alone is fraught with

danger. Looking at early attempts to measure intelligence, the widespread use of the IQ test in the first half of the twentieth century came about for a variety of reasons, including the need to identify mental retardation in children. One of the pioneers, French psychologist Alfred Binet, a key developer of what later became known as the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scales, however, came to the conclusion that intelligence was multifaceted, but came under the control of practical judgement 'otherwise known as good sense, practical sense, initiative, or the faculty of adapting Intellect on its own is not a measure of potential success; sadly, it is often the opposite, as Binet was to evidence himself when his tests were used by the eugenics movement in the USA as a proof of intellectual disability, resulting in thousands of American women, most of them poor African Americans, being forcibly sterilised based on their scores on IQ

The reliance on data and results without placing them into a proper context is undoubtedly one of the problems. I have been in education long enough to regard IQ scores with caution. I am even reluctant for teachers to know the IQ of their pupils and most certainly parents. This isn't some form of denial, but simply the effect that data has on the way we judge people, creating a glass ceiling of expectation. IQ taken on its own is a poor measure of ability or future success. I have known too many people with high IQs who achieved nothing of note, who lacked any sense of purpose or responsibility and whose emotional intelligence quotient (EQ) was sadly deficient. Indeed there is evidence that very many 'intelligent' people are deficient in other areas of life, particularly those who have had their education in the narrow corridor of academia, who struggle in relationships and in making moral judgements and who end up in positions of power and influence. Invariably, such people are the product of selective schooling. On the other hand, I have also known a similar number whose IQ was in the average band, or even below, but who more than compensated for a lack of IQ points by displaying Binet's 'practical judgement' who overcame whatever number was attached to them. They are often the high-achievers, achieving the balance between intelligence and the ability to do something with it.

One of the arguments put forward for selection is that it promotes academic excellence, that any deviation from such an approach would result in a drop in standards and that departure from selection is an example of the liberal approach to education that has ruined the country's schools. That is simply not true. There is no reason why education should not be every bit as rigorous in non-selective schools, especially with a judicious use of setting and streaming. It is not lowering standards and expectations, but the opposite. It is, however, likely to be more challenging for teachers who are not equipped to teach a wider range of abilities, who can only operate in the closeted world of selective schools and whose strengths are, sadly, restricted to teaching to the test. The training of teachers to improve the differentiation of their lessons by employing the different abilities and intelligences of their pupils to complement, create and enhance the learning of all, is still given too little place in teacher training. If we want to improve our schools, improving the craft of our teachers is a good place to start.

So much of current practice is based on the assumption that by selecting children earlier, we end up with better educated – not just more knowledgeable – adults. Hand in hand with the disquiet caused by league tables, the competition for places at top schools and universities, the calls to start formal education earlier and the referred pressures placed upon teachers and schools to deliver, however, has come an epidemic of stress related diseases, eating disorders and mental illness. We ignore the statistics at our peril and the fact that an estimated 80,000 children in Britain suffer from severe the number of children with sexually transmitted diseases has nearly and that the number of teenagers who self-harm has increased by 70 per cent in the last two years, should be of paramount Add to that, children struggling with eating disorders and body image and with the residue of family breakdowns, and the priorities change, along with our definition of what constitutes a balanced and successful education. Is this reality really any surprise when we have an approach to education that is focused on driving up standards without ever appearing to consider how such a thing might be best achieved or even the fundamental question of what, in this

day, represents the best education for our children? How do we go about building character and resilience, growing aspirations, and having less emphasis placed on summative exams which can stifle curiosity and independent thought? What place does discipline – including self-discipline – have in learning? What is the best mix of knowledge and skills? Naturally, we should insist on excellence and try to improve examination results – but not at any price. Instead, we should be looking at how we measure children – and why.

In evaluating whether we are placing our priorities in the right areas, we should look at the disjoint between what schools are producing, often by placing children under duress, and what employers, universities and, dare I say, society wants. We should focus on addressing key issues like class size, classroom discipline, teacher training (and re-training), as well as the amount of funding lost to bureaucracy, and look to move the focus in education from demanding more from children in the way of time and tenuous results to asking more of them as people. We need to give our schools some social capital. At present, it appears there is no time for deviation in our quest for better exam results, no time for exploration, no time for the commensurate social development that needs to take place, no time to allow for readiness or for challenging the scurrilous idea that education is confined to the walls of a classroom. Parents and children are weary of hearing comments about how initiative, curiosity and time for collaborative learning are all sacrificed because 'they are not being examined'. And for what? Are our children at 18 better motivated or better educated? Or just better drilled and tutored, but in fact, less- rounded, less resilient, less inclined to want to keep learning? As a consequence, we have children being blamed for not working harder, cynical about what lies ahead for them; teachers being lampooned for the lack of effectiveness in raising performance and aspirations; and schools sacrificing children on the altar of league table for their own ends. All of this is a disaster. We seem to be looking everywhere and nowhere: the Far East, Australasia, Finland, as if there is some trick to it. There is not for we know that education is simple: it is about the effectiveness of the engagement; developing attitudes

