AND FINALLY!

P S TAIT

The fourth and final volume of 'Thoughts from the Study'

2015

Introduction: After three previous collections, it is satisfying to be able to head one up 'And Finally' concluding a total of over 150 articles written during my time as a head. I intend to continue writing on education, but without the responsibility of being in charge of a school, always having to consider possible reputational damage especially when writing about sensitive educational issues such as some pastoral subjects or the state-private divide. When one of my articles was discussed on the Jeremy Vine show I became aware, very quickly, of how arguments can be distorted and how cautious you have to be. Yet, there is a place for forthright dialogue and discussions on education – some of which will form the basis of 'Please Not Again' or some such title in the future.

The greatest tragedy in education facing us today is the inequality of educational opportunity, a stick often used to beat independent schools, but which sits more properly with government in tacitly accepting the postcode lottery that hides the huge discrepancies in the quality of education available from one school to the next. That mutual suspicion exists between the sectors, based on misinformation, ignorance and occasionally arrogance, is regrettable.

Education is too important for any argument to be dismissed on such grounds. The widening social gap and slowing down of social mobility should concern us all. We all need to learn from each other and have some honest debate and we could start by refuting the myth that the reason for the pre-dominance of the alumni of independent schools in society is solely because of the excellence of their education. Nor should we try to do without independent schools for they have an important role to play even if they have some soul-searching to do in terms of their modus operandi and their moral and ethical codes. A break down in discipline and a lack of hope and aspiration are evident amongst too many of our young and both sectors need to work to address these issues.

Meanwhile, below are a series of articles that have appeared as columns in Attain or Sherborne Times, a sermon delivered in Sherborne Abbey (slightly abridged), a chapter of a book on selection, several blogs that have appeared in the Daily Telegraph on-line and other miscellaneous articles from the past two years. There may some repetition in one or two, for which I apologise. I hope you enjoy them.

Peter Tait August 2015

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Call This Education?

The recent news that two thirds of state schools had not managed to send a single pupil to Oxford or Cambridge highlights the problem that exists around the portmanteau word that is 'Oxbridge'. Read the literature of almost any independent school, and there will be some reference somewhere to the number of Oxbridge places they have achieved. It is what their governors and parents want, for in their view and in the view of many of the public, that is the yardstick of academic excellence, the acme of a successful education.

What a lot of tosh! While there is no disputing the excellence of both universities, what is happening to our education is that these two old, venerated ladies are held up as the pinnacle of the success of our schools. Those who choose to go elsewhere, however able, do so at their peril and often to the gnashing of teeth by their schools, as if no other universities count. Oxbridge has a cadence, a ring that is out of place in today's world. As a result, ambitious schools, concerned with their own standing, aspire for their best students to go there and nowhere else and often place them under extraordinary pressure to achieve – all of which goes someway to explain the epidemic of mental health issues experienced by their undergraduates.

The problem is that what we are doing in our schools feeds this mentality. Oxbridge is the banner, but selection is the issue. League tables for SATs, for GCSEs, for A Levels perpetuate the idea that excellence is a narrow gateway and that all you have to do is learn to pass exams. Testing is all, raising examination results is all, despite the sacrifices required in educational terms to achieve that end. When Nicky Morgan talks about a moral mission to improve children's well-being, she might well start here, with the tunnel vision that exists in our schools because of league tables. There is an obvious cost: children's health, breadth of learning, expansive and creative teaching, a denigration of other educational opportunities, unrealistic expectations on schools and teachers, a focus on a goal that condemns the vast majority to fail,? All because of an obsession with two universities? Really?

Of course, it is not about two universities. It is about the fact that our education, through league tables and the need to succeed, has turned our schools into places where measurement is all and where education is defined by how well we perform on a single - and flawed - measure of what makes a good education.

On a British Council Mission to China late last year, we met with Professor Tang, an adviser to the British government at one time and former Principal of Shanghai High School when it led the world in the PISA rankings so beloved of politicians, to put education into a broader

context. Asked by a colleague whether league tables or value added were the best measures of a school, he replied that all either did was to measure the improvement of test scores. Such a focus represented a part of education at best. What of the other less easily quantifiable goals, leadership, initiative, creativity, purpose, the breadth of skills and independent thinking, where are they? Where indeed? Just because we cannot easily measure them does not mean they don't count.
We have a dysfunctional school system littered by the flotsam and jetsam of political bad ideas; schools screwed to the wall by bureaucracy so school trips, games, anything out of the ordinary are hardly worth the bother; schools (and when did we think it was helpful to start dividing schools up into academies, free schools and their like?) are treated like businesses despite the fact that they are not. Schools unable to get on with teaching because someone is always tweaking policy (adding 'able' to gifted and talented comes to mind). Failing schools? Where did that idea come from? And what do we do with them? Well, close them of course. That's a good message. Can we apply it to politics? And having parents as the shareholders in schools? Can we try that in the Ministry of Justice also and see how vested interests would operate there? Come on!
The reality is we live in a progressive, socially mobile society undergoing rapid and exciting social and technological change that should have teachers at the core. Yet the profession is in retreat, intimidated by league tables, dulled by inspection, 'failing' schools threatened with the intervention of super-heads and battalions of new teachers fresh from the armed forces or the City. And through it all, instead of looking at how we can make education more relevant and fit for purpose, we keep coming back to that word and our obsession with it.

i This article appeared in the Daily Telegraph on-line on 19th February, 2015 under the heading "*Oxbridge is not the only yardstick of a successful education."*

Children should see Education as an Opportunity, not a Straitjacket'

Education is about raising expectations and facilitating ideas, it isn't about dragging the lifeblood out of childhood, argues headmaster Peter Tait

As the current education revolution gathers further momentum with Michael Gove's blitz on absences during the term, truancy, the length of the school day, school holidays and the state-independent divide, something is happening to our children.

Hand in hand with the disquiet caused by league tables, the competition for places at top schools and universities, the calls to start formal education earlier and the referred pressures placed upon teachers and schools to deliver, is an epidemic of stress related diseases, eating disorders and incidences of self-harming**.**

Is this really any surprise when we have an approach to education that is focused on driving up standards without ever appearing to consider how such a thing might be best achieved or even the fundamental question of what, in 2014, represents the best education for our children?

We know what will help: smaller class sizes, greater freedom for schools and teachers to manage their curriculum and their classrooms, improved classroom discipline (and, yes, there have been positive moves here), more money allocated to training and retraining teachers.

Also, more emphasis on building character and resilience, breaking down the glass ceilings that flatten aspirations, and less emphasis on summative exams which can stifle curiosity and independent thought.

But most importantly, we need to move from a situation where pupils are being compelled into working longer hours and sitting more tests than almost any other country in the world, into one in which they are given a different mindset, that education is an opportunity that lies at the heart of advancement and fulfilment; something they want to pursue, not some straitjacket or artificial compulsion.

No wonder we have an epidemic of ill health amongst our young, especially in London and the South-East, despite Steve Munby triumphing London schools as being a success story**,** (ironically, the place where student mental health is most at risk).

