

THINK NATIONAL, WORK LOCAL

All the signs point to 2017 being a year in which crisis in the education service continues to intensify without attracting a great deal of public attention.

Schools are running out of money and finding it increasingly difficult to pay for teachers (which, perhaps, is just as well, as the latter are a disappearing commodity). Such public money as there is continues to be wasted in large quantities on the failing programme of academies and “free” schools and later this year the Prime Minister will waste a great deal of parliamentary time in trying to introduce her reactionary plan to expand selective schooling.

Nevertheless, thanks to Brexit, Trump and the woes of the NHS, education is not likely to command many headlines. It is even more important, therefore, that members and supporters of CASE make every effort to get their voices heard in every possible way.

In this edition, along with a report of the latest “Reclaiming Education” conference, we include two accounts of how members of CASE are actively campaigning in their local communities, in the hope that other members will be inspired to follow their example.

LIES, DAMNED LIES AND STATISTICS

Among the clichés that characterised the new Secretary of State’s address to the Conservative Party conference was the assertion that

“there is evidence that” the tiny handful of children from deprived backgrounds who attend grammar schools make “faster progress” than children of similar backgrounds who attend other types of school.

This claim has since been regularly repeated by Conservative politicians and has even appeared in the DFE’s recent “consultation” about grammar schools.

Missing from the claim is any evidence that the DFE has obeyed the first rule of statistical comparison and compared like with like.

It is hardly news that selected children do better than rejected ones in areas such as Kent, where selection has continued virtually unchanged since 1948. But do they do better than children of *similar background* and, crucially, better than those of *similar ability* who live in areas where there is no selection at all?

The DFE cannot say but this has not deterred it from repeating a claim that is at best meaningless and at worst a downright lie. At least one government department is at home in the “post-truth” era!

BURIED TREASURE!

Do you know of an old local CASE bank account? Last year, Barbara Gilgallon and Barney King unearthed funds belonging to the now-defunct Richmond Association for the Advancement of State Education and Richmond Campaign for State Education, resulting in a windfall of over £2,500!

More recently, members in the Leeds area have also dug-up a substantial donation.

There may be other education action groups with unused funds. For instance, when Leicestershire Parents Opposed to Opting out (anti GM schools) closed, they donated the few hundred pounds they had either to CASE or ACE.

Could you do the same?”

CASE believes in a fully comprehensive, locally accountable and democratic education system.

NO RETURN TO SELECTION

“RECLAIMING EDUCATION” ALLIANCE CONFERENCE 2016

When first planned, the conference was to be a celebration of the half century since Circular 10/66, which set in train the major move towards establishing non-selective comprehensive schooling in UK state education. Its title, *The Stalled Revolution*, was an acknowledgment that there was more work to be done. However, by the time of the conference it had become clear that the government intended to sweep away what progress had been made since 1966 and was planning to expand selective education.

Anne West contextualised the current situation with a historical review. The need for universal free education was recognised as urgent during World War II and the 1944 Act enabled its introduction. But the introduction reflected the contemporary confusion between aptitude, ability and attainment and the now discredited belief that measuring the last of these gave reliable information about the former two. The problem was further complicated by the belief held by many in authority that aptitude and ability were genetically determined rather than mediated by upbringing. The result—testing children at age eleven and then dividing them by the spurious “ability” inferred from the test result led to a system which, by 1947, had placed a minority of children into grammar schools and the rest into under-resourced and undervalued secondary modern schools.

It soon became apparent that the system had serious defects. Grammar school children with a working class background tended to be failed disproportionately by their schools and to drop out by the age of fifteen. Significant numbers of middle class parents whose children failed to get into grammar schools were concerned that secondary modern education was very limiting. The eleven plus tests themselves were known to be unreliable in their own terms so that many children were assigned to unsuitable schools. The comprehensive movement, which ideally would have abolished 11+ selection, began to emerge in the 1950’s in response to grass roots discontent but it was not until the Labour Government of Harold Wilson that it received ministerial approval in the form of Circulars 10/65 and 10/66. These encouraged but did not require Local Authorities to become comprehensive. As a result of this weak approach, 163 grammar schools remain.