and a good work ethic; raising expectations; inspiring and facilitating ideas; and setting students new challenges and the intellectual freedom to deliver. It is about engendering self-discipline; it is about the quality of what is delivered and acquired, not the quantity; it is about starting children on a lifelong journey, not subjecting them to a marathon, before their brains and bones are set. We should focus more on character and values, nurturing creativity and initiative and less on prescribed knowledge if we are really wanting to get the best from our children.

Academically the early pressure placed on children raises several issues and it is right that we question the presumption that early selection benefits children and is a requirement for later academic success. In a novel based on the life of Katherine Mansfield, C.K. Stead wrote in the person of Bertrand Russell: 'People of my sort... have a lot to unlearn. Too much is laid on us too early. We grow up There is much to be said for not cluttering the mind, for not forcing the excessive acquisition of knowledge and encouraging children to think and question rather than to putting children under pressure at a young age simply to provide a mechanism for selection. There is considerable evidence from very successful school systems, such as in Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Belgium, Canada, New Zealand and Australia that less selective systems work at least as well as a more rigorous selective system, in academic terms alone as well as producing a more cohesive society. *(insert i)*

And finally, what are the lessons for parents? Do not be seduced by schools that are selective based solely on an entrance examination. Treat league tables with caution as sometimes all they reflect is how selective schools are. Avoid schools that refuse siblings for the sake of a few percentage points or who cull at the end of GCSEs. Ask how they differentiate their teaching (and setting and streaming could be part of this). Good schools use interviews as a key part of their process. Be wary of schools that lack the staff to be able to differentiate (and especially those who employ staff based on the universities they attended rather than their ability to teach); ensure your children are comfortable in the schools that

they are going to, for they need to be challenged, but not overwhelmed. Look for schools that measure their performance by value- added or by the breadth of what they offer. Whether schools stream and set their pupils is fine so long as classes and sets are not set in stone, but allow for development (and regression). Make sure their selection process, if they have one, is not based solely on a desire to move up the league tables for that is one way to ensure your child will not get the education that will sustain them throughout their lives. After all, the best measure of education is the skills, knowledge, attitudes and values that survive formal schooling, not by how much is learned, jettisoned and forgotten on the way. The happiest, most successful adults are those who have been challenged and enthused by their education, not downtrodden by it.

i. G. Orwell, *Such, Such Were the Joys*, London, Penguin Great Ideas, 2014, p.9.
ii A. Binet and T. Simon, *The Development of Intelligence In Children*, 1916, pp.42- 43.
iii The principal advocate of Binet's work being adapted for this purpose was Henry Goddard: H. Goddard, *The Kallikak Family: A Study In the Heredity of Feeble-Mindedness,* New York, Macmillan, 1912.
iv Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health: 'Steep rise in children suffering depression', News and Campaign, 30 September, 2013
v A Gregory 'Teen STIs Plague: 15,000 underage teenagers caught sexually transmitted infections in last three years.' Daily Mirror, 22 March, 2013
vi I. Johnston, 'Number of children who self-harm jumps 70% in just two years,' The Independent 11 August, 2014
vii C.K. Stead, *Mansfield,* London, Harvill, 2004, p.176.

In the final editing of the book, the following was deleted and understandably so in that it focused on case studies that detracted from the thesis. I have included them here for the purpose of illustration and because I feel they give some support to the experience of a non-selective school system, in this case, New Zealand.

"In looking at the evidence from New Zealand, noting the country's position on the PISA's rankings and its paucity of selective schools, Katherine Mansfield's compatriots

might add something to the debate as to whether selective schooling helps children succeed. From the evidence, it would seem unlikely. If we consider Felicity Lusk, Headmistress of Abingdon College, Sir Graham Davies, former Vice-Chancellor of Liverpool and London Universities and now Chair of the Higher Education Policy Institute, John Hood, recently retired Vice Chancellor of Oxford University; and Dame Judith Mayhew Jonas, former Chair of the Independent Schools Council, we might reflect on the fact that all were educated at non-selective state schools in New Zealand; as were, more recently, Elizabeth Catto, winner of the Mann Booker prize for 2013 or film director, Peter Jackson. Almost certainly their first significant exam would have been the equivalent of GCSE and, like GCSE, at a level not far above the Common Entrance exam that is used in independent schools and that the Minister for Education has suggested be adopted as a measure for all schools. A more recent example would be the appointment of Ross McEwan as Head of the Royal Bank of Scotland whose business degree from Massey University in New Zealand was notable (in terms of all he has achieved since) for the fact that he failed the accountancy module – twice!