No wonder we have children turned off learning because they have grown cynical about its inequities. No wonder tutoring is now our fastest growing industry.

Until we get rid of the whip and focus more on the carrot in sharing attitudes to education, and actually show that education is more than passing exams, we are going nowhere. The question is how to make children believe.

We can acknowledge some positive changes. For instance, we can assume that our academic performance needs to improve. And we do need to raise our expectations for our children (although this is more a failing of our society than our schools).

The changes in the computer curriculum were welcomed as has been the focus on improving social mobility, even if it is just words. Yet when we get the former Schools Minister, Nick Gibb advocating rote learning as

the way to compete with their peers in the Far East, one wonders what he is thinking.

Of course, some rote learning is good and necessary, in the same way that we need a mix of knowledge and skills and pedagogy. Naturally, we should insist on excellence and try to improve examination results – but not at any price. We should be looking at how we measure children – and why.

We should look at the disjoint between what schools are producing, often by placing children under duress, and what employers, universities and, dare I say it, society wants.

We should focus on addressing key issues like class size and the amount of funding lost to bureaucracy and look to move the focus in education from demanding more from children in the way of time and tenuous results to asking more of them as people. Finally, we need to give our schools some social capital.

Parents and children are weary of hearing comments about how initiative, curiosity and time for collaborative learning are all sacrificed because 'they are not being examined'.

It appears there is no time for deviation in our quest for better exam results, no time for exploration, no time for the commensurate social development that needs to take place, no time to allow for readiness or for challenging the scurrilous idea that education is confined to the walls of a classroom.

For what? Are our children at 18 better motivated or better educated? Or just better drilled and tutored, yet in fact, less-rounded, less resilient, less inclined to want to keep learning?

So what do we have: children being blamed for not working harder, cynical about what lies ahead for them; teachers being lampooned for the lack of effectiveness in raising performance and aspirations; schools sacrificing children on the altar of league table for their own ends. All of this is a disaster.

We seem to be looking everywhere and no where: the Far East, Australasia, Finland, as if there is some trick to it. There is not. Education is simple: it is about the effectiveness of the engagement, developing attitudes and a good work ethic, raising expectations, inspiring and facilitating ideas.

It is – and especially in this brave new world of technology – about setting students new challenges and the intellectual freedom to deliver. It is about engendering self-discipline; it is about the quality of what is delivered and acquired, not the quantity; it is about starting children on a

lifelong journey, not subjecting them to a marathon, before their brains and bones are set.

It is not about dragging the lifeblood out of childhood.

We should focus more on character and less on prescribed knowledge – especially that chosen for us by politicians – and we should worry about things that really matter – that self-harming is on the increase and that we are undergoing an epidemic of stress-related diseases.

We should address the fact that our children live in a toxic climate which is being created for them for no good reason.

Ask the employer, who wants a well-rounded person, with good social skills, the ability to work collaboratively, a good work ethic and a sense of humour. Ask the parent, who wants a happy, well-adjusted child with ambition and a hunger to learn. Ask the child, who wants a little bit of childhood back.

We are moving forward, but we are not empowering children and making them trust and believe in the power of education. That is a waste that will not be corrected until schools and politicians know how to keep students' best interests at heart.

This article was first published in the Daily Telegraph On-Line on 25 February, 2014

Education in China

"Teachers open the door but you must walk through it yourself."
(Chinese Proverb)

Last October, I was one of five head teachers invited by the British Council to visit China. The Great Mission, so called, was hosted by the Cultural and Education Section of the British Consulate-General and had as its primary objectives to promote boarding in the United Kingdom, by showcasing the education and culture offered by British boarding schools, and to help link British and Chinese schools.

The itinerary was a full and busy one including press conferences in Beijing and Shanghai, representing British boarding schools on behalf of the British Council at the International Education Expo in Shanghai, meetings with head teachers in each of the cities, joining in panel discussions on education and a number of visits to schools.

Over recent years, Shanghai, in particular, has been held up as the acme of educational achievement in China with Shanghai High School regularly identified as the top achieving schools in the PISA rankings, so

beloved of the present government. As a result of their success, there have been a number of well-publicised exchanges of ideas and personnel, most recently involving fifty mathematics' teachers between British schools and their counterparts in China in an effort to discover and replicate some of the DNA that makes the Chinese schools so successful. There are, of course, few secrets, other than cultural. Children may start school in China two or three years later than do their counterparts in Britain but they start with an appetite that is embedded in their cultural values and is not easily replicated in the West.

Of course, the prevalent view in the UK is still that Chinese students work inordinately long hours and that their education focuses on the acquisition of knowledge above all else and therein lies their success. This is, of course, a part of it, but by no means all. Visiting Xinghewan School in Shanghai, we had lunch with Professor Tang, the previous head of the aforementioned Shanghai High School, who had recently returned from advising the British Government on education. At one stage in the discussions, there was a debate between two of our group about measuring schools by league tables or value added. Professor Tang listened patiently before commenting that both dealt with measuring the improvement in the students' ability to perform in examinations, but that was all and was not at the heart of education. When pushed he added, 'academic performance' was only a part of what education is about and what was as important was the moral development of the student, their sense of responsibility, attitudes, manners, habits and leadership qualities. Students needed to learn that knowledge is not static, but dynamic and that they needed to learn the skills of analysis and critical thinking to manipulate and use it.

Which is, of course, at variance with much of what we associate with Chinese schools. While we were very aware we were, in the main, seeing schools at the forefront of educational change, it was very evident that change happens very rapidly in China and when it does, involves huge numbers of children. For the first time, I witnessed a true international curriculum, built on Chinese traditions and cultures and embracing aspects of American, British and other curricula. During my school visits, I had meetings with a number of 11 and 12 year olds who told me the history they studied included Chinese History, of course, but also American History, Japanese history and the history of World War Two (two had been on exchange in the United states and were critical of the one dimensional history being taught there). When taking a class of fifteen year olds on the subject of Myth and History and how we need to see history from many sides, a hand went up and a student volunteered the parallel of Atticus telling Scout in 'To Kill a Mockingbird', that to understand another person (or culture), one needed to walk around in

their skin! And when I somehow ended up giving a seventy minute talk on Thomas Hardy and his wives to over two hundred 14 and 15 year olds I would have sworn it was almost incomprehensible until one student asked about whether Hardy loved his second wife, employed as his secretary, while the first wife was still alive – one, at least, had been listening!
Which was all very humbling – and illuminating!

China is well underway to building a true international education system and to do so, they are travelling like magpies around the globe, selecting what fits and enhances. At the moment British schools still have something to offer – but I would venture that the pendulum is starting to shift quite dramatically. While over 400,000 Chinese went to study abroad in 2013, (including 135,000 to Britain), during the same period, 54,000 UK students were in full-time study in China – a staggering increase of 29% on the previous year. The future looks exciting indeed and is one of mutual benefit - but only as long as we keep up and make a worthwhile contribution.

