

Governors' Agenda

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This Term's Issue

I	Editorial Teach children to fail well and fast	Page 2
II	Damian Hinds's educational vision	Page 4
III	Children's mental health problems cry out for solutions	Page 7
IV	Promoting children's welfare: foci on obesity and knives	Page 10
V	Main-scale teachers to receive a 3.5% increase in salaries but funding shortages deepens gloom	Page 14
VI	Academy Trust Chiefs' salaries continue to soar	Page 17
VII	New Opportunity Fund to boost provision for bright, disadvantaged children	Page 20
VIII	Ofsted in the spotlight - again	Page 21
IX	Head of steam developing for T levels as launch date draws nearer	Page 27
X	Government turns screws on schools and academies to promote technical education	Page 30
XI	The Education Reform Act (ERA) 1988 celebrates 30 th birthday	Page 32
XII	Glossary of terms used in this issue	Page 37

Editorial

Teach children to fail well and fast

Summer is a time of tests and examinations and autumn of league tables. Throughout the year we have inspections. All three have one thing in common. Achievement. God help children if they fail and thus threaten their schools/academies with a lower rank on the national league table. God help schools/academies if they fail their Ofsted inspections. The education culture in our country appears to be obsessed with success and terrified of failure. I question whether this is the culture we should be promoting.

Education is sometimes compared to a three-legged stool. The first leg constitutes the disciplines/subjects that are taught, often, discretely, subjects such as mathematics, history, geography and music. The second leg is each of the cross-curricular themes that help develop children in a rounded manner – such as expression/language and the ability to think. The third leg is the way education is promoted, e.g. how teachers teach (e.g. telling and teamwork) and enabling children to learn (e.g. discovery, imitation and observation). The late Professor Ted Wragg of Exeter University ascribed a different metaphor to this calling it the cuboid curriculum.

But there is a fourth leg (going by my analogy) or dimension (going by Professor Wragg's one) – i.e. the qualities that we wish to promote within our children, a key one being resilience. Intrinsic within resilience is managing and coping with failure. Because every school/academy wishes to be at the top of its league table, governors, headteachers and staff do everything it takes to succeed. This desire is both, intrinsically and extrinsically, passed on to the pupils. And when they fail, their skies come tumbling down on them – as it did with chicken-licken in the toddler's story.

Sir James Dyson, British inventor and industrial designer, learnt what it was to fail. He built 5,126 prototypes to create a working device for his famous bagless vacuum cleaner. He told Matthew Syed, the writer and journalist: "That was my advantage. I had the resilience to keep going when others might have given up. In fact, I wanted to fail fast, the quicker to learn. That is how technology advances. People trying things, making mistakes and gaining fresh knowledge. Failure is indispensable to success in any complex field."

It took Edison over 2,000 attempts to invent the light bulb. After he had failed 2,000 times, someone asked him what he had achieved. He said: "I have learnt 2,000 ways in which **not** to invent the bulb." He persevered and eventually succeeded.

Children are not born to be terrified of failing. See youngsters learning to walk and toppling over. They pick themselves up and try to continue on two legs. Watch a child playing football for the first time and mistiming a kick. She/he does not throw in the sponge but goes for the ball again to connect with the foot. In fact, children are so mindless of failing, they often go to the other extreme and rush

across a road without heeding the traffic and here is where the adult's intervention becomes necessarily leading the parent/teacher to become the guide on the side (rather than the sage on the stage).

As they progress up the year groups at school/academy, the competition becomes fierce so that they are hesitant about tackling new challenges fearing adverse judgements when they fail. At school, I developed an awful stammer because I was frightened of standing up and making a fool of myself in class when asked to read or answer a question. It was only through the encouragement of a teacher who threatened fire and thunder on my peers if they mocked, that I gradually lost my inhibitions and began to overcome my speech epidemic. This was allied to my losing my fear of failing.

Social media does not help. Youngsters (like adults) want to be successful – in singing, dancing and, of course, how they look. Programmes like the X Factor promote unattainable aspirations and a desire to be famous for 15 minutes. Consequently, pupils are fearful of raising their hands in class and answering questions in case they give the wrong answer and look silly.

Jeff Bezos (Amazon), Larry Page and Sergey Brin (Google) and Bill Gates (Microsoft) have commanded the virtual world because they were not afraid to fail. When they did fail, they tried and tried again. Taking a leaf off the books of the founders of these establishments, the bosses of tech companies now hire people based on their soft skills, such as their ability to take risks and deal with change, rather than potential employees' performances in examinations and tests. Laszlo Bock, ex-head of people operations at Google, said, when he was at Google: "We look for people who can not only solve today's problems, but can also solve whatever unknown problems may come up in the future."

Mathew Syed, the author of *You Are Awesome: Find Your Confidence and Dare to be Brilliant at (Almost) Anything*, wrote in *The Times*: "It's the children who are most successful in class who often struggle most with failure. They are so used to being praised for flawless performances, and getting lots of nice, big ticks, that they can't cope with setbacks when they eventually come along."

The fear of failure is the silent killer of aspiration. To deal with this, some schools and academies are holding "failure weeks" in which parents and members of the public are invited to talk about how they have failed and what they have learnt from it. The former Head of Wimbledon High in South London, said when she was the Headteacher: "Our pupils are successful in their examinations, but they can overreact when things go wrong. We want them to be courageous. It sounds paradoxical, but we dare them to fail."

In his novella, *Worstward Ho*, Samuel Beckett wrote: "Ever tried? Ever failed? No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better." And Winston Churchill, our great wartime leader, said: "Success is not final. Failure is not fatal. It is the courage to continue that counts."

Researchers have provided the following data which we ignore at our peril.

- 1) 48% of children aged 12 to 16 in England feel sad or anxious at least once a week.
- 2) 11% of children aged 12 to 16 are worried about getting enough 'likes' or responses on social media.
- 3) 6% of primary school children want to work in social media or gaming, the fourth most popular career choice.

- 4) 44% of young people in the UK aged 16 to 25 fear there will be fewer job opportunities for their generation over the next three years.
- 5) 21% of young people aged 16 to 25 think that their life will amount to nothing no matter how hard they try.
- 6) 59% of young people aged 16 to 25 cite the political climate as making them feel anxious about their future.

All those working in our education system and parents must do what we can to make children see that the stumbling blocks of failings can be converted into the stepping stones of successes.

Damian Hinds's educational vision

Damian Hinds described the direction in which he will steer the future education of the children in our country. He proposes expanding opportunities for young people by loosening the reins of accountability on schools and academies and giving teachers greater opportunities to grow and develop professionally.

I National Association of Headteachers' Conference

When addressing a conference of the National Association of Headteachers on 4 May 2018 in Liverpool, he told delegates: "Accountability is vital. Children only get one shot at an education and we owe them the best... where they are being let down we need to take action quickly – so no one ends up left behind.

"But what I've found from speaking to many of you these last few months is that there is also real confusion within the sector... I believe school leaders need complete clarity on how the accountability system will operate.

"I'm clear that Ofsted is the body that can provide an independent, rounded judgement of a school's performance.

"This means we will not be forcibly turning schools into academies unless Ofsted has judged them to be inadequate. I believe strongly that becoming an academy can bring enormous benefits to schools. Hundreds of schools every year voluntarily choose to become academies and I want this to be a positive choice for more and more schools as we move forward.

"We must also have a system that does more than just deal with failure... But we will do so in the right way, and there will be a single, transparent data trigger for schools to be offered support – which we will consult on. I intend this to replace the current confusing system of having both below the floor and coasting standards for performance...

"I have a clear message to schools and their leaders: I trust you to get on with the job."

Mr Hinds recognised that those involved in education knew about the "what" that was needed to secure excellent provision for our children. However, there continued to be dissonance on the "how" of

achieving those objectives. While schools and academies – like all other publicly funded institutions – were accountable to the taxpayers, there was “confusion within the sector” on the multiple accountabilities to which school leaders and teachers were subjected.

He said that Ofsted (and only Ofsted) would be the body that would provide independent, rounded judgements on the performances of schools and academies. He wanted schools – including those that required improvement – to be free to make their own decisions, and if they wished to go down the academy route, he thought the choice should be a positive one rather than one stemming from compulsion. Schools that are struggling will, in the first instance, be offered support before being shanghaied into another academisation.

He recognised that the system of having below the floor and coasting standards for performance needed to be replaced by something that was simpler and coherent. To this end, he would be working. What was encouraging was his statement: “I have a clear message to schools and their leaders: I trust you to get on with the job.”

To retain good, experienced teachers in England, he stated that they would be offered up to a year’s paid sabbatical after 10 years’ services. For this purpose, he has set £5 million aside. It is more likely that a teacher will receive a term’s sabbatical, albeit occasionally, she/he could be offered a year off to study or spend time working in an industry relevant to her/his field.

Newly qualified teachers (NQTs) will have their probationary period lengthened from a year to two years. “We will be introducing an enhanced offer of support for new teachers, including extending the induction period to two years,” he said, “and we will work with the profession to develop a new early career content framework that will set out all the training and mentoring a teacher is entitled to receive in those first years.”

Mr Hinds has recognised that the profession is haemorrhaging teachers at a very unhealthy rate. He remarked: “We have a shared goal of making sure teaching remains an attractive, fulfilling profession. We will take an unflinching look at the things that discourage people from going into teaching or make them consider leaving and we will look at how we support teachers to get better at what they do and hone their expertise and career progression.”

Mr Hinds will create an advisory, working group with the teacher unions to help develop the strategy of the Department for Education. Among other things, this working group will address teachers’ workload and how it can be eased for them without negatively affecting the quality of education, the progress that children make and the standards they achieve. He acknowledged that unacceptable burdens were placed on teachers by the policies they set on marking and the data that they were directed to garner and maintain. He hinted that governors and headteachers were responsible but they in turn passed on the pressures from central bodies such as inspectors, Regional School Commissioners (RSCs) and the DfE itself to the front-line workers – teachers and teaching assistants.