Kent is one of 15 educational authorities in which selection has survived almost unchanged since 1948. **Jo Bartley**, a Kent parent, presented a number of moving vignettes about Kent children whose life chances and

mental health had been damaged by the selective system. The system splits siblings and friendship groups. About forty per cent of Kent parents will spend up to £2,000 a year on private tuition for their primary school children. Few children entitled to Free School Meals attend Kent grammar schools. The tests themselves are known to be about 30% inaccurate.

Richy Thomson of the Fair Admissions Campaign (FAC) and the British Humanist Society described how faith schools allow parents to game the admission system in order to separate their children from those of the less well-off. There are 3,600 faith schools in the country. FAC research discovered 1,500 breaches of the Schools Admissions Code committed by faith schools, such as the requirement to be actively involved in parish work, in the case of some Catholic schools, and to be a paying member of a synagogue to gain access to some Jewish schools. The Labour government’s response to these breaches was to ban “vexatious” enquiries by organisations such as FAC! The present government proposes to remove the 50% cap on religious selection that has been applied to faith schools to ensure an element of diversity. Richy urged that campaigning against the re-introduction of academic selection should be combined with opposing selection on religious grounds.

Roy Perry, the Conservative leader of Hampshire County Council, made it clear that the attempt to expand academic selection at age eleven would meet strong evidence-based opposition across the political spectrum. Hampshire runs an effective comprehensive education service that is committed to supporting all its schools and is reluctant to being forced to give up this rôle. There are some 29 Conservative MPs who are opposed to the idea of creating more grammar schools. Opposition in the House of Lords is even stronger.

Melissa Benn summed up the current situation and outlined the tasks ahead. There had always been bi-partisan support for comprehensive education. The Labour Party had always been ambivalent about selection and had missed many opportunities to phase it out. The new Labour leadership still seem reluctant to take on the struggle against selection. All the evidence makes it clear that the return of selection will be disastrous for the country but, in the current climate, intellectual arguments carry little weight.

Our arguments have to work at the emotional level: currently people embrace nostalgia for a mythical age
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“DOING SOMETHING” LOCALLY

IN BARNET - by Jenny Brown

“Doing something” in Barnet meant joining local resident and teacher organisations in order to network, organise and learn about the local situation.

Most Barnet secondary schools converted to academy status around 2010 and remain as “stand alone” secondary schools. Including two “free” schools, there are 17 secondary academies. Primary “free” schools brought several multi-academy trusts (MATs) to Barnet.

This led to the formation of Barnet Parents Defending Education (BPDE), a campaign to protect our 90 local authority primary schools and remaining LA secondary schools.

Grandparents, residents, governors, teachers and support staff were included in setting up BPDE. We used a template of an on-line constitution, held meetings in our homes, produced leaflets on the situation in Barnet for parents at school gates. We wrote to local papers, governing bodies, and MPs.

We made use of the summer holidays to continue talking to parents in parks and playgrounds and we raised funds for a front page advert in a local paper to focus on four Barnet issues. One of these was/is the continuing underfunding of our LA schools and another was a proposal for the MAT “Reach 2” to take over one of our primary schools. Two more issues are described in more detail below.

In April last year, the Council’s Education and Skills contract, worth £70 million, was awarded to Mott MacDonald Ltd, a construction company who have a joint venture in a MAT trading as Cambridge Education. We began to gather information, attend Council meetings and submit written questions and at the end of last year we held a public meeting, airing the serious concerns that have arisen from the award of this contract. The meeting was streamed on social media.

There is a proposal for 2017 for the MAT “ARK” to build a new school in Barnet. The site is small although the DfE purchased it for Ark more than two years ago for £14.2 million. Hundreds of Barnet residents wrote to object to ARK’s planning application, which is now referred to the Council Planning Committee.

ARK’s plan for the new school involves replacing qualified teachers with teaching assistants to supervise computerised learning. Our challenge is to work with Barnet NUT, CASE and others to raise public awareness of this.

CASE provides authoritative material, support and advice. We have a growing contact list instead of membership (we encourage people to join CASE) while offering a broad invitation to get involved, become informed and look after our schools.

Jenny Brown is a local campaigner.