Forget 'Asian tigers' we need to focus on learning smarter

"We should be wary of aspiring to the educational systems of Pisa's high-scoring countries such as Singapore, China and South Korea. Any nation could technically emulate such stringent systems, but it would come at a price." David Hanson

The publication of the latest PISA results has, once again, had the Government in a flap, trying desperately to explain away Britain's continuing fall down the international rankings.

Inevitably the Government have been quick to blame Labour for failing a generation whilst they were in Office, while Labour has responded by criticising current Government policies. With politicians, especially those involved in running education, it was always thus.

In Saturday's papers, Elizabeth Truss, the Education Minister, was very clear as to what we need to do to respond to the challenge. We should, she assert, "adopt Chinese-style tactics such as evening classes" and "learn from the Asian Tigers" in order to "out-educate the rest of the world."

It is a laudable ambition, but so lamentably unrealistic and limited in scope that it is most unlikely to convince anyone that the Government's educational vision is anything other than naive.

Of course, we want our children to be more ambitious, more aspirational and to work hard, but we need to consider what that means, how it can be achieved and to what end.

If it means jeopardising the mental health of our children as happens in South Korea, which now has the highest youth suicide rate in the world, then we need to tread very warily; if it means extending classes into evenings, extending the length of days and terms, then we need to ask why some of the some of the most successful nations teach considerably fewer hours than we do and to much greater effect.

If we want our children to work harder and longer hours, we have to convince them of the value of education and the benefits of doing so in a society that doesn't always reward hard work or ambition.

If, instead, we spend some time examining the type of education already being practised in Singapore or Finland, or asking why we trail countries with similar school systems including Australia, Canada and New Zealand, then there are valuable lessons to be learned which could inform us as to which way to proceed.

It might be sensible ascertaining what works best within our culture rather than throwing more hours – precious hours – wrested from an ever-diminishing childhood, for no obvious end.

If we are honest, I suspect we are not going to be able to compete with those Asian and other economies where education is an economic imperative, and often the one opportunity for families to break out of poverty.

Children in many emerging countries are hungry to learn and willing to go to great lengths to do so. By comparison, most of our children are comparatively well-off, too distracted and comfortable to make the sacrifices necessary – and that is not their fault, but a consequence of our standard of living and the resultant adjustment in their expectations.

As Allison Pearson says**:** "The uncomfortable fact is that most kids in this over-entitled, under-boundaried, celebrity-obsessed culture of ours simply do not have the hunger that drives their Asian counterparts."

However, all this is a distraction. Au contraire, I do not think we should be trying to emulate the methodology of the Asian Tigers with its extra pressures and longer working hours, for a raft of educational reasons – after all, teachers in England already spend more than 100 extra hours a year in front of their students compared with those above them on the PISA table (and spend over $15,000 more on the education of their 6 – 15 year olds than the international average) and certainly more than the three commonwealth countries.

We could cite the example of Singapore, placed in the top three countries in the world for mathematics, reading and science, a country that spends less on education, has fewer timetabled hours and bigger class sizes and ask some salient questions about why we are setting out to do the opposite.

Instead of trying to replicate the style of teaching practised by the 'Asian Tigers' by trying to match their work ethic, we would benefit by spending more time thinking about 'learning smarter' and focusing on what will be important in the future, especially the ever-changing role of technology in our schools.

We need to hone our soft skills, improve our core subjects, especially mathematics, and ensure that what we are teaching is providing the best possible mix of skills and knowledge for our children, as well as a breadth of learning and experience that will make our children more employable and better citizens in the future.

To do that we could do three things: The first, is to instil more discipline in our schools and self-discipline in our children, a task that resides as much in our families, and our society, as in our classrooms. Our children need to know how to work hard and how to use time and opportunity to maximum effect.

Second, we need teachers who can engage and inspire children, who can plant in children knowledge and skills, but also the hunger to learn and the purpose for doing so. We want to encourage teachers who are highly motivated, aspirational for their pupils and who would be, in turn, duly rewarded, both financially and in the status afforded them.

Thirdly, we need to look at what we are teaching and ensure that we have given priority in time and emphasis to what will really count in improving the quality and relevance our children's education.

We need to show pupils it is possible to beat the economic odds, that hard work gets its just desserts; although to achieve that, we need to continue chipping away at the iniquitous glass ceiling that holds back aspiration. We need to get children to believe that time and effort expended will be worth it.

We need to think about what they should be learning, to make them more inquisitive, more able to use knowledge rather than just acquiring it, and to know how to communicate with all groups within society and all cultures, preferably in more than one language. For I fear they will not be able to compete in the simple acquisition of knowledge by emulating Asian Tigers – but the good news is nor do they need to.

Groving with Mr Blob

"We believe children will flourish if we challenge them but the Blob, in thrall to Sixties ideologies, wants to continue the devaluation of the exam system," **Michael Gove**

Mr Gove was clearly spoiling for a fight when he recently likened his battle with progressive education to that of Steve McQueen in the 1958 science fiction film, "The Blob". His first foray earlier this year was met with the inevitable over-reaction before the issue settled down to another of those episodic arguments of name-calling and point-scoring between the Minister and his acolytes and the numerous academics and teachers who oppose him.
There is no doubt that his attacks on Mr Blob appealed to many of his supporters and advocates. He used an impressive array of weapons - attacking schools for failing a generation; polarizing points of views; politicising education debate (something David Laws is clearly uncomfortable with); using emotive and pejorative words and terms in his speeches; dividing opponents by innuendo and association; and questioning the credibility and professionalism of teachers, too often caricatured as shadowy figures of the left who, apparently inhabit our schools in droves.

The trouble with such attacks, founded on scaremongering and division, is that they fuel a phoney war on education while distracting from the major issues. The Minister talks about the primacy of knowledge in education, but schools have always known that, although, determining what knowledge should be taught is most certainly not the job of politicians. Few teachers would ever see knowledge and skills as mutually exclusive, (nor knowledge and critical thinking) as they have been accused of doing. Teachers know that education should always have at its heart the acquisition, understanding and application of knowledge and yet Mr Blob's archenemy seeks polarise teachers along a skills – knowledge divide which is as erroneous as it is dangerous. In the same way, attacks on current jargon including 'progressive education' are as misplaced as attacks on his 'Gradgrind' model of education. One thing is clear however, and that is education must adapt and change as the demands of the world change. Schools need to develop, and while they need good foundations, they cannot be constrained by a set body of knowledge that is not, in itself, subject to review. When I hear criticism of schools for promoting independent learners or teaching children to become problem solvers, things that have always been an inherent part of what education should be about, then the propaganda war is well and

truly out of hand. In such instances, we should take a hard look at ourselves and ask the question, 'when did education become important for me?' I would venture the answer would be 'when I decided I owned it.' Ask Toby Young, outspoken critic of 'The Blob' who left school after O Levels before realising that education was important enough to return to full-time education and complete a PPE degree from Oxford, the same degree that launched the careers of a number of the current cabinet. How much time he would have been saved had he reached this realization, that his education was his responsibility, a little earlier in his life – or is this an example of education being as much about social development as the mere passing of exams? Not something we measure, Mr Blob.