He said that standards in the classrooms were higher than ever. Altogether, 89% of schools and academies had been judged Good or Outstanding by Ofsted. This should give us cause to be optimistic.

II Hindsight at the National Governors' Association Conference

Speaking at the National Governors' Association in early June 2018, Mr Hinds touched on four compelling matters.

(a) Chief Executives' and Headteachers' Salaries

First, he said that he wanted Multi-Academy Trusts to “bear down” on excessive salaries for chief executives and headteachers. However, there was no mention of the DfE setting any framework for what was reasonable except that academy accounts would have to detail any salary of over £100,000 which the DfE would challenge publicly. Where leaders were being paid more than £100k, he will want to know the percentage of teaching times these individuals undertake.

(b) Party transactions of relatives

Second, MATs would be required to give detailed accounts on related-party transactions. This is where an academy trust pays for goods and/or services from a company linked to a governor or trustee – whether directly or through a family member. From April 2019, trusts would be required to seek approval of the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) for any related-party transactions more than £20,000. Those sums of under £20,000 would still have to be declared.

(c) Assessing the performance of a Multi-Academy Trust

Mr Hinds intends to establish a new system for assessing whether a MAT should take on new schools and/or academies. Currently, this is based on a MAT's ranking on the performance table, the outcome of an Ofsted inspection and financial data. Also, Regional School Commissioners (RSCs) have criteria for determining whether or not a MAT can expand. Mr Hinds conceded that these mechanisms have limitations, though he did not spell out what criteria or system would be deployed.

He promised that whatever initiative was taken it **would not add to the workload of governors and teachers**. He declared that he would consult MATs and school and academy leaders before going native with it. Further, this would be in addition to the principles for a ‘[clear and simple](#)’ **new accountability system** which the DfE published in May 2018.

(d) Support for governors

Finally, but by no means the least important, he promised more funding for governor and trustee training – double the amount currently available – i.e. up to £6 million. Additionally, he said that there would be better guidance for governors, trustees and clerks. Allied to these carrots was a stick, i.e. that where a MAT was providing weak governance, he would act against it.

Notwithstanding, Mr Hinds praised the work of governors and trustees and thanked them for it. He appealed to people from different ethnic and cultural groups and professionals from varied walks of working life, as well as young people to become governors and trustees. He asked employers to encourage staff become governors by giving them “time to do so” as the BBC and HSBC do. This last message was warmly applauded by the delegates.

Commentary

Mr Hinds’s speeches were welcomed by headteachers, teachers, the unions and governors. However, the biggest fear was that many of his proposals to recruit and retain good teachers, who are in the frontline of the provision we make for our children, could perish on the financial treadmill.

Geoff Barton, the General Secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), said: “It is vital these proposals are properly funded by the government and that they do not end up becoming yet another additional unfunded cost on schools.

“We urge the Treasury to ensure there is sufficient funding in place to deliver these plans. This issue is too important to be allowed to founder on the rocks of austerity.”

Schools and academies are facing a shortfall of 30,000 classroom teachers. Primary schools are better placed than secondary ones. In a survey carried out by the National Education Union (NEU) earlier in the summer survey, 80% of classroom teachers said that they had considered quitting the profession because of their workload. The promised sabbaticals for experienced teachers could well be one way of stemming the rot. Schools and academies could also engage in more flexible working practices through part-time work and job-shares.

The proposals were welcomed by National Association of Head Teachers General Secretary, Paul Whiteman, who said: “Accountability is an essential part of our publicly-funded education system; but it is also one of the main drivers of workload.”

The professional reaction to Mr Hinds’s speech – in broad terms - was one of welcome and relief. It is likely that he will be given the time and space by the government – because of its preoccupations with Brexit – to get on with the job.

Children’s mental health problems cry out for solutions

Data published by *The Times* on 6 August 2018 revealed that the number of girls who have self-harmed, based on hospital admissions, doubled in the last 20 years in Britain. Among teenagers, the number of both, boys and girls, who admitted self-poisoning with easily available and prescription drugs rose more sharply.

According to the National Health Service 7,327 girls were admitted to hospital in 1997 for self-harm. This jumped to 13,463 in 2017. Altogether, 249 girls were treated for attempting to overdose themselves. This rose to 2,736 – over tenfold – in 2017. However, boys who self-harmed stayed constant (2,236 in 1997 and 2,332 last year). Notwithstanding, boys who overdosed themselves increased over five and a half times from 152 in 1997 to 839 in 2017.

Denis Campbell wrote in *The Guardian* on 23 June 2018 that teachers said that Britain's school children were suffering from an epidemic of anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts but barely received the NHS treatment they needed. Altogether, 78% of teachers encountered at least one pupil struggling with mental health problems over the last year and 14% of cases were allied to suicidal thoughts and behaviour. Two-thirds of 300 teachers surveyed by the health charity, [Stem4](#), said that they had to help pupils suffering from anxiety. A little under half (45%) of teachers supported at least one pupil suffering with depression, 30% with eating disorders, 28% with self-harm and 10% with addiction.

Dr Nihara Krause, the Chief Executive of Stem4, said: "Schools face huge challenges in dealing with mental health issues of their students, and teachers are on the front line. They witness first-hand the devastating impact of pressures such as exam anxiety, bullying, and family problems. The consequences of these problems are serious, often life-threatening, and teachers are desperate to help," said Krause.

"Yet at a time when the need for preventative, early intervention and specialist services are soaring, schools are finding it increasingly difficult to provide the help their pupils need. There's an urgent requirement for better support mechanisms in schools, as well as decent funding for the range of mental health services children and young people need."

Access to mental health care continues to be stubbornly unavailable from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS).

On December 4, 2017, the then Secretaries of State for Education (Justine Greening) and Health (Jeremy Hunt) issued a [Green Paper](#) setting out proposals to improve the mental health provision for youngsters.

The Green Paper is turning out to be like all Green Papers – making proposals which seldom move to action. The Green Paper had suggested that every school/academy appoint a designated lead, who would help young people with mental health issues, provide support and advice to them (the pupils) and staff, and teach pupils about the consequences of poor mental health. For this purpose, a national training programme was to be in place by 2025.

Government would arrange for researchers to investigate

- the impact of the internet, particularly social media, on mental health;
- how families can give support to those suffering with mental health issues; and
- how mental health problems can be avoided in the future.

Mental ill-health stems from various sources – i.e.

- within oneself such as genetic influences, communication difficulties and low self-esteem;
- in the family – where there could be domestic violence, hostile relationships and physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect;
- in a school/academy where there is bullying, deviant peer influences and poor pupil-teacher relationships; and
- in the community where young people may be homeless, the subjects of disaster, accidents and war and/or the victims of unfair discrimination.

In our attempt to prevent mental ill-health, which is better than finding a cure, experts have suggested we identify the causes of poor mental health. Jon Goldin, vice-chairman of the Child and Adolescent Faculty at the Royal College of Psychiatrists, told *The Times*: “I think there are a range of factors putting pressure on young children — academic pressures, exam pressures, social media . . . with fear of missing out and comparing yourself unfavourably to images you see online.” Responding to a question, he added that girls self-harmed more than boys because they were probably more sensitive to comments made on social media. Girls also were more likely than boys to be the victims of violence albeit the number of knife crimes in the country, especially in London, affects black boys more than anyone else.

According to Anne Longfield, the Children’s Commissioner, Ministers blame social media, social media companies blame exam stress and other pressures and we, members of the public, blame the world and his dog. There is a strong correlation between the increased use of social media and children’s mental health problems. However, there are other factors as mentioned above e.g. within schools/academies, where there is covert and overt bullying and in families, where many children are the victims of abuse. Because we are not sure, we keep passing the buck about who precisely is responsible for the increasing incidence in children’s mental ill-health.

So, what has Ms Longfield suggested would be a useful way forward?

First, she would like to see a professional from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) in every secondary school/academy immediately – not in five years’ time.

Second, primary schools/academies should have access to proper counselling and children taught about the pros and cons of using the internet.

Third, parents should take more responsibility for their children and think deeply before giving their children smartphones. If push comes to shove and they do give them mobile phones, they should teach them to use the phones as useful servants rather than become slaves to them. For instance, parents must show tough love and have these phones switched off at a reasonable hour of the night.

Fourth, schools/academies should toughen up their policies on the use of mobile phones and educate parents about their children’s use – both the up- and down-sides.

There is, of course, a fifth course of action that government needs to consider carefully. Ministers – like the rest of the nation – are keen for our education to be as good as it can be and our children are happy and enjoy the education they are offered. However, they should stop obsessing about league tables. Within our schools/academies, many governors and headteachers are so concerned about our pupils and students hitting targets and pushing their schools/academies up these league tables, they ignore children’s mental health and cause them to suffer unduly.

Matt Hancock and Damian Hinds, the Health and Education Secretaries respectively, admitted that people with mental health problems did not have the same level of support as those with physical illnesses in the past. Wouldn’t it, however, be so much more effective if they (and we) work towards eliminating the causes of mental ill-health which would save time and money finding cures?

Promoting children's welfare: foci on obesity and knives

Schools and academies are responsible for promoting children's welfare and protecting them from harm. They do so very well - indeed so much so that Children's Social Services are relieved when they (the schools/academies) shut down for the summer recess. It is then that the pressure of constant referrals that schools/academies make to Social Workers of children being physically, sexually and emotionally abused or neglected reduces significantly.

Two other areas to which governors, headteachers and staff members should give some attention are children's love of fast foods, especially their penchant for fast foods – a key cause of obesity - and the increasing incidence of knife crime.

I Obesity

Public Health England (PHE) stated that a quarter of 2-to-10-year olds, a third of 11-to-15-year-olds and two-thirds of adults are overweight if not obese. PHE forecast that 70% of the nation would be overweight if not obese by 2034. Obesity rates are highest in the most deprived 10% of the population, about twice that of the least deprived 10%. A higher percentage of ethnic minority groups of children – particularly from Black African and Bangladeshi backgrounds - and children with learning difficulties are more likely to be obese than other groups.