In teaching sixth form History in a non-selective independent school in New Zealand, I revelled in having boys and girls who were at school for their final years primarily for the rowing or rugby and who were destined for the family farm, studying alongside keen academics (two of whom, in my last two years there went straight from the school to Cambridge where they both achieved first class degrees). How better balanced they were from their school experience than if they had been separated off from their peers at an early age simply because of their ability to pass exams.

And, of course, we can find numerous examples at home. To mention only two: Amanda Foreman, who won the Whitbread Prize for her biography 'Georgina: Duchess of Devonshire", based on her doctorate thesis from Oxford. At A levels she got two Cs and, disastrously, an E in English. She re-took her English at a crammer - and still got an E. Although she applied twice, not one British University made her an offer. Such is the way we measure our children. Thankfully, by going to the United States and beginning her tertiary education there, all came right, but how many others have been similarly lost to a patently flawed system? Another example from a different field of endeavour is that of David Hemery who was born in Gloucestershire, but educated in the United States. As a youth, he was dyslexic and unable to read until the age of ten, and

at 14 years weighed six stone and was only five feet and three inches high. Not the resume one would expect from someone who went on to win a gold medal in the 400 metres hurdles and who since has written four books and accumulated four degrees from Boston, Oxford and Harvard - and who didn't specialise in a single sport until he was twenty. How far would he have got in the rigorously selective environment of his homeland? What chance would he have had?

Which brings us back to the whole vexed question of when children reach their academic maturity. Some time ago, I attended a conference in which one of the speakers, a very successful army doctor spoke about his rather ordinary school career at a grammar school in Norfolk. When he was in his final year of school, several of his teachers complimented him that at last he was starting to work. His reply was telling: 'No', he said, 'I've always worked this hard. The difference is I've only just got it.' We all 'get it' at different ages. For some, whose school careers are like shooting stars, they are ablaze at twelve, but burnt out by twenty. Others have a longer fuse and their trajectory is enduring, so long as they haven't been placed away in a box of duds somewhere for failing to ignite when required. We need to be patient; we need to keep doors open; and we need to re-assess the criteria we use to determine potential and place more stead on such attributes as attitude, curiosity and a decent work ethic; and finally, we need to take on board our social responsibilities in extending children beyond academic criteria and to ensure the business plan of schools does not contradict the ethics and purpose of education. To do all of these things, we need to reform the process of selection, for the cost of casting children aside at a young age is both wrong and a waste of talent. We need to humanise our process and ask what our schools are for.

Postscript:
In any argument against too early or too rigorous selection in order to provide for a more inclusive school system and to make greater use of the nation's talent pool that is its youth, delaying selection is, but a subtext to the greater changes that are required. What is needed is more than a change in government policy or an increase in the number of free schools; imperative is a shift in the way we tackle the constraints that hold the majority of children back from achieving their potential. There is no point in talking of raising expectations and increasing opportunities without giving the young an assurance that such things are possible, that there is, in fact, no glass ceiling. It is about having a plan

for addressing issues of access and fairness and a commitment to educate all the nation's young in such a way as to maximise their ability, both for their and, as important, for the nation's benefit.

Of late, there has been a clamour for more grammar schools, a debate that will rumble on. If we accept the historical constraints to accessing a 'good school', the disproportionate numbers of students from independent schools securing internships and job opportunities through networking and nepotism, the distorted school system and the comparative failure of the comprehensive system to inculcate aspiration and provide a breadth of education, not through its own failings, but because of government's lack of ambition for them, then the ongoing clamour for an increase in their number is not surprising. So long as entry to grammar schools is based exclusively on an academic entrance examination, however, all the same problems would remain, exacerbating the problems of selection. It may be, in the eyes of many, the devil's work and also run counter to the principle of deferred selection which I have advocated, but in a society where social divisions are widening despite all the government has tried to put in place, including more overt social engineering, academies and free schools and pressure on the charitable nature of independent schools, then at least one leaky conduit may be better than nothing at all. It is not and can never be the answer, yet in searching for pragmatic responses to a system so full of potholes one can understand why it has so many advocates