Education has always been most successful when teachers have high expectations of children, engage with them in lessons and teach both knowledge and the skills by which to use it. In the same way children benefit from discipline, preferably self-discipline, and structure. But education is also about encouraging flexibility of thought, of questioning knowledge, whatever the teaching style or medium, whatever the colour of the teacher's tie. It is about teaching children to develop life-long habits for learning. On such matters, most teachers would agree. But it doesn't need an excessive emphasis placed on knowledge in isolation from the skills that make it work; blind adherence, narrow curricula and over-prescription is just as dangerous as the Blob.

In casting judgement on our schools and the way education has shifted, Mr Blob should, instead, reflect at what politicians have done to our schools. It is a truism, to mangle a maxim, that every society gets the schools it deserves, based on the value put on education (not the cost). In recent years, the fundamental paradigm for education in England has changed almost beyond recognition, as society, politicians and families have cheerfully handed over the major part of their social responsibility to schools. Wrap round care, the feeding of children, the provision of rules, guidelines and role models for children in the absence of any home rules, family divisions and widespread abrogation of parental roles and responsibilities, providing discipline where none exists have all passed over to teachers, who, having taken on these extra responsibilities on one hand, have been undermined on the other by having so many of their powers taken away through legislation, through Government interference and through rampant bureaucracy. When a primary Head confided that their main headache, come September, is to work out how they can provide school lunches for all of their children, then we are clearly in a different business than a generation ago.

So when Mr Blob gets a good kicking from politicians who place teachers on some arbitrary political spectrum, complain about falling standards (having taken teachers away from classroom and suffocated them in time-wasting bureaucracy before disempowering them by legislation),before throwing the responsibility for society's ills at them, is it any wonder we are confused? Sometimes, it seems, the truth is stranger than science fiction.

I'll Just Write that Down.

"When I talk to teachers they tell me the things they'd most like from any government are a reduction in bureaucracy, support to help ensure good discipline and a reformed Ofsted. Michael Gove

"Anyone who wants to induct a young person into their trade must fill in a "learning record every quarter. They must submit to extra health and safety inspections, and get a CRB check if they want to give work experience to someone under 18, before deciding whether to offer such an apprenticeship. They must ensure that the apprentice has diversity training, is familiar with employee rights and responsibilities, knows equality legislation and health and safety laws and can testify to the range of advice available to them including Access to Work and Additional Learning Support.

"We live in an age of measurement, rather than enlightenment" Tony Little, Headmaster, Eton College

Recently, a Government review found that NHS doctors and nurses were spending up to ten hours a week collecting and checking data, a third of which was deemed unnecessary, time that it was felt took them away from their core function, that of attending to patients. Ironically, it appears the proliferation of bureaucracy has expanded in direct proportion to the increased use of technology that was intended to reduce it. Instead, rather than allowing those qualified to provide medical care to do just that, they have less time to do so as they are constantly covering their backs. As a result, an estimated 2.5 million hours are lost per week on non-essential paperwork, time that could, and should be, spent on patient care, a trend that shows no sign of abating.

Sadly, it is no different in teaching. When I reflect on the job I took on fifteen years ago, it is almost unrecognisable. When I started has a head, I ran a department, taught a significant number of sets, coached a top sports team, and much more, with the help of one secretary who doubled as registrar. This was the norm and the teaching was at the heart of all I did and my major focus. Now with two extra secretaries, extra bursary staff, a registrar and marketing assistant, more school managers, more governors sub-committees, two technical assistants and a number of teaching assistants, it is a different world – and the tragedy is not that we need them all, but that what goes on in the classroom has assumed a lesser importance.

Fuelled by a fear of litigation and the need to record everything, from a plethora of meetings, to consult and inform, to every possible concern, threat, observation, possibility that might, just possibly, escalate into something else, has made schools and teachers guarded and defensive, no longer prepared to take school trips or challenge the reluctant child. The result is the over-examination and categorisation of children, a blanket of blandness, evident in school reports, in correspondence with parents, even, saddest of all, in teaching; adventurous and challenging lessons are subsumed by safe lessons, concerned with teaching just what is required to meet a target, to pass a test, seldom deviating from what is necessary to what is important. The constant need to record everything, to risk assess every activity, to comply with a growing amount of government requirements, for inspection, for compliance, for auditing, for measurement, for records, for feeding avaricious websites means that schools are no longer dominated by the number of teachers, but by a growing teams of auxiliary staff, providing with extra classroom and administrative support, staff dealing with human resources and extra technical support. Assessment targets, curriculum objectives and more detailed and regular appraisal means that time once given over to children is deflected into recording and measuring so that we can prove progress, whatever that means.

The other compounding factor that has become all consuming is, of course, the use of e-mail that has added considerable time each day. This is a problem that affects all service industries, and while it can speed up the transfer of information, overall its use has been deleterious; both in time lost, and also in creating a culture that is squeezed of any flexibility or life.

So what are the benefits, what are the costs of this risk-averse age we live in, so fully detailed on paper, by camera, on hard drives? Are we safer?

Possibly, yes, in the short term, but the long term prognosis says otherwise. Are our children safer? Doubtful, for they have protected against life, but not immunised against its dangers. Are we doing a better job educating them? Almost certainly not – for how can we when our resources for so doing are so marginalised and our targets are so prescribed? The tsunami of paperwork, now in the process of moving from our filing cabinets and servers to the cloud, is in danger of washing us all away, leaving a landscape safer, more measureable, but ultimately more sterile and restricted, and less capable of growing creative thought.

IQ – EQ = Bullingdon Club

"It is not clear that intelligence has any long-term survival value."
Professor Stephen Hawking

"He's very smart. He has an IQ." Leo Rosten

"He's like a lighthouse in the middle of a bog – brilliant but useless."
John Kelly attrib

The recent statements by Boris Johnson, (soon, one suspects, to seamlessly exchange roles with Eddie Izzard), about the fact that a person's IQ is a major determinant in life and that some people were not bright enough to succeed, caused considerable reaction, even amongst his own party, many of whom, in typical fashion, were quick to dissociate themselves from the Mayor's remarks. Mr Johnson continued in the same vein, describing greed as a 'valuable spur to economic activity' and arguing that 'some measure of inequality is essential for the spirit of envy."

He might be right, if we are describing success as he seems to be describing it, which is having a certain innate intelligence to exploit the job market to maximum effect, often in jobs that are non-productive but derive a good living from the labours of others – no doubt those with lesser IQs. Perhaps, just perhaps the system is at fault and the jobs that we reward best are not the most important at all, but simply those that have been created to provide a living for the non-productive members of society, dealing in a self-made world of little importance and maximum return.