Overweight or obese children suffer in multiple ways. They are bullied at school which causes low self-esteem and mental ill-health. They tend to have high cholesterol levels, are likely to suffer from type 2 diabetes and have bone, joint and breathing problems leading to their being absent for periods of learning with illnesses of one kind or another.

Obese children tend to graduate to obese adults. Obese adults have a penchant for being morbid and depressed. They comfort-eat and swell further developing disabilities. Premature mortality, stemming from type 2 diabetes, asthma, hypertension, cancer, heart disease and/or stroke, is the result.

Many children have poor role models in families. This is unsurprising given that 50% of women of childbearing age in England are overweight or obese. Also, there is a close correlation between maternal obesity and the weight of babies born to mothers. Overweight babies born to overweight mothers tend to become overweight and obese children and overweight adults. It's unhelpful when children are subjected to poor diets and too little physical activity.

Add to that the amount of sugar consumed by children. [The National Diet and Nutrition Survey](#) revealed that sugary drinks account for 30% of 4-to-10-year-olds daily consumption. Processed foods, which constitute so much of what youngsters eat these days, contains saturated fats which are harmful to them.

Thanks to social media (with children hooked to computer screen and glued to their mobile phones) and poor diet, youngsters find physical activity anathema. In England, only 21% of boys and 16% of girls between the ages of 5 and 15 engage in the recommended levels of physical activity. This spirals downwards as they grow older.

II What can schools/academies do to tackle a weighty problem?

So what can schools and academies do to tackle what appears to be an intractable problem?

[The School of Public Health at Harvard University](#) suggests: “Serving healthy choices during lunchtimes, limiting availability and marketing of unhealthy foods and sugary drinks and making water available throughout the day are some of the ways that schools can help prevent obesity.”

This is easier said than done. Healthy foods are more expensive than fast foods. Also, persuading children to accept healthier options and counteracting the numerous ways that they are tempted by unhealthy foods outside of the normal working day – including endless television programmes about cooking and baking – are challenging.

Notwithstanding, schools and academies can take measures to deal with promoting healthy living. Some are as follows.

- (1) Ensure that school/academy meals have healthy options and take measures to curtail fast food vendors from selling their wares during break and after-school times just over the school/academy boundaries.
- (2) Incorporate into normal lessons information on healthy eating and physical education.
- (3) Encourage children to participate as widely as possible in sport outside of normal working hours and set up equipment in the playground to promote as wide a range of sports as possible.
- (4) Ban unhealthy snacks from the school/academy premises and permit children to bring only fruit and raw vegetables (like carrots) onto the school/academy premises.
- (5) Educate the parents of children about healthy eating.
- (6) Finally, but perhaps the most important, staff members **must model** by eating healthily and in moderation and slimming down if overweight (despite the stresses of teaching). There is no point in telling children: “Do what I say and let me do what I want.” Staff members must walk their talk. Those who are overweight should take their cue from the Japanese – especially women. During meal-times, they stop eating just before they are satisfied and sated.

Amsterdam, which has the highest rate of obesity in the Netherlands (20% of children there are overweight) has enforced the following measures some of which involves schools.

- (1) Children are banned from bringing juice into school and there are more water fountains in the city.

- (2) Children are taught about healthy ethnic dishes and how to cook pizzas with a broccoli base, kebabs with lean chicken (rather than pork) and honey and dates instead of sugar.
- (3) The city has decided not to have fast food companies sponsor state events.
- (4) Pregnant mothers are counselled about healthy diets and health visitors pay close attention to gastronomy during the first 1,000 days of children’s lives (that’s slightly under three years).
- (5) Members of every family are encouraged to dine together.
- (6) Sport centre membership and activities are subsidised for low-income families.

Because of the above measures, the number of overweight and obese children in Amsterdam dropped by 12% from 2012 to 2015.

Meanwhile, back on these emerald isles many children gorge on food while for many others there is little or no food at home because of food poverty. A recent survey carried out by *The Times Educational Supplement* and the Association of Colleges (AoC) revealed that nine in 10 colleges are feeding learners who struggle to feed themselves.

In fact, a report published in summer 2018 mentioned that 5% of people aged 15+ struggle to get enough food. Lindsay Boswell, the Chief Executive of Fairshare, a charity which redistributes surplus food, said: “In 12 months, we’ve seen the number of groups we work with increase by 44%, and we supplied enough food to make up nearly 29 million meals a year.

Altogether, 13% of colleges have food banks on the campuses and 86% offer support to students who cannot feed themselves. Some colleges provide free toast and cereal at breakfast times and others offer students a small sum (£4 a day per student) to spend in the canteen, vouchers for the local food banks or even trips to the local supermarkets with members of staff.

So, while many of the country’s young people swell and grow in substance, a matching number does not have enough to eat. Both ends of the spectrum present concerns which we need to address.

III Knife Crime

Young people – especially in London – have been caught in a vice-like grip that gets them implicated in knife crime. So worried are they that they will be “bumped off” in the streets in gang fights, that they carry knives to defend themselves. In extremis, they use these weapons to defend themselves and fatally injure other young people. A few end up in prison.

They are caught up in a vicious circle: they carry knives to defend themselves against other young people who carry knives because they also wish to defend themselves. When they use them, it is often with fatal consequences.

More than 30,000 children aged between 10 and 15 now say that they are in gangs, according to research.

Anne Longfield, the Children’s Commissioner, said that [criminals are preying on teenagers](#). She said that 70,000 youths up to the age of 25 are now in gangs. She added that the rise in school exclusions was partly to blame for increasing youth crime. Pupil referral units (PRUs) had become the recruiting ground for criminals. Children in cities are targeted as much as those in rural areas. “Parents have told me that police and teachers don’t believe what they are telling them about gangs — it’s still not seen as a countrywide threat,” she said.

Ofsted is concerned. It has launched a survey of school leaders in London to ask [how they are keeping children safe](#) and how pupils are being educated about the dangers of carrying offensive weapons.

Mike Sheridan, Ofsted’s regional director for London, assured headteachers that their responses would not be used to form judgements on individual schools. If they were fearful, school/academy leaders can respond to the questionnaire anonymously.

Meanwhile, more than 25% of London secondary schools/academies have taken up the offer of free knife detecting "wands". The knife detectors can be used at individual school/academy events. High-risk schools/academies may choose to use them regularly to screen students entering the premises. Headteachers will decide how they are deployed.

Schools can request a knife wand through their safer schools’ officer or by emailing <https://schoolsbulletin.haringey.gov.uk/files/2017/11/MOPAC-and-MPS-letter-to-schools-re-knife-wands.pdf>.

Assuring words have come from Geoff Barton, General Secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, who said that while the rise of knife crime had created “a sense of urgency and alarm” schools/academies remained “oases of safety compared to the streets outside them”.

He added: “I would encourage schools and colleges to seriously consider this offer, not only to give reassurance to parents and teachers but also to act as a deterrent. If there was anyone thinking of taking a knife into a school, this would be a way of reinforcing how completely unacceptable that would be – even to contemplate it.”

Sadly, a quarter of shops are selling knives to underage pupils, according to new figures published in mid-May 2018. Shop workers failed to check the age of mystery shoppers buying knives in 26% of 2,357 test sales in 2017. Among shops classed as homeware or DIY stores, where 672 tests were carried out, 41% sold the blades to mystery shoppers without checking identification. This also happened in 21% of supermarkets where 1,685 test purchases were carried out.

The Times reporters, Rachel Sylvester, Alice Thompson and Fiona Hamilton, wrote on 25 June 2018 that 50 young people were stabbed to death in gang-related attacks in London so far this year - 15 more than died in all four terrorist attacks in Britain in 2017.

The number of children aged between 10 and 15 being treated for stab wounds in England had increased by 69% since 2013. Children as young as 10 years of age are being recruited to take drugs from big cities to rural areas as part of the network of “county lines”. They are trapped in gangs. Indeed, one ten-

year-old boy was recently found in the park of a provincial town trying to hang himself with his school tie because he feared for his life.

The study by Ms Longfield's office found that 73,000 young people, 32,500 of whom were aged from 10 to 15 years old, confessed that they were members of gang. The Metropolitan Police gang matrix database holds fewer than 4,000 names but figures from the Children's Commissioner are thought to be much higher because they relate to self-identification. Longfield's report, [Vulnerability Study](#), highlighted the harm done to children exposed to gangs and violence. More than half of the nearly 420,000 annual crimes against children aged 10-15 are now related to violence, it said.

The good news is that Sajid Javid, the home secretary, announced in late June 2018 new controls on people buying knives (online) and acid.

IV Closing thoughts

Schools and academies have the responsibility for keeping children healthy and safe from harm. This has implications for promoting their physical and mental health – so that they encourage children to develop the Goldilocks matrix of being not too fat and not too thin and anorexic. As they control the contracts awarded to lunch-time caterers, they can ensure that only healthy options are offered to children. Many schools control what children bring into schools/academies. They ban sugary drinks, crisps, sweets and chocolates. Ensuring that staff members also “walk the talk” on healthy eating is as, if not more, important.

Knives are (generally) banned from schools and academies. There have been numerous examples of pupils being permanently excluded for bringing knives into schools/academies.

What is a more intractable problem, however, is getting the message across to parents and carers so that healthy eating extends to after working hours and youngsters keep away from gangs where knife crime is endemic. When alerted to these dangers, many parents/carers pay heed. Some, however, are so busy promoting their careers or simply scratching around to earn a living, that the safety messages fall on deaf ears.

Main-scale teachers to receive a 3.5% increase in salaries but funding shortages deepens gloom

Shortly after the schools and academies closed for the summer term 2018, the government announced on 24 July 2018 – the last day of Parliament – the pay rises for teachers.

The awards were as follows.

- 3.5% uplift to the minimum and maximum of the main pay range (MPR), which means that the salary of a teacher could rise from £1,184 to £1,366.