IN LEWISHAM - by Nicky Dixon

This education journey started when my son was in Year 6 and we had made our choices of secondary schools. We heard in December 2014 that Lewisham Council planned to intervene in the secondary school we had chosen - the biggest in the borough - by changing the leadership team: an interim board was appointed in January 2015, a new head teacher appointed in April 2015 and a full-time CEO from July 2015.

A few Y6 parents met our MP, local councillors, had meetings with the Director of Children & Young People (CYP) and the Cabinet CYP Councillor CYP to better understand the concerns. Many Y6 parents decided to support the new leadership team for the good of our children and we have kept communication channels open with our MP, councillors and officers, our school’s leadership team and the RSC, which I think is very important, if you want to have a voice and a seat at the education table, as a parent.

In early 2016, I realised from talking to councillors and parents how little knowledge there was about the Education & Adoption Bill and decided to write a CASE South-East London Newsletter. I wrote 5 Newsletters in 2016, distributing them to parents, Lewisham Parent Governor Representatives, Schools, Councillors and MPs to share knowledge about our local schools and parliamentary news. White papers and Green papers kept me busy (and still do)!

By invitation, I spoke at the Lewisham Education Select Committee last summer and offered my thoughts on the Lewisham Education Commission report. More recently, I have helped CASE Greenwich to establish itself. I have made some good friends of parents I have met at my son’s school and other Lewisham schools, and we support and visit each other’s schools. We submitted evidence to the Commons Education Select Committee on the Inquiry into Multi Academy Trusts (MATs), and attended a parent workshop to share our experience of MATs – in my case, my son’s school was issued with an Academy Order in May 2016 and a MAT still has not been found to take the school, so my story is of no MATs – perhaps I should be called Nicky-No MAT!

"DOING SOMETHING" LOCALLY

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More than ever our schools need parents' support, particularly with the relentless cutting of funds. My plan is to create a borough-wide parent education network group in Lewisham – parents are a valuable resource for schools and I hope we can share our resource for the benefit of all schools.

Nicky Dixon is a Lewisham parent

EDUCATION AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

A frequent lament of politicians is that "social mobility" has "stalled" and that this has to do with the "dominance" of the privately educated at "the top" of British society.

It does not seem to occur to politicians that, in such a profoundly unequal society as ours, even if every young person in the UK obtained first class honours, the children of the rich would still have the best jobs.

Ah but what about the early post-war years when we had selective education for all, there was "room at the top" and the sons of coal miners went to Oxford and became famous writers?

Sadly, this is a myth. The war itself was much more instrumental in making Britain more democratic than any amount of education and, in the ensuing years, hardly any working class children went to university of any kind, let alone Oxford. Indeed, nearly 80% of children left school at 15 with no qualifications of any kind.

The "room at the top" was, in truth, more like "half way up", as economic changes increased the numbers of "white collar" jobs, reduced the demand for unskilled and semi-skilled labour and forced many employers to help their employees overcome the failures of the school system by providing training and encouraging their workers to attend evening classes.

However, in spite of educational failure, those were days of optimism. Post-war Britain was much more democratic than it had previously been, standards of living for "ordinary" people were rising fast and the gap between richest and poorest was far narrower than it is today.

Now the idea of "social mobility" has become the British version of the "American Dream", constantly invoked by people who have no intention of making it possible.

Michael Pyke

RECLAIMING EDUCATION CONFERENCE

(Continued from page 2)

of aspirational opportunity that never existed. Parents, particularly the young ones with children in primary schools, need to understand that opening a grammar school in an area seriously downgrades the neighbouring schools. They may well aspire to the opportunities for social mobility that they think grammar schools may offer but grammar schools have never had more than a small proportion of working-class students and parents need to understand that most of their children will end up in the secondary moderns that the grammar schools automatically create.

The Conference ended with an address by **Kevin Courtney**, General Secretary of the NUT. The public service ethos of education was under threat from government policy. As an example, he quoted analysis by the Centre for High Performance which produced an eight point list of steps for helping academies lift themselves in the League Tables. Getting rid of "poor quality students" ranked above improving teaching and learning! Viewed as a way of providing high quality education for all, government policy was a failure. Pressure without support was not working. There is a shortage of teachers and head teachers and cuts to school funding will worsen the situation. Kevin concluded by expressing unreserved support for the work of Reclaiming Education.

Who We Are

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Contributions to CASEnotes are welcome.

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