The widespread use of the IQ test in the first half of the 20th century came about for a variety of reasons, including the need to identify mental retardation in children. One of the pioneers, French psychologist Alfred Binet, a key developer of what later became known as the Stanford–Binet tests, however, thought that intelligence was multifaceted, but came under the control of practical judgement 'otherwise known as good sense, practical sense, initiative, or the faculty of adapting oneself.' Intellect on its own is not a measure of potential success; sadly, it is often the opposite, as Binet was to evidence himself when his tests were used by the eugenics movement in the USA as a proof of intellectual disability, resulting in thousands of American women, most of them poor African Americans, being forcibly sterilized based on their scores on IQ tests

I have been in teaching long enough to treat IQ scores with caution. I even have misgivings about some teachers knowing the IQ of their pupils and most certainly, would not want to share it with parents for fear of how the information might be misused. This isn't some form of denial, but simply knowing the effect that certain data has on the way we judge people, creating a glass ceiling of expectation. Too often we assess children by data that ignores all the variables that make for a successful adult – even a successful academic. I have known too many people with high IQs who achieved nothing of note, who lacked any sense of responsibility or morality and whose EQ was sadly deficient. It is hard to reflect on the swaggering insouciance of the Bullingdon Club, for instance, without asking how such seemingly 'intelligent' people could be so socially ignorant as to think that such displays of elitism, such disdainful behaviour towards their society was ever acceptable (i) But is it that surprising when most of its members have been separated by virtue of their IQs for almost all their school lives from the majority of the population? Indeed, there is evidence that very many 'intelligent' people, confident in their academic standing, are deficient in other areas of life, especially social and emotional, struggling in relationships and in making moral judgements and yet who end up in positions of power by virtue of a misplaced confidence in an ability that might well have no practical currency whatsoever.

On the other hand, I have also known a similar number whose IQ was in the average band, or even below, but who more than compensated for a lack of IQ points by displaying Binet's 'practical judgement' who overcame whatever number was attached to them. They didn't grow up in a vacuum and their empathy for others was not merely cerebral, but actual.

While not quite agreeing with the writer who stated that *"I have come to the conclusion that a good reliable set of bowels is worth more to a man*

than any quantity of brains" it is hard not to despair about a system of measurement that is used as a determinant for selection by our schools. In judging a pupil, we should always be more interested in an attitude of 'I can' rather than IQ and those for whom a respectable work ethic, a healthy dose of empathy, an ability to learn from others (and from other intelligences), a sense of purpose and a modicum of curiosity and enthusiasm allows them to achieve all manner of things even if that does not include the ability to float aimlessly in the fish-tank of academia or off Canary wharf.

(i) *Boris Johnson did have the grace to describe his time in the Bullingdon Club as 'a truly shameful vignette of almost superhuman undergraduate arrogance, toffishness and twittishness.'*

Let Freedom Ring

"Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose."

We live in a democracy and how good is that. Last year, on my travels, I saw first-hand just how important freedom is. While in China, I was conscious of the ban on facebook and twitter and the surveillance of the internet, and the contrast with the freedom of information we enjoy in the west. When visiting Qatar, it was hard to escape the fact that this was a country where alcohol was banned under Sharia Law. And in stopping in Malaysia, the local papers were full of the punitive drug laws where being caught with as little as seven ounces of marijuana can see you arrested for trafficking, a crime which, in extremis, carries the death penalty.
Freedom – we need to cherish it. It is what allows us to be who we are. Not just the freedom to choose whether to drink or not, to use social media or recreational drugs, but political freedom, the freedom to work hard and make good, to be creative and to express ourselves without fear of reprisal. It is what our ancestors fought so hard to secure. It's what so many of our former students gave their lives to protect. We must never take it for granted.

Yet what do we do with these freedoms?

Well, many of us drink. Our teenagers in Britain are now amongst the heaviest drinkers in Europe. Over a third have tried cannabis, a higher proportion than any other European country and yes, we're also top in young cocaine users. The number of teenagers with sexual diseases has

doubled in the last decade; 20% of our children are bullied on-line; we have a soaring teenage suicide rate and over 20% of young people suffer from some sort of depression or mental illness with an 11% increase in self-harming last year alone. Many of our young are in free-fall, not able to manage the responsibility that comes with freedom, not equipped to make the right decisions, unable to find any purpose or fulfilment in their lives. For those trapped in a cycle of poverty or addicted to drink, to drugs, to violence, to depression, freedom is a double-edged sword, helping the bully to bully, the dealers to grow rich, the drink industry to entrap and social discord to grow.
Of course, it is not freedom, but free will that fails us. The political freedom sought throughout history, by Moses, by Ghandi, by Mandela – and there are many such acolytes - is obvious. Less so after recent events abroad have reminded us, is the freedom of speech, the freedom to be creative, to use our imaginations to move mankind forward, to be in charge of our own destiny. Freedom is precious. But it demands something of us. It demands we make conscious decisions about who we are and what is our moral construct.

Bob Dylan wrote *a hero is someone who understands the responsibility that comes with their freedom.* And that responsibility is to be both a firewall and filter of what freedom gives us, good and bad, sifting each decision, each action through a moral sieve. That's what living in a democracy requires. And sometimes, yes, it does appear that our definition of freedom reads like nobody cares enough about the young and vulnerable anymore. For as Pope John Paul II put it, "*Freedom consists not in doing what we like, but in having the right to do what we ought.*

And there is an even greater freedom ahead for you that is less transparent**.** A freedom laced with temptation, to make good, even if tempting you to ignore ethical or moral considerations on the way.

One of the sad truths today is that governments will always struggle to outsmart those who employ top accountants to keep them one step ahead. Even the law, whose historic purpose, after all, was to embed and protect power, property and privilege – the idea of human rights is a much more recent innovation – is circumnavigated daily by lawyers manipulating regulation for their clients' personal gain. How you do in life can come down to how good a lawyer or accountant you can afford. It is acceptable and normal behaviour. If it's legal, you can do it. After all, how many bankers have been imprisoned as a result of mis-selling financial products or fixing interest rates and currency prices Answer none.

Teddy Roosevelt once said: *'A man who has never gone to school may steal from a freight car; but if he has a university education, he may steal the whole railroad.' What he didn't add was 'and get away with it.'*

And we're not going to change that while the public conscience is unregulated or at least not without a moral revolution. And when last week we read that Goldman Sachs shared £367 million amongst 121 of its London staff, we could only shake our heads and wonder how long before such incendiary headlines burn us and ask why there are no filters on such avarice. Yet if I ask young pupils what they would like to be when they grow up, many answer 'rich and famous- but especially rich'. And I expect so would some of you although you may dress it up a little better than that. As life's raison d'etre, when taken in isolation, without a greater purpose, it is frighteningly shallow.

Several years ago there was a television documentary about six tribesman from the interior of Papua New Guinea brought to England. While up the London Eye, their guide pointed out St Paul's, and explained when it was built it was the biggest building in London. One of the party nodded and said the spirit house should always be the largest building before turning to the taller buildings of Canary Wharf, London's financial hub, and asking so what God lives there? What God has replaced your God?

It is a fact that in the financial crisis and in the expenses scandal, independent schools were disproportionately represented. Which is why it is implicit upon us to do more to develop moral leadership and social responsibility, to talk about values and ethics. Perhaps the trouble is we all feel we can act as we want until our Zacchaeus or St Paul moment. Yet we know what happens in a crisis: David sinned, Peter lied, Judas betrayed. It's just too late.