- 2% uplift to the minimum and maximum of the upper pay range (UPR)
- 1.5% uplift to the minimum and maximum of the leadership pay range

Academies do not have to comply with the Pay and Conditions Regulations and grant the pay increases, but schools must. Schools have flexibility about pay rises on the points in between. However, the teacher unions have warned that those that fail to pass on the full pay rise to teachers will face an ‘industrial relations disaster’.

Mary Bousted, joint general secretary of the NEU teaching union, told *The Times Educational Supplement*: “We have already heard from members on the last day of term [when the pay award was announced] whose school leaders have said, ‘Well, we can’t afford to pay.’ We expect the award to be paid in full to all members.” She added that the NEU would be “monitoring that situation very closely”. This is unsurprising, especially in the light of the DfE data that shows the percentage of academy trusts in deficit increased to 6.1% in 2016-17, a 0.6% rise on the previous year.

Early in July 2018, the [five teaching unions](#) – the National Education Union (NEU), the National Association of Headteachers (NAHT), the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), UCAC (the Welsh Union – Undeb Cenedlathol Athrawon Cymru) and Voice – jointly submitted a claim for a fully-funded “restorative pay rise” of 5% for “all teachers and school leaders” in England and Wales to provide both a cost-of-living increase and a first step towards restoring “the real value of teaching salaries to 2010 levels”. The National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) wants a hefty pay rise after years of austerity but failed to name a figure in its submission to the School Teachers’ Review Body (STRB).

During the last seven years, teachers were subjected to pay restraints – a pay freeze in the first two years and a 1% rise cap for each of the next five. Owing to the cost of goods and services increasing at a much greater rate than salary rises, teachers fell behind other professions in their standards of living.

The government expects schools to fund the first 1% increase and the DfE will fund the rest – i.e. £508 million. The Chancellor, Phillip Hammond, made it clear that as far as education is concerned, the piggy bank was empty. Apart from the NHS, who will have their funding increased by a few billion pounds, only the Defence Department will receive £800 extra from the Treasury.

Total funding in English schools/academies decreased by 8% in real terms between 2009 and 2017, according to [research by the Institute of Fiscal Studies \(IFS\)](#). However, the DfE has countered this by declaring that core school/academy funding will increase to £43.5 billion by 2020.

The IFS study revealed that rising pupil numbers and reductions to local authority and sixth-form funding saw a real-term reduction in educational spending. Sixth-form funding went down by 25% and financial support for local authorities plummeted by 55%. The IFS analysis added that between 2015 and 2017 core budget funding for pupils up to the age of 6 fell by 4%.

Governors and school/academy leaders have been beating their collective chests in protest at the cash shortages. They have been compelled to cut staff and request parents to make voluntary contributions. A Jewish secondary school in Manchester asked the parent/s of each student to “donate” £1,000 annually to enable it to make ends meet, for instance.

James Ludlow, headteacher of the King’s Church of England School, told the BBC he was “extremely angry” that the budget shortage caused him to [cut 14 staff members and that is still not enough to repair 300 holes in the roof](#).

According to the [Education Policy Institute](#) (EPI) the number of local authority secondary schools’ deficit rose from 8.8% in 2013-14 to 26.1% in 2016-17. It also found that there were many other primary schools in deficit.

Secretary of State Damian Hinds did admit to the NAHT at its Liverpool conference in May 2018 that schools/academies were the subject of funding pressures. “It is challenging for schools making the numbers add up,” he said. “Society asks much more of schools than we did a generation ago.”

Reflections

Prior to the most recent cabinet reshuffle, when Justine Greening was Secretary of State for Education, she instructed the School Teachers’ Review Body to assess “what adjustments should be made to the salary and allowance ranges for classroom teachers, unqualified teachers and school leaders to promote recruitment and retention”.

The STRB recommended that teachers across the board receive an increase of 3.5%. However, Damian Hinds, the current Secretary of State for Education, decided that only qualified teachers on the main scale and unqualified teachers were to receive an uplift of 3.5% as it was more important for the purposes of recruitment and retention. Those on the Upper Pay Spine and the leadership scale are now being left kicking their heels with increases of 2% and 1.5% which is below the inflation rate of 2.4%.

It has been custom and practice for the Secretary of State to adopt the recommendations of the STRB in their entirety. Not this time. The STRB’s proposals are just that – proposals, and, in law, the Secretary of State can decide as he so wishes, provided he has considered the proposals, which he has done.

Main scale and unqualified teachers will be doing much better in the salary rises than Armed Forces who will see salary increase of 2.9%, prison officers - 2.75%, and the police, General Practitioners and dentists - 2%.

So, where exactly is the DfE to find the extra £508 million promised to schools and academies especially as it has given us an undertaking that there would be no cuts to existing programmes? No one currently knows.

Meanwhile, the unions are caught between a rock and a hard place about what precisely to do – accept or revolt with strike action? They had asked for a 5% uplift, but 3.5% is generous compared to what those in other professions will receive or have received. However, those on the Upper Pay Spine and leadership scale, have been left languishing. It is unlikely that the rank and file of teachers will want to strike. The Trade Union Act of 2016 requires a ballot turnout for strike action of 50% with at least 40% of the union membership voting for it.

The uplift of 3.5% for qualified, main-scale and unqualified teachers (assuming that schools and academies accede to what the Secretary of State has proposed) will go some way towards recruiting and

retaining them. (New [workforce data](#) published at the end of July 2018 revealed that overall teacher numbers fell in 2017 owing to a decrease in the number of teachers joining the profession and those leaving staying constant.)

To stem the teacher-haemorrhage, the Secretary of State Damian Hinds [announced](#) (at the close of the last academic year) that headteachers would receive more support to free their teachers from unnecessary, time-consuming tasks so that they could concentrate on what mattered to children's education.

The online toolkit provides schools/academies

- i. advice and workshops on the most burdensome tasks such as pupil feedback and marking, planning and resources, and data management;
- ii. ready-made tools to help schools quickly implement new policies, and cut down on time-consuming tasks such as email communication; and
- iii. a series of case studies to share knowledge of how schools across the country have used technology to streamline processes.

This will build on what headteachers are already doing, as reported in research carried out by the [School Snapshot Survey](#) at the tail-end of 2017 revealing that 73% of school/academy leaders had already reduced unnecessary workload, such as an overhaul of marking practices.

Academy Trust Chiefs' salaries continue to soar

I *Schools Week* throws light on runaway salaries

It's unsurprising that both, the producers and consumers, of educational policy and practice in the United Kingdom, especially in England are transfixed by the exorbitant salaries many Chief Education Officers of Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) are drawing, given that the country's schools and academies are going through financial straits. In March 2018, *Schools Week* published an article based on an analysis that the magazine carried out of the MATs where each had at least 20 academies in them. The results make compelling reading.

There were huge variations between the salaries of men and the per pupil funding of each MAT. The headline information was as follows.

- (i) The highest paid CEO was Sir Dan Moynihan of the Harris Academy Trust at £440,000 annually - £10,000 per academy.
- (ii) The CEO who secured the highest pay rise was John Murphy of the Oasis Community Learning Trust who went from £180,000 to £205,000 - £4,183 per academy - a 14% rise.
- (iii) The lowest paid was John Mannix at Plymouth Cast Trust at £55,000 annually at £1,527 per academy.

- (iv) The lowest paid per academy was John Coles of United Learning at £160,000 annually and £3,018 per academy.

While Sir Dan Moynihan – who heads 44 academies in the Harris Trust - received a £20,000 pay increase in 2017/18, he earned less than half the amount per pupil than eight other CEOs earned. However, he earned more than three times that of Julian Drinkall, the new CEO of the country’s large chain, Academies Enterprise Trust (AET), which has 64 academies in the trust.

Sixteen of the 24 trusts with more than 30 academies received pay rises, though three diocesan trusts were unable to share their data with *Schools Week* within the time-frame given. In case of the Academy Transformation Trust, the accounts had yet to be published.

John Murphy received a £25,000 uplift. Sir Dan Moynihan of Harris and Toby Salt CEO of the Omiston Academy Trust were each given a pay rise of £20,000. (Salt has now been succeeded by Nick Hudson). However, CEOs at four trusts took salary cuts or started at lower salaries than their predecessors, i.e. Mannix at Plymouth Cast, Drinkall who succeeded Ian Comfort at AEO, Martyn Oliver at Outwood Grange Academy Trust who replaced Sir Michael Wilkins and Rowena Hackwood at David Ross Academy Trust, who filled in the vacancy caused by Wendy Marshall’s resignation.

Three CEOs stayed at the same salaries, though they took on more academies: John College at United Learning who took responsibility for an additional eight academies, Wayne Norrie of Greenwood Academy Trust at £170,000, though he absorbed two special academies (formerly schools) and Libby at Astrea Academy Trust, who accepted another six academies though staying at £130,000.

Notwithstanding the exemplary behaviour of several MAT CEOs, teacher unions have been up in arms at learning about their exorbitant salaries especially as teachers had been restricted to 1% pay increases annually. (The situation this year improved with teachers on the main scale receiving a 3.5% pay increase.¹) Mark Wright of the National Education Union (NEU) remarked that research by the Centre for Education Economics in 2016 observed that there was no evidence linking leadership with pupil outcome. [It’s worth bearing in mind that Britain’s Prime Minister earns £150,000, 9circa) annually.] Wright observed that while leadership was supposed to support what occurs in the classrooms (where teachers spearhead the work), it appears to be the other way around, with teachers supporting CEOs and their demands. Multi-Academy Trusts tend to use industry as a yardstick where CEOs earn “monopoly” money.

¹ Education funding has gone down by 8% over the last four years and the salaries of staff severely constrained with an average of 1% (circa) rises (less than the cost of living) year-on-year. Exceptionally, the government [announced](#) shortly before Parliament closed for the summer recess that teachers were to receive increases in their salaries as follows.

- 3.5% uplift to the minimum and maximum of the main pay range (MPR)
- 2% uplift to the minimum and maximum of the upper pay range (UPR)
- 1.5% uplift to the minimum and maximum of the leadership pay range

II The Gender Gap

Schools Week analysed the salary of men and women CEOs of MATs. The magazine reported on the salaries of CEOs in 24 MATs each of which had more than 20 academies. In three of the 10 MATs which had the greatest number of academies, women - Dr Karen Roberts at the Kemnal Academies Trust (43 academies), Lucy Heller at ARK (36 academies) and Dr Karen Cook at Plymouth Cast (36 academies) - were the leaders. (Since the analysis, Cook was replaced by Raymonth Friel.) Heller is one of the 10 best paid CEOs.

However, the average salary of men in 16 MATs where there are 20 academies or more was £174,765. Where women were the leaders, the average was £139,800. Vivienne Porritt, the co-founder of WomenEd, said this was yet another example of a “rampant” gender pay gap in education that was becoming “really tiring.”

“Are trustees, who are also mostly white male (there is no black CEO of a MAT), appointing people who look and think as they do?”

For 2017-18, four CEOs including Martyn Oliver at Outwood Grange Tust and Gary Peile at Active Learning Trust did not take pay rises. Two others, Wayne Norrie at Greenwood Academies Trust and Jon Coles at United Learning Trust, had not had a pay rise in three years.

III Reflections

A [report published on 24 July](#) from the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) had recommended a 3.5% uplift to all pay and allowance ranges.

The huge increases that MATs chiefs appear to be sticking in the throats of their staff. However, teachers have been cowed by the financial crisis that hit us in 2008 and the unions circumspect in picking up the strike cudgel. Their patience now has begun to wear thin.

The real loss in funding our education and the changes in the curriculum, tests and examinations have meant that schools and academies have been having to do more and more with less and less, to a point where they could have to do everything with nothing. How can trusts, in such an environment, justify paying their chief such high salaries? The nation is looking askance and trusts now must justify the measures they have taken on this front to the DfE.

New Opportunity Fund to boost provision for bright, disadvantaged children

It is now official. Bright children from disadvantaged backgrounds are underachieving. Some time ago, the Sutton Trust were banging the drum for them. Rebecca Allen, Director of Datalab who carried out the [research](#) for the Trust, revealed that a much higher proportion of children on free school meals or from disadvantaged backgrounds were unable to go on from primary SATs to secondary GCSEs and achieve similar results – even for those in the highest 10% of results at state primary school level in England.

The Social Mobility Commission had pointed out in the past that disadvantaged children of all ages underperform. Allen’s research specifically compared the results of most able disadvantaged children at the primary stage with their later results in GCSEs. She discovered that one of three boys eligible for free school meals – where households earned £16,000 or less annually or on benefits – who attained top marks at the end of Key Stage 2 failed to feature among the top 25% of those at GCSE level. Meanwhile, a quarter of disadvantaged girls who attained top Key Stage 2 results, failed to feature in the highest quarter of GCSE grades.

Allen wondered: “The highly able Pupil Premium children had the school and home support to do really well at primary school, so why do things go so wrong for some of them at secondary school?”

“Nobody’s looked at how this happens; what sort of qualifications highly able Pupil Premium children take, or where this missing talent is in the country. Obviously, it is in areas that are underperforming generally, but there are also areas with good schools that nevertheless do poorly for highly able children.”

Eight out of the 10 worst performing local authorities were in the north of England or the Midlands. However, the research showed that Coventry, Leicester and Lambeth had highly able children falling behind. Authorities that were bucking this trend were Barnet, Ealing and Hackney (in London), and Reading, Slough and Trafford.

To address this malaise, the government has earmarked £23 million in the shape of the *Future Talent Fund*. It is to be used to support the brightest pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds to reach their potential. Applications are open for organisations to manage the fund, which will run to 2020.

The *Future Talent Fund* will be deployed to test new, innovative ways of helping bright children to perform consistently well as they move through the different stages of education so that they don’t fall behind their richer peers. The fund manager will evaluate pilot projects from January 2019. The objective of the projects is to stem the rot of poor, bright pupils dropping off in their academic performance from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4.

There will be two bidding rounds for 30 projects. The scheme will champion best practice and “encourage evidence-led interventions, including those that could be funded by schools using the Pupil Premium”.

From September 2018, organisations will be eligible to apply for grants from the Fund, including state-funded schools and multi-academy trusts, charities and research organisations, independent schools and universities. “Projects supported by the fund must be delivered in non-selected state-funded schools/academies in England”. They must cover at least one of the following strands of work.

- 1) Curriculum: such as broadening or deepening what is covered in the curriculum
- 2) Pedagogy: for example, individualised teaching, the use of digital technology or feedback
- 3) Parental involvement: which could include aspiration interventions, engagement through technology or behavioural insight techniques
- 4) Mentoring and tutoring: including academic mentoring, community-based mentoring, school-based mentoring, one-to-one tuition, group tuition or peer tutoring
- 5) Transition between key stages: such as summer schools or transition practices in schools
- 6) Enrichment activities: which could include after-school classes, extra-curricular activities or visits

Ofsted in the spotlight - again

I Inspecting schools/academies – a high-risk business

Working as an inspector for Ofsted is a high-risk business. Because inspections are obsessed with judgements, the exercise can have devastating consequences on schools and academies. It is, therefore, unsurprising that Ofsted is constantly under scrutiny.

The great and the good, including Professors Dylan Wiliam, formerly of University College and Institute of Education London, and Robert Coe of Durham University, have been critical of Ofsted in the past.

William Stewart wrote in an [article](#) for *The Times Educational Supplement* in April 2015 that Wiliam said in 2012 that Ofsted needed to subject its school inspections to a proper evaluation of reliability, claiming the watchdog did “not know good teaching” when it saw it. Coe [warned](#), in 2013, that Ofsted’s practice was not research- or evidence-based adding that it needed to demonstrate that its evaluations of lessons were valid by testing the judgements of different inspection teams.

Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector (HMCI) Amanda Spielman is making strenuous efforts to change the public perception of inspections. First she is confronting schools/academy leaders who off-load their “disruptive” children – especially prior to a possible inspection and/or the examinations in which they are likely to fail. Second, she is introducing a fairer inspection regimen that takes more account of children’s starting points.

Secretary of State Damian Hinds is giving his support. For instance, [he has made it clear](#) that it is not going to be the Regional Schools’ Commissioners (RSCs) who will be inspecting and evaluating the quality of education in schools/academies but rather Ofsted that will judge the institutions.

II Problems confronting Ofsted

While Ofsted is doing its utmost to be thorough and fair, problems exist. Funding is a short. Ofsted's annual budget of £280 million in 2005-6 shrank to £167 million by 2015-16. The watchdog spent £60 million inspecting schools and academies in 2017-18 having invested £125 million in a similar exercise in 1999-2000. This was a reduction of 52%.

Probably, the real reason why inspectors reduced the time inspecting a school/academy from four days to one – or two, if the school was likely to be judged outstanding or in trouble – was because of the reduced budget, though the good reason advanced was that it did not wish to place extra burdens on schools/academies.

However, the shorter inspection – albeit one where a school/academy receives only half a day's notice – is deemed by academics such as Professor William to be unreliable – especially when inspectors assess the quality of teaching and learning. Huge weight is placed on pupils' achievements – though inspectors do their best to take account of their progress too.

The research reveals that where pupils' results are very good in grammar schools/academies, and those in the well-heeled parts of the country, schools and academies are deemed to be good if not outstanding. (Four out of five grammar schools/academies are rated "outstanding".) In the poorer sections of the country, many schools/academies (out of all proportion to the first group) are deemed to be requiring improvement or inadequate. Little attention appears to be paid to the low starting points of the pupils in the latter group. In fact, only 20% of non-selective schools secure the top grade – evidence that pupil intake rather than the quality of education on offer drives Ofsted's ratings.

Information from Ofsted shows that 58% of schools/academies with the fewest white pupils from deprived backgrounds were judged "outstanding". In schools/academies with the highest number of white pupils from deprived background, only 4% attained the top grade.

Nick Brook, Deputy General Secretary of the National Association of Headteachers (NAHT) who is leading a commission on accountability, does not believe that Ofsted inspectors uncover anything new about a school/academy in one day. He insisted that such an inspection, where data becomes the be-all and end-all, is not long enough to be useful but has become the norm.

The [National Audit Office \(NAO\) has been critical of one-day inspections](#). The NAO wrote that the one-day inspection allows "inspectors less time to discuss with schools how they might improve". It observed that inspectors had found shorter inspections spawned a practice which was more about checking compliance and less about improvement and follow-up work.

Spielman admitted that inspectors just don't have the time. The NAO has also looked askance at Ofsted exempting "outstanding" schools/academies from inspections every three years. This has meant that 1,620 schools/academies have been deprived of the inspection "privilege" for six years and 296 for over 10. This is of concern because we know that while it takes a long time for a school/academy to improve the quality of education, create a culture of learning and raise standards, it takes only a term of poor education to make the school/academy "go down the Swanee" as our American friends would say.

Professor Coe admitted in an interview recently that assessing how well pupils were learning in lessons was daunting. There is much that is going on under the surface that is invisible. While an inspector can comment on a teacher's organisation and children's behaviour, it is very, very difficult to know what children are thinking. In fact, I, personally, find it a conundrum to know what *I* am thinking until I hear what I say. Imagine how it must be for poor inspectors.

Ofsted is sensitive to the criticism; this is why it has ceased grading lessons and, in 2017 held its first international research seminar on classroom observations with 14 world-wide experts, who shared their insights.

III Reasons for Ofsted's birth

Prior to 1992, we had a different kind of inspectorate. Inspectors visited schools, but very few full-scale inspections per se occurred. On rare occasions, as was the case in 1987, when the London Borough of Brent was administered by a very left-wing administration that bared its teeth to Mrs Margaret Thatcher government and, in the course of doing so, hugely overspent its budget making the authority almost bankrupt, Secretary of State, Kenneth Baker, sent in the inspectors, who found the educational provision in the local authority (LA) in a parlous state. This was one of the major contributory factors for the Education Reform Act 1988.