I believe young people today have more to contend with than any generation before them, in facing a future in a world with more comfort, but less certainty. The truth is, as a country, freedom alone has not made us content. So we have one of the highest standards of living in the world, but without a sense of purpose and community, we can appear miserable. The Dali Lama wrote "*the purpose of our lives is to be happy*" yet a recent survey of the world's regions on a measure of happiness found Africa, with its ever-present threats of terrorism, famine and Ebola the happiest and Western Europe the least happy. Why is that? We might well ask.

It is evident that on their own, freedom, wealth, even good health are not enough. We need to find a purpose for our lives. And in this Abbey,

perhaps we should pause to ask ourselves, who am I? What are my values? What rules do I live by? What is my purpose for being here?

I always admired my father for his single-minded pursuit of what he wanted to do. As a nineteen year old, he went off to war with his own father in tow leaving the old man to serve in the Italian campaign while he joined the RNZAF and flew Lancasters. After the war, he returned to New Zealand, trained as a GP and lived his life doctoring in a remote rural practice. He gave himself to the job, delivering half the local population in his lifetime including a couple of All Black props and seeing others out the exit, with care and compassion. Holidays were a nuisance as were mealtimes. His vocation gave his life purpose and in that, he was fortunate indeed.

We all need to have in our ambition, some sense of purpose or vocation. It may not be as admirable as being a medical volunteer in Sierra Leone, but it should have some other value than monetary, to do what is morally right, rather than what is legally permissible and that we can get away with. Freedom should encourage us to think of community and society above self, to be reflective, to grow a social conscience and live by it. It's difficult for what you have lying in wait for you is enticing. You will all need strength and purpose and good filters to get it right. No-one can tell you how to do it although the advice of Motital Nehru to his granddaughter, Indira Gandhi, that: *"There are two kinds of people – those who do the work of the world and those who take the credit"* and to try to be in the first group since there *"was much less competition there"* is worth heeding.

Many leave school and work for charities abroad which is commendable, but the challenges facing us are enduring, and part of the conundrum of living in a society that is cash rich and conscience poor. How can we rank 51st out of 65 countries on a poll to find the happiest people? Because we're not satisfied. Because we don't believe in the worth of what we're doing. Because we don't have a sense of vocation? When you come to reflect on your lives, it is important you can defend the paths you have chosen and the goals you have sought. After all, the world needs decent people more than it needs graduates – and they are probably going to be more employable in the future.

Be armed before you venture out into the world. Get the rocks in place first. Establish who you are and who you want to be. Make sure of your moral foundations and the rules by which you will live your life. Filter your freedom. Seek out a purpose.

Only then should you start worrying about your exams.

Morals and Ethics in our Schools

"Freedom consists not in doing what we like, but in having the right to do what we ought." Pope Paul II

As the Government continues its crusade to enforce the teaching of **British values and character in our schools**, there is a much more urgent issue that needs to be addressed. Daily, we read of actions and behaviours that show an absence of self-regulation and a lack of integrity, morality or any sense of social responsibility.

As the old social groupings of nuclear families, extended families, church and local communities are replaced by imagined communities and the State, we have a generation that includes many who are rudderless, isolated and lonely, drifting without any moral anchor or structure to their lives.

Laudable as it may be to promote the values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect, faced with an endemic focus on self and the self-made, both in our society and in our schools, there is an urgent need to dig deeper, to ensure that children first grow up with a proper understanding of right and wrong through a study of morals and ethics.

While we celebrate the freedom embodied in the **Magna Carta,** the consequence of rapid social change over several decades has resulted in a society where many children and adults are struggling to cope. Inevitably, it is not about freedom, but about the exercise of free will and the absence of a moral construct.

If we are looking for examples, we need go no further than the recent press about tax evasion and tax avoidance – one illegal, one not, although both raise moral issues, especially when laws are manipulated by large companies and the very rich for their own ends.

Yet while the wealthy may have recourse to financial advisers and use tax havens because they can afford to, they are not alone in making choices without moral recourse, for we can all be guilty of it to some lesser degree, even if just by supporting those multinationals engaged in large-scale tax avoidance. In such instances, there is rarely any consideration of

community or other people's welfare, or any expectation to make decisions on any other basis other than 'what's in it for me?'

If we expect our children to grow up with a respect for the rule of law, (which needs to be seen as fair and equitable for all), then we need to teach them about making moral choices and having a value system as a basis for their decision-making.

Part of this requires a change in the mindset that is prevalent in society, one that says 'if it is legal and if you can get away with it, then it is acceptable.'

In order to make this change requires us to make time in our curriculum, through assemblies and other school activities in order to teach our children to consider issues and behaviour by a moral yardstick rather than more usual measures of success. For without proper ethical considerations, we are in danger of society becoming increasingly fragmented and unstable as self-interest overshadows the public good.

The other, powerful change in our society that adds to the ethical imperative is the unprecedented and largely unregulated advances in science and technology that are happening across the globe.

Many of the projects may appear inconceivable – as did mapping the human genome a decade ago – and as implausible as the Gilgamesh Project seems today. The pace of change and innovation is bewildering. Instead of going hand in hand with ethical considerations, scientists working in the fields of nanotechnology, intelligent design, cyborg engineering or engineering of inorganic life are largely operating outside of any moral construct.

The dangers of unregulated technology, of not grounding decision-making on futures in ethics are potentially catastrophic. In order for adults to begin to make the appropriate political and ethical decisions on using new technologies, we need first to start training our children to ask salient and responsible questions, based on a resolute moral and ethical framework. We need to train them to think differently.

In the first instance, it is up to those leaders in society, the wealthy, the leaders of industry and public figures to lead the way. And yet, our experience is that their example is often a poor one, highlighted recently by yet another chapter in the **cash for access scandal**.

It was Teddy Roosevelt who said: "*A man who has never gone to school may steal from a freight car; but if he has a university education, he may steal the whole railroad*." What he didn't add was "*and get away with it*".

Sadly, that is the popular perception of many of our financial traders and politicians. If we look at the banking crisis and expenses scandals, those

guilty came predominantly from the well-educated, from leading schools and universities.

When we talk of someone in such terms of 'well-educated', we are defining the term in a very narrow and inadequate way, usually measured by their performance in tests. Clearly, there is something missing in their education, call it humility, empathy, honesty or some similar values. Too often they leave school compromised, half-cooked, despite their academic achievements. Somehow, their otherwise excellent education has let them – and society, down.

We live in an age of everyone for themselves to lesser or greater degree and we're not going to change that while the public conscience is unregulated, at least not without a significant moral shift.

The current focus on mindfulness on happiness, on well-being and on character is all very well, but there is a more fundamental challenge for our schools. British values aside, we don't seem to be challenging our children enough with the really fundamental questions about how they should live their lives.

We cannot put everyone in a single moral universe but we can teach them about cause and consequence, about the value of charity and community and about having values that are not able to be measured in material terms alone.

Before talking of **developing grit and resilience,** we should be offering the children in our schools an education in morals and values for that would underpin their lives like nothing else.

Parents Under Pressure: Doing the Best for your Child.