Also, education was bedridden in the 1980s in England, brought to its knees by the then (very red) National Union of Teachers [that followed in the footsteps of the National Union of Miners (NUM)] who went on strike repeatedly in a bid to compel government to raise teachers' salaries. Children's education and welfare hardly featured in these battles. In fact, the government and the union operated like two bulls that had locked horns and trampled all over the ground – the children – in their fight with each other.

In such a climate, the government felt justified in bringing in an accountability regime with Ofsted leading the charge. Ofsted is now viewed as the bedrock for the schools/academies system. Parents and politicians, in equal measure, rely on its assessments of the educational well-being of the country.

Academics, however, cite the cases of other high-performing countries that do not have such a watchdog but do - if not as well as us - perhaps better. In Finland an inspectorate is conspicuous by its absence. Germany has decided to abandon inspections as the government does not consider that they benefit the schools much. However, what needs to be factored in to these countries' arrangements is the extent to which education is valued. Their cultures – “culture” being defined as “how we do things here” – are different to ours.

Amanda Spielman and Sean Harford, the National Director for Schools/Academies Inspections, are keen to improve the system. They are constantly “myth busting” about what Ofsted does (and doesn't do) and engage with the profession on social media – albeit, unlike President Trump – seldom on Twitter. In early 2017, Ofsted published [a short study](#) to demonstrate that 92% of inspections were reliable. More recently, the newly installed head of research at Ofsted, Daniel Muijs, recognised that it was impossible to be conclusive about how [reliable inspections](#) were.

The simplicity of Ofsted judgments on schools being outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate makes it easy for parents to understand what the watchdog is about and is popular with government ministers. Inspection is not an exact science. There is a penchant for humans to become more definitive and strident in their views when they are unsure. Take, for example, religious beliefs including those of the afterlife, if such a thing exists. Humankind has engaged in some of the bloodiest religious wars over such issues. Ofsted's judgements, must consequently, be treated with care.

To deal with this criticism, Ofsted, published in 2017 the outcome of a study. Different groups of inspectors carried out one-day inspections at a number of schools and academies with each school or academy being inspected by more than one team. In 22 out of 24 cases, inspection teams made similar judgements.

However, [Professor Coe told the TES](#) that judging how well pupils were learning in a lesson through classroom observation was daunting because while some elements of good teaching were visible, many were invisible. The evidence or organisation and behaviour management could clearly be seen but not whether pupils were thinking productively about the subject matter. Within a classroom it is very, difficult to make space to hear all pupils' talk about their thoughts.

IV The Future

The government relies on Ofsted to produce the necessary soundbites. It trumpets that 1.9 million more children are being educated in "good" schools than there were in 2010.

The research findings of [Parentkind](#), formerly Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) UK, revealed that just over 50% of parents had looked at Ofsted reports, albeit only a quarter said they were important to them when choosing schools/academies for their children. Michelle Doyle Wildman, its Acting Chief Executive, said that having an independent inspectorate was important to parents and that Ofsted had been a "force for good", though she acknowledged that there was a need for a debate about whether it was fit for purpose in the present educational system.

While the NAO was negatively critical, its report had some positive features about Ofsted. Most heads it surveyed – 84% – said they were happy with their inspections. Another 44% mentioned that inspections had improved their schools/academies - more than those who said they didn't, which was 28%. The NAO also remarked that the government had reduced Ofsted's budget for more than a decade while asking it to do more. "Government needs to be clearer about how it sees Ofsted's present and future inspection role in the school system as a whole, and then resource it accordingly," its report concluded.

Meanwhile, Sean Harford [announced](#), at the watchdog's spring conferences in Manchester, Nottingham and London that in 2019 there was to be "an even sharper focus" on the curriculum during inspections. He referred to research that Ofsted had carried out to develop a common language for the curriculum to encompass the following.

- (i) What knowledge and understanding is the institution promoting for pupils to develop at each key stage (intent), i.e. what the school/academy is trying to achieve in the curriculum.

- (ii) How does the institution translate the framework over time, i.e. how is the curriculum being delivered? (Implementation)
- (iii) Finally, what knowledge and understanding do pupils gain against the expectations and what difference is the curriculum making in their learning lives? (Impact).

The Chief Inspector is of the view that schools/academies have narrowed the curriculum to ensure that pupils do well in tests and examinations. Accordingly, from September 2019, she plans to direct her inspectors to make judgements on breadth and balance of the curriculum and move away from judgements based on tests and examinations. Inspectors will be searching for the answers to four questions.

- (i) Is there too much focus on English and mathematics at Key Stage 2 making the wider curriculum a casualty?
- (ii) Is the time spent on non-core subjects at Key Stage 3 shortened with justification?
- (iii) What is the range of subjects available for pupils, especially those from disadvantaged groups and those with poor attainments?
- (iv) Is a school's/academy's intentions being translated into practice and what positive impact (where it exists) has there been?

In November 2017, Ofsted [published a report](#) on international lesson observations. The upshot has been that Ofsted now admits that pupils' learning cannot be measured solely by single lesson observations and sound judgements are based on high standards of training.

Ofsted's five-year strategy signals its intention to "scrutinise education, training and care structures, including at Multi-Academy Trusts". However, at present, it is up to the Department for Education (DfE) to decide whether or not Ofsted carries out inspections of MATs. There is considerable opposition from trustees and governors against the watchdog on the grounds that inspectors lacks the necessary experience and/or expertise about their functions. Besides, there is a real danger that they will be treading on the turf of Regional School Commissioners (RSCs), they claim.

V Changes that take effect from September 2018

In the meantime, minor changes were made to the [Inspection Handbook](#) that took effect from September 2018.

(1) Religious Education and Collective Worship

Under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005, the governing board of a voluntary (aided or controlled) or foundation school/academy in England ensures that a designated religious body conducts regular inspections of its religious educational provision and the acts of worship. However, Ofsted inspectors are now required to look at the content of religious education (RE) in voluntary controlled (VC)

schools/academies (see page 74 in the Annex) because a VC school follows the local authority's agreed RE syllabus. On pages 75 and 76, the Handbook sets out the timings for such inspections.

(2) Myth-busting

Pages 12 to 16 of the handout sets out what inspectors **do not expect to scrutinise or know about** i.e.

- i. the attainment of past pupils,
- ii. how primary schools/academies carry out assessment or record pupils' achievements in subjects,
- iii. the process for the performance management arrangements for staff and anonymised lists of teachers meeting or not meeting the performance thresholds for pay progression,
- iv. whether the school/academy has policies related to staff behaviour, and
- v. retrospective applications for references for staff members appointed prior to and continuously employed since the introduction of the vetting and barring.

(3) Schools causing concern

Paragraph 112 of the handbook states that maintained schools and Pupil Referral Units (PRU) that are issued with academy orders and allocated to new sponsors (if already academies) or to sponsors for the first time if they are controlled by local authorities, **won't normally receive monitoring visits from inspectors**. However, the affected local authorities, proprietors or trusts will still need to prepare statements of action to include how the schools/academies will transfer to new academies. Paragraph 113 explains this.

VI Final thoughts

These changes, as the reader will probably know, will not be the end of the matter. Many problems remain, one of the chief being the reliability and validity of Ofsted's judgements. How on earth can Ofsted judge the quality of teaching if inspectors spend no more than 20 minutes on observing each of a very, very few lessons that come under the microscope? And can they really make profound judgements on the quality of education being served up at a school/academy if they spend only one day inspecting?

Governors, headteachers and staff members of schools/academies moan that inspectors come to inspections with their minds already made up based on the documentation they've scanned. All that they do at the schools/academies is make strenuous efforts to confirm their guesswork and hunches. And who can blame them, if they are in schools/academies for only a day.

If, on the other hand, they spend four days inspecting a school/academy as they did in the halcyon days, governors, headteachers and the staff will find the experience very stressful and resent the inspection. Ofsted is damned if it does and damned if it doesn't.

We live in exciting times and must wait and see how matters unfold.

Head of steam developing for T levels as launch date draws nearer

I What are the T Levels?

On 11 October 2017, the then Education Secretary, Justine Greening, announced the launch of the first three T (Technical) levels in September 2020. Delivered by a small number of providers, they will be

- 1) Childcare and Education (Education Pathway);
- 2) Digital (Software Applications Design Pathway); and
- 3) Construction (Building, Services and Engineering Pathway).

In September 2021, the six T Levels, which will join the first three, are

- 1) Legal, Finance and Accounting (Full Route);
- 2) Childcare and Education (Full Route);
- 3) Digital (Full Route);
- 4) Construction (Full Route);
- 5) Engineering and Manufacturing (Full Route); and
- 6) Health and Science (Full Route)

The remaining five, which will take off in September 2022, are

- 1) Hair and Beauty (Full Route);
- 2) Agriculture, Environment and Animal Care (Full Route);
- 3) Business and Administration (Full Route);
- 4) Catering and Hospitality (Full Route); and
- 5) Creative Design (Full Route).

A small number of providers will offer the first three qualifications from 2020. Selected providers will deliver the six priority areas (see above) the following year. The vast majority of providers will offer T levels by 2024. The government intends to confirm who these providers will be in Autumn 2018.

II Technical Studies: the Cinderella of Education

We in the United Kingdom have a problem with technology, which, in our educational system is Cinderella to her academic step-sisters, the A Levels. To understand why, we must go back into history.

Sir Bernhard Samuelson, MP for Banbury and the son of a Swiss-German engineer, headed up a Royal Commission on technical instruction in the 1880s. He was the son of a Swiss-German engineer, who was a pioneer of the dual system of apprenticeship. Sir Bernhard was charged with persuading the Treasury about the merits of his plans to give technical education the status that it deserved at a time when there was not much enthusiasm to provide the resources needed. Accordingly, the mandarins (civil servants) had the then Chancellor agree to imposing a tax on whisky production to help local authorities achieve Sir Bernhard's aims.

This was at a time when the Iron Chancellor of Germany, Otto von Bismark, was funding an expansive network of vocational schools in his country, many of which exist till today. It wasn't surprising, consequently, when Britain became the object of the joke of not being able to organise quality vocational training from a booze-up in a brewery.

The T levels initiative has been the brainchild of the [Sainsbury Review 2016](#). Sainsbury's working group had found the existing vocational qualifications too confusing besides not providing young people with the necessary skills to succeed if not excel at work. Altogether, £60 million has been made available this financial year to prepare for the launch of T levels. This will rise to £445 million in 2021-22 and eventually to £500 million by the year following.

David Hughes, chief executive of the Association of Colleges, told *The Times Educational Supplement*: "The new T levels will need to fight hard to gain recognition and to be valued, but this announcement is a good first step. I look forward to working with the government on developing the pathways from level 2 through levels 3, 4 and 5 which are needed for success."

Neil Carberry, managing director for people policy at the CBI, added: "Businesses will be encouraged by the positive progress on the introduction of T levels, though there is still much for companies and the government to address together. It's important that these new technical routes are woven into the wider education system from the start, to ensure they are respected and are seen to have the same quality as A levels."

III Developing parity of esteem

It will take a shift in the mindset of the nation to enable technical/vocational qualifications develop parity of esteem with the academic. However, as Confucius said: "Longest journey is achieved when man decides to take the first step" – perhaps the most difficult one to take. The government is doing so with technical education. We keep our fingers crossed and there is no reason why we should not succeed in a nation where we have produced the following greats.

- ⇒ Sir Michael Faraday, the British inventor of the dynamo and industrial design engineer.
- ⇒ William Robert Grove, who developed the Grove cell using zinc and platinum electrodes exposed to two acids and separated by a porous ceramic pot. He invented the first incandescent electric lights which were later perfected by Thomas Edison.

- ⇒ Sir Tim Berners Lee, British engineer and computer scientists best known as the inventor of the World Wide Web.
- ⇒ Sir James Dyson, the British inventor, industrial design engineer and founder of the Dyson company who is best known for inventing the dual cyclone bag-less vacuum cleaner.

IV The failed tripartite system

Sir Rab Butler, former Education Secretary, promulgated the Education Act 1944, which sought to establish a tripartite system, by giving equal status to grammar (for the academic), secondary modern (for those who failed their 11+ tests) and technical schools. Much later, the government introduced a smorgasbord of diplomas for young people - the 14-19-year-olds. These were ditched by the coalition government. England has not been short of good intentions, but that has been the way to our vocational/technical “hell”.

We are in the lower quartile of the 35 countries in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in technical skills. Damian Hinds, the Education Secretary and Anne Milton, the Skills Minister are now charged with making T levels a success. According to Tom Bewick, Chief Executive of the Federation of Awarding Bodies, they will need to ensure that their civil servants pay attention to three key issues.

First, they will need to draught in “the widest possible expertise from the qualification and assessment community” to bid in delivering the T levels. The Federation of Awarding Bodies wrote to Anne Milton “about a consortia-led approach to bidding, including some imaginative ideas about how a reformed single licensing regime could help to minimise the risk of a major collapse”.

Second, government must send a strong message to parents and their children and convince them “to see T levels as a ‘gold standard’ on a par with A levels. Beyond the Westminster bubble, there is next to zero awareness of what these technical education reforms are trying to achieve”. Winning hearts and minds with a national marketing campaign will be a challenge. The sooner this begins, the better.

Bewick is concerned that the government has not set national minimum entry requirements for T levels, which he states in *The Times Educational Supplement*, “may sound sensible in terms of social mobility, but there is a danger that T levels could quickly become stigmatised as a ‘sink scheme’ for the less able”. If the first cadre of students in 2020 did not include some high achievers at 16+, the qualification will be seen as being fit for “other people’s children”.

Third, quality work placements for T level students must be made available. “Britain has a poor record of education-business partnerships at the local level. There is a need, therefore, to invest heavily in a network of sub-regional and local brokerage bodies to help match T level students to the available work placement opportunities,” he wrote.

Government turns screws on schools and academies to promote technical education

We have a cultural problem in this country. Secondary schools and academies continue to resist encouraging youngsters to become technically competent. However, under [Section 42B of the Technical and Further Education Act 2017](#), all schools and academies have a number of duties in relation to the promotion of technical education. They must

- (a) “give education and training providers the opportunity to talk to pupils in years 8 to 13 about approved technical qualifications and apprenticeships”;
- (b) “have clear arrangements in place” to ensure that all pupils have opportunity to receive information from providers of post-14, post-16 and post-18 options “at, and leading up to important transition points”; and
- (c) publish policy statements outlining how providers can access their schools/academies, the rules for granting and refusing access and what providers can expect once granted access.

Whether it is because schools and academies put so much store on GCSEs and A Levels and the push to getting more of their children into universities – especially those in the Russell Group - or for the purposes of climbing up league tables, they are loathe to allow their brighter and more academic pupils to opt for technical education. Consequently, technical education continues to be the Cinderella of the service.

[Section 42B](#) of the Technical and Further Education Act has been described as “the Baker Clause” because of the wish of the former Secretary of State for Education, Lord Kenneth Baker to make non-academic options available for youngsters. Section 42B came into effect on 2 January 2018. However, earlier this year, a *Schools Week* investigation discovered that only two of the 10 largest Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) had fully complied with the Baker Clause.

Anne Milton, the Minister of State for Skills and Apprenticeships has urged colleges and training companies to [report](#) schools and academies that are non-compliant. In fact, the Department for Education already began [action](#) in May 2018 against institutions that were flouting the law.

Meanwhile, the Education Secretary, Damian Hinds, has allocated £5 million to 20 ‘career hubs’ to boost advice and job ‘encounters’. Altogether, 646 secondary schools and academies, 15 sixth forms and 49 Further Education Colleges will be linked to the hubs. Each hub is involved with 40 (circa) different institutions.

Every career hub must help schools and academies to promote local enterprise partnerships and offer bursaries to train career leaders. Altogether, 30 local enterprise partnerships applied to join the initiative and 20 were successful. (See appendix for a list of career hubs.)

The North-East Local Enterprise Partnership piloted the initiative from 2015 to 2017 with a view to enabling all the secondary schools/academies in the area achieve all eight Gatsby benchmarks. The

number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) halved over the period, according to the Social Mobility Commission.

Mr Damian Hinds said: “The hubs will support young people with the right advice to help them make decisions about their future by building better links with employers and providing practical guidance and support to improve the provision of careers advice in schools.”

All secondary schools and academies must publish details of their career programmes from 1 September 2018 and the names of their “careers leaders”. By December 2020, each secondary institution must offer every pupil at least seven “meaningful encounters” with employers over the course of her/his school/academy career and meet all eight government-endorsed “Gatsby benchmarks” of good careers education, i.e.

- (i) a stable careers programme;
- (ii) learning from career and labour market information;
- (iii) addressing the needs of each pupil;
- (iv) linking curriculum learning to careers;
- (v) promoting pupil/student encounters with employers and employees;
- (vi) enabling pupils/students to have experiences of the workplace;
- (vii) organising encounters between pupils/students with Further and Higher Education; and
- (viii) offering pupils/student personal guidance

Appendix

The 20 Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) selected to run hubs

- 1) Cornwall & Isles of Scilly
- 2) Lancashire
- 3) Leeds City Region
- 4) Black Country
- 5) York, North Yorkshire and East Riding
- 6) Cumbria
- 7) Swindon & Wiltshire
- 8) Stoke & Staffordshire
- 9) The Solent
- 10) West of England
- 11) Buckinghamshire Thames Valley
- 12) Greater Manchester
- 13) The South East (East Sussex)
- 14) Leicester & Leicestershire
- 15) Heart of South West (Devon, Plymouth, Somerset and Torbay)
- 16) Humber
- 17) Tees Valley
- 18) Worcestershire

- 19) Liverpool City Region
- 20) New Anglia (Norfolk and Suffolk)

The Education Reform Act (ERA) 1988 celebrates 30th birthday

I What precisely is ERA?

The Education Reform Act 1988 (ERA) is regarded by many as the most important piece of legislation since the Education Act 1994. The ERA - known as the Butler Act – celebrated 30 years of being on the statute books in July 2018. It firmly placed education in the marketplace, a process that began in the early 1980s under Mrs Margaret Thatcher’s government. Her Education Secretary at that time was Kenneth (now Lord) Baker. The Act transferred most powers and responsibilities from local educational authorities (LEAs) to school governing boards at one end of the educational spectrum and to the Secretary of State at the other end.

In its incubation in Parliament, it was known as the GERBIL, the Great Educational Reform Bill.

For the first time, the country had a national curriculum (NC). The NC set out attainment targets, programmes of study and arrangements for assessment. The NC consisted of three core subjects (English, Mathematics and Science) and six foundation subjects (History, Geography, Technology, Art and Physical Education) together with a foreign language. In Welsh-speaking areas of Wales, schools were also required to teach Welsh.

The National Curriculum Council (NCC) and the School Examination and Assessment Council (SEAC) were established. Both are now defunct. Their functions were to review all aspects of the curriculum and examinations and testing. Four Key Stages in pupils’ education were established, where pupils were tested (in the first three Key Stages) and sat examinations at Key Stage 4 – i.e. GCSEs.

Attached to tests and examinations were league tables introduced by the government. These made some headteachers and governors spare with worry while others gamed the system.

Religious Education was not a core of foundation subject but continued to be a fundamental teaching requirement in line with Section 25 of the Education Act 1944 – the Butler Act. In faith schools, the RE curriculum followed had to be approved by its parental religious body. In non-faith schools (the majority), the RE curriculum was the Agreed Syllabus codified by the LEA. This is the case till today. Also, all schools had to have a daily act of worship, the majority of which had to be of a Christian character, unless the school obtained a dispensation from the Standard Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE).

The Act required all schools to be open for (at least) 190 days a year and all teachers to have training for an additional five days annually, which came to be known as the “Baker days” – after its creator.