Over recent months, there has been a concerted attack on over-ambitious, pushy and ill-mannered parents and their multitude of failings and excesses. Snow-plough parents, committed to clearing any obstacle in their child's way, helicopter parents, accused of hovering over their children and tiger mums have been firmly in the sights of some schools, who have clearly felt the fall-out of parental attitudes and behaviours. What has been unusual is that the attack has been coming from the very schools that they have chosen to educate their children. Clarissa Farr, Head of St Paul's Girls' School led the charge, accusing parents of a range of crimes including 'affluent neglect' the spending of money on their children in lieu of time, placing of unreasonable expectations on their children and refusing to accept failure on the premise that it reflected upon them. Tim Hands, head of Magdalen College Oxford, joined in criticising parents for excessive parental ambition in hawking

their children from school to school while Andrew Halls head of King's College school in London even had the temerity to criticise some of the products of independent schools, these same children parents have invested heavily in, as having a bullish and charmless confidence that can asphyxiate the society they move in. While noting that these comments all came from heads of heavily over-subscribed schools who were able to make them without fearing the backlash could impact upon their roll, they represent a direct rebuttal of the maxim that 'the customer is always right', and, in fact, the contention of may modern parents that independent schools are a service industry and should get used to demands being placed upon it, reasonable or not. The same views about the role of parents today, however, were also reflected in the findings of a recent survey published by this magazine for the Independent Association of Prep Schools (IAPS), that "the vast majority" of prep school heads named the unrealistic demands of parents as the biggest frustration of their job – ahead of paperwork, government policy changes and workload." Whether it is about parts in the school play or positions in a sports team, the complaints have tended to be more trivial and more intrusive, largely on the back of e-mail, a complaint culture and instant intervention.

So what's happening? What's happened to have changed parents from sensible and moderate human beings trusting their schools and teachers to do the very best for their child into dervishes ready to battle with anything and anyone on behalf of 'their' child? What has made parents put their own child at the centre of the universe and to hell with the rest? What has gone wrong?

Before even attempting to answer my own question, it is worth noting that parents are doing only what parents have always done, which is to try and do the best for their off-spring. It is not easy being a parent in the 21st century and I have considerable sympathy with the pressures they find themselves under. True, more and more parents seem to have lost a sense of perspective when it comes to their own child and in accepting the mantra of 'every child matters' act as if only their child matters. But there are reasons outside of the fact that society has become more self-centred and selfish. From birth onwards, new parents are confronted with an information overload about all aspects of child-rearing from diet, a mishmash of social and psychological theories, what books to read, what music their baby should listen to and an array of half-cocked or recycled theories on how children learn, on child development, on stages of maturation, on the development of the brain. Magazines on education have proliferated at an alarming rate, often launched by parents who have

a view on education or by businesses preying on the concerns and anxiety of parents, often representing interests in publishing, consultancy or even selling real estate. Many of these independent magazines operate without a constituency, full of well-meaning but often muddled articles and opinions on education which serve only to confuse, although their influence is slight compared to mums-net which panders to the very worst in education. As concerning is the importance placed by parents on the Good Schools Guide or, even Tatlers, as if parents are buying some article of social cache.

Apart from the huge number of conflicting theories about child-rearing, a number of factors contribute to the current situation. League tables, for SATs, GCSE and A Levels, have caused undue anxiety for parents and have led to the boom in the number of tutoring agencies as parents feel they have no choice but to opt in so as to give their children a chance. As a result, one in four parents are now paying for private tuition for their children, a figure closer to 40% in London, putting an extra pressure on parents who cannot afford to do so. The fact that the market for tutors in the UK has been estimated at £6bn a year employing, on and off, one million people, with an average spend on each child of £2,758 per year, is perhaps the greatest indictment of public confidence in education in Britain today.

London schools have tried to move away from academic tests to random verbal and non-verbal tests which cannot be prepared for (try telling this to parents) or interviews, but while demand for places exceeds supply and the schools select on academic ability, so the problem gets worse. Frankly, they need to do more, if only to alleviate the social and health problems that beset their schools.

The other fact that parents struggle with is that while they are determined to do the very best for their child, they very often end up doing the opposite. As parents, it is most important to trust your intuition. Common-sense and parental instinct have always been the best guides to raising children. But also, have confidence in those whose job it is to look after your children's education and the wider context in which you children exist. And trust the passage of time, focusing on whether your children are happy, challenged and purposeful and are learning the right values. If so, they will be fine. Sometimes, there is a temptation to think that if they could work harder, get more help, be put under a bit more pressure, they could improve their marks and get into the school you wanted for them although their time might lie in the future. But don't

discount the fact that the barriers to their academic progress may just be genetic.

Presumptive History

"The most effective way to destroy people is to deny and obliterate their own understanding of their history."
George Orwell

"*History shall be kind to me for I intend to write it."* **Winston Churchill**

History plays a number of roles in any society, some complementary, some divergent. Whether history is being used to tell a story, promote national identity or fuel a country's mythology, part of the historian's job is to make sense of a country's past based on objective research, even if they are not always able to explain the zeitgeist that underpins it. History is often used shamelessly, to provide a basis for national self-justification, to inform, to explain, to promote thought and discussion, to make the reader aware of differences and similarities, or even, if we believe some historians, to invoke patriotism or some other emotion. In learning and teaching history, however, the subject demands a little more respect. We must, of course, seek objectivity above all and try to ensure that we guard against in-grained prejudice and question the sources, always. In accordance with that premise and the fact that we teach history according to a number of presumptions and assumptions that often go unchallenged, it may be worth considering the checklist below to which I have presumptuously given the heading of presumptive history.

These presumptions can include:

1. An inherent belief that it is right, even a requirement, to convert other peoples to your own faith, especially from polytheistic faiths or simple belief systems that are deemed inferior. There is evidence throughout history of this in action.
2. A belief in capitalism, and the accumulation of wealth, both as a society and need personally, through the acquisition of land and property (or an equivalent presumption in communism or any other political system).
3. A belief in the broad principles of Social Darwinism (this is usually unspoken for obvious reasons, but can be present in some historical writing, especially in regards warfare and empire building - so beware!)

4. A belief in the superiority of one race, colour, creed over another, or of one set of cultures, habits, traits, behaviours over those of other cultures and races, or of one language over others.
5. A master – servant, teacher – pupil pedagogical attitude to both other countries often manifesting itself on cultural or racial grounds
6. A belief that technological superiority and the accumulation of wealth is a measure of civilization
7. Value-judgements based on any of the above
8. Defining good and bad; establishing how we make value judgements; teaching what we want to hear, what is good for us; selective history; myth-making; history as part of nation-building
9. A belief in our definitions of taste, fashion, smell, culture, manners, cleanliness, etc
10. A belief in our sense of decency and moral code
11. An understanding of legal fictions: or social constructs or imagined realities how limited liability companies, religions, nations, money, human rights, laws and justice only exist in the common imagination of human beings.

Process: In our schools, we should teach history by getting children to challenge assumptions (who wrote that and why?), by teaching understanding and by getting children to question their own attitudes and ways they look at the world by using The Atticus Principle, even at a very young age

First of all," he said, *"if you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you'll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view - until* ***you climb into his skin and walk around in it****."* Atticus talking to Scout in To Kill a Mockingbird p.30

Reading League Tables:

Once again, the exam results recently released to students have seen schools scrambling to put the very best slant on their GCSE, A Level and SATs results by interpreting and manipulating the data to get the best look - and who can blame them? Inevitably, this is what happens when we start ranking schools by examination grades, without any caveats or explanation, and the reason why league tables are boycotted by many schools who pride themselves on value added or breadth of education.

If we look at league tables based on SAT tests, GCSE and A levels the purpose is similar, whether used by governments, school boards or the Ministry, ie to rank students. This is not to say that examinations are not an important way of gauging attainment, (except when used as the exclusive measure) or that they have not improved standards, for in many instances they have. Where it all goes wrong, however, is when the data is used for comparative purposes without any caveats or explanation, when the test becomes the driving force in teaching and learning and when the process of learning is impeded.

The greatest issue with league tables is what they do to the minds and actions of the participants.

For teachers, they encourage adhering to a prescribed body of knowledge, often without hesitation or deviation – although usually with a good deal of repetition. They encourage teachers to smother the curious, avoid tangential questions, to maximise the accumulation of marks for they know that they, and their departments, will be held accountable for what their students achieve, and especially so if their results affect the school's placing in the league tables. Speak to any primary teacher and they will tell you the amount of time given over to the three major subjects in preparation for the SATs tests, usually to the detriment of breadth of curriculum and the process of learning.

The league tables work on the student indirectly, by encouraging them to focus on learning a prescribed body of knowledge, to accept that education is about passing exams and that nothing else counts (despite telling them the contrary). Short cuts to learning, avoiding reading round a subject and keeping the learning brief to a minimum are all consequences of the primacy of league tables and the maximisation of grade accumulation, whether sustainable or not or justifiable in theory or practice, is the message that is rammed down their throats.

For parents league tables can complicate their selection of schools. Keen to identify schools that will get results, however short-term they may be, league tables became a crude form of comparison. Teaching children to pass a test is not necessarily the same as educating them and, when the props and guide ropes are removed, students often have nothing to fall back on bar a good examination technique which has limited value except for passing tests. All of which serves to encourage the growth of an often predatory tutoring industry which will give the extra help necessary, including, in the past, an insight into the shape and focus of the examination – for a price.

For schools league tables can encourage the selling of souls for the sake of publicity and creating a market edge. This might take the form of the culling of pupils after GCSE or the dishonest advertising of schools based on league table position with no acknowledgement of the level of entry required. Senior schools that demand more and more from junior schools, often have as their overriding ambition not the laudable aim of providing the best education possible for the children, but to get the best results they can for their school. Hence, many schools that boast about their outstanding results have done little more than gild the lily, so selective are their entry requirements.

For universities and employers, the data available from A Levels and GCSE exams provides a means of selection, but hardly an accurate one, skewed by socio-economic factors, by tutoring or some other advantage. Worse, the universities or employers will tell us, league tables have encouraged the very dependence that neither seeks, as initiative, collaborative learning, the habit of reading widely and critically, and intellectual curiosity are put to one side and especially by schools that measure themselves by their standing on league tables. A levels are achieved in English using plot summaries and extracts; historians are taught to write what their markers are expecting to read. It is all rather disheartening.

The lesson is simple: if we choose to give league tables undue prominence, by ignoring the myriad of other factors that make for a successful education, then the likelihood is that we will make ill-informed and wrong decisions in the future.

Reflections on Headship

"You cannot teach a man anything. You can only help him find it within himself." **Galileo Galilei**

"What nobler employment . . . than that of a man who instructs the rising generation." **Marcus Tullius Cicero**

In visiting a school, the one person prospective parents expect to meet is the Head. Before enrolling their son(s) or daughter(s), often at considerable financial inconvenience, they want to feel confident that the person at the helm is someone whose character, educational philosophy, views and values they agree with and that they are happy to entrust their

children to. While heads might point to their school's outstanding pastoral care, excellent academic, cultural and sporting achievements, glowing inspection reports and the quality and experience of its staff, it is still the head that parents invariably want to talk to and to have all the answers. This is particularly so in prep schools, where parents want the head to know their children by name, their interests and foibles and where they might have lost their trainers. It is a rich and varied job, with a diverse range of responsibilities and functions albeit one that can bogged down in minutae, in the many and varied demands placed upon it.

After sixteen years as a Head, however, there have been significant changes to the job I took on. Not surprisingly, while the key roles of headship remain essentially the same, the demands on time and priorities have changed beyond measure. I would estimate that nearly three quarters of my time is now put to a different use than would have been the case when I began.

What is true for heads is, in part, true for the whole profession. Over the past decade, all teachers have seen their role change from that of educators to a combination of roles more akin to social workers, providing wrap-round care, counselling, offering security, entertainment and nourishment to the children in their care, while delivering a curriculum that continues to undergo numerous changes. They have seen the hours of work increase dramatically in order to produce the documentation required for health and safety, compliance, safeguarding, early years, inspections and the like. They have felt the impact of e-mail and social media that has added significantly to their workload, arguably making them more efficient, but less effective. Over the same time span, parents have become more anxious and more demanding, confused and pressured by information disseminated by journalists and politicians and websites such as Mumsnet as to how to do the very best for their child – the answer of which is often, as little as possible).
They will have witnessed a third of their employees subjected to some malicious accusations, easy targets for a blame culture instilled in the young, drunk with their rights, provided with the arrows of criticism for which they are never called to account. That 21% of teachers have been subject to cyber bullying just adds to their beleaguered status. They have been buffeted by wave upon wave of bureaucracy and seen government via its many-headed quangos constantly shifting, interfering and demanding more accountability, more checks, more meeting of spurious targets. Even when results appear to be improving, they are dismissed by the general public as a reflection of lowered standards, never better teaching. The malaise of the whole of western society, the lack of

discipline, teenage pregnancy, drugs, knife crime and ignorance are all laid at the door of the teachers. Even the apples brought in to brighten their day are subject to VAT.

All of which falls onto the shoulders of the head who has to contend with the myriad of new challenges and problems and yet their brief remains constant: they need to lead, they need to communicate their message clearly and often; they need to be aware of the expectations of parents and be prepared to either meet, manage or modify them; they need to be more technologically savvy and more aware of social media and the importance of the their website; unlike children, they need to be seen AND heard, as often as possible, on the side-lines, concert halls, at meetings and in the playground and be constantly available for any parents who want an audience.

Occasionally, in making appointments, governors look to appoint heads who have their own young families, who can walk the journey of parenthood alongside their current cohort of parents. Some such as Simon Henderson, who is about to take over the headship at Eton College aged only 38 years are unusual in having all the right attributes and presence at such a young age, but comparatively few are of that calibre. Instead, parents expect Heads to show a little gravitas, to be a capable classroom teacher and have the experience, skills and common sense to run a school.

While a knowledge of education remains the key attribute for boards of governors in making an appointment of new heads, increasingly