The Act ushered in grant-maintained (GM) schools, the precursors to foundation schools and later – i.e. academies. GM schools received their funding directly from government with those sums deducted from the budgets of the local authorities in which they were sited.

ERA heralded the end of the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA), the stamping ground of Ken Livingstone, who had reigned supreme at the Greater London Council (GLC). ILEA was broken up into 13 smaller authorities – the City of London, Camden, Greenwich, Hackney, Hammersmith and Fulham, Islington, Kensington and Chelsea, Lambeth, Lewisham, Southwark, Tower Hamlets, Wandsworth and Westminster.

To shake up the school system even more, the government directed that every LEA delegate the bulk of school budgets to schools to manage their own finances. This became known as the local management of schools (LMS). The governing board now had responsibility for its school expenditure – not the local authority. The headteacher managed the school budget on a day-to-day basis and was answerable to the board.

Fifteen City Technology Colleges (CTCs) - state-funded, all-ability secondary schools, free to the pupils but independent of local educational authorities - were created. They were overseen by the Department for Education (DfE). Private business sponsors came up with 20% of the capital costs for establishing a CTC with the rest from the government. CTCs had to teach the national curriculum but specialised in subjects such as technology, science and mathematics. They forged close links with business and industry through their sponsors from where they drew directors and governors.

Of the 15, only three remain (the others having converted to academies). The three are

- ⇒ the British School for the Performing Arts and Technology in Croydon;
- ⇒ Emmanuel College in Gateshead; and
- ⇒ Thomas Telford School in Shropshire sponsored by the Mercers Company and Tarmac Holdings Limited.

CTCs spawned University Technology Colleges (UTCs), the brainchild of Lord Baker. The 50th UTC - North East Futures - opened on 1 September 2018. Two more are waiting approval from Damian Hinds, the Secretary of State.

ERA also ushered in much more parental choice of schools/academies, albeit many barriers remain, not least, a shortage of places in what parents consider to be “good” schools and academies. Finally, ERA, scrapped academic tenure for university lecturers and professors.

II Reflections of Lord Kenneth Baker, architect of ERA

Writing in *The Times Educational Supplement* on 13 July 2018, Lord Baker mentioned that following the 1987 general elections, which the Conservatives won, Prime Minister Thatcher told him to go away for four weeks and return with some clear ideas of how he wished to fashion the education system in the country, given that many schools had been severely shattered by teachers’ industrial action for more pay in the mid-1980s and some local authorities were ruling the roost to the detriment of children’s futures.

Writing in *The Times Educational Supplement* on Friday, 13 July 2018, Lord Baker said that at that time, he set himself four tasks (additional to settling the 18-month teachers' strike).

- (a) The first was dissolving the ILEA, which he considered was dominated by “extreme left-wing teachers”. Allied to this was the creation of grant-maintained schools based on parental ballots.
- (b) Second, he wanted to ensure that every school included computing and digital training in its curriculum. He thought that this could be spread by establishing City Technologies – “the first independent state schools” - whose education would focus on computing. While Lord Baker averred that 16 were established, only 15 were.
- (c) Third, he was keen to create a “national curriculum, since good schools had a good curriculum and poor schools had a commensurate curriculum – some even teaching peace studies instead of history”.

Linked to the national curriculum were tests to which pupils were to be subjected at the end of key stages – i.e. aged 7, 11, 14 and at the end of the fourth key stage aged 16, when pupils would sit GCSEs. “The publication of results would then lead to league tables,” he wrote. “My goal was for parents to know more about the performance of their children’s schools – that was revolutionary in 1988.” This was at the heart of his policy to place education in the marketplace.

- (d) Finally, he wanted schools to be in charge of their own budgets. The scheme had been successfully trialled in Cambridgeshire. He wanted to extend it to the rest of the country’s schools.

While the Labour Party became extremely vocal in negative criticisms of the GERBIL (later the ERA), the fact of the matter was that when it came to power in 1997, Tony Blair, the then Prime Minister, and David Blunkett, his Educational Secretary, accepted the changes – almost in their entirety. They abolished grant-maintained schools but introduced foundation schools – where the governors became the employers of staff, owned the properties on which the schools were sited, framed their own admissions policies and managed the practice.

One part of the policy Lord Baker regrets. He wrote in the TES: “If I was fashioning a national curriculum today, I would stop it at age 14 and then provide a series of specialist colleges for ages 14-18 covering academic studies, science, engineering, digital, creative industries, health, business studies, logistics, agriculture and hospitality. This is what happens in Austria, which has the lowest number of NEETs (young people not in education, employment or training) in Europe.

The other “sin of omission” he admitted was not having “improved technical education further, which has always been the Cinderella of our system. I am trying to make up for that with University Technical Colleges”. Also, he would have liked to have lengthened the teaching day by one period. However, this would have involved lengthy negotiations with the teacher unions at a time when he had just settled the teachers’ strike. He did not feel at that time it was a battle worth fighting.

III Reactions of Fred Jarvis, NUT Leader from 1975 - 1989

Unsurprisingly, the former leader of the National Union of Teachers (NUT), who was also given a verbal platform in the TES to vent his fury, savaged the ERA. He wrote: “When a piece of legislation is described as a ‘Reform Act’, one expects that it will deal either with a long-awaited change of practice, repair a major deficiency in provision or create new practice generally recognised as beneficial. The ‘Baker Act’ satisfied none of those criteria.”

He said that the Act failed to address the low participation of working class children in higher education and was deficient in providing universal nursery education. He could not understand why Lord Baker rued having failed to recognise that technical and vocational education was as important as the academic, given that 15 CTCs in which technical education featured prominently, were established.

While he wrote that the Act did nothing to put an end to the lack of trust, the government and parents considered that the teachers had behaved (with their strike action closing schools down) in a way that did not merit government’s trust.

Jarvis resented the Labour Prime Minister Jim Callaghan’s unprecedented entry into the “secret garden of education”. However, if education was being funded by the tax payer, the government, one can argue, had every right to ensure that schools were producing educational quality for the citizens who were funding it. Besides, the nation was tiring of striking teachers to the detriment of the children. Additionally, there were wide disparities in the quality of the education being delivered not just across the country but also within an area and even in a school: hence the announcement in ERA of a national curriculum.

Jarvis was possibly justified in expressing reservations about the Secretary of State taking “more powers under the Bill than any other member of the Cabinet, more than my right honourable friends the chancellor of the exchequer, the secretary of state for defence and the secretary of state for social services”. The Secretary of State has over 2,000 powers in his control of the education system today. Sir Tim Brighouse, the former Educational Director of Birmingham and the leader of the London Challenge, said in a recent lecture that “the Secretary of State defines in detail what shall be taught, how it should be taught and when it should be taught – something never attempted by Napoleon, Hitler and other continental dictators, and, interestingly, by no other western developed country – at least to the same extent as that enacted in England”.

Jarvis wonders how Lord Baker could establish the national curriculum when, today, free schools and academies are not required toe the national curriculum line. But was Michael Gove and not Lord Baker who created academies and free schools in 2010.

Jarvis points to Finland as an exemplar of what should have been in the UK. Finland is one of the countries at the top of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). He quoted Pasi Sahlberg, former Chief Inspector of Finland’s schools, as saying: “We trusted teachers,” when asked for one factor that accounted for the country’s educational success. However, Jarvis fails to take account of the fact that the culture of Finland is different to that of the UK. In Finland, education is highly valued by the country’s population more than it is over here – particularly among the white working-class population.

It is best left to Dame Joan McVittie, former Headteacher of Woodside High School in Tottenham (the London Borough of Haringey), to have the final words on the matter of the national curriculum and testing.

She said that when she was a teacher in the 1980s, she thought that “there was greater mobility of families across the country and it made sense to me that all schools would teach the same content to each year group. So pupils arriving, for example, in Cumbria from Essex or other areas were able to quickly settle down with their studies as all schools were supposed to teach the same content.

“Many pupils in weaker schools were allowed to drift until preparation for GCEs and CSEs began. Suddenly we had league tables, which were published publicly, showing pupils’ attainment at the end of Year 9 and Year 11, and the stakes were raised for all schools and teachers.

“There were many other aspects to the 1988 Act, but for those teaching in most schools, the new accountability measures probably had the greatest impact. I believe that they helped to drive school improvement. Prior to the Act, I had worked in a school (not in London) where the technology department spent two years building a boat in the middle of the school quad. While I have no doubt that it was a marvellous experience for the teachers, I wonder how much technology the pupils learned. Lots of practical woodwork for some, but not much else. With the national curriculum and the accountability measures, teachers were held to account for what they taught their pupils.”

Fred Jarvis would be hard pushed to get the support of headteachers, teachers and governors to go back to the halcyon days which are as dead as dodos.

Glossary

AET	Academy Education Trust
ASCL	Association of School and College Leaders
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
CEO	Chief Education Officer
CTC	City Technology College
DfE	Department for Education
DIY	Do It Yourself
EBacc	English Baccalaureate
EPI	Education Policy Institute
ERA	Education Reform Act
ESFA	Education and Skills Funding Agency
GERBIL	Great Education Reform Bill
GLC	Greater London Council
GM	Grant Maintained
HMCI	Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools
IFS	Institute of Fiscal Studies
ILEA	Inner London Education Authority
LA	Local Authority
LEA	Local Education Authority
LMS	Local Management of Schools
LEP	Local Enterprise Partnership
MAT	Multi-Academy Trust
MPR	Main Pay Range
NAHT	National Association of Headteachers
NAO	National Audit Office
NC	National Curriculum
NCC	National Curriculum Council
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NEU	National Education Union
NHS	National Health Service
NUM	National Union of Miners
NUT	National Union of Teachers
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
PHE	Public Health England
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
RE	Religious Education
RSCs	Regional School Commissioners
SACRE	Standard Advisory Council for Religious Education
SEAC	School Examination and Assessment Council
STRB	School Teachers' Review Body
TES	Times Educational Supplement
UCAC	Undeb Cenedlathol Athrawon Cymru
UTCs	University Technical Colleges
VC	Voluntary Controlled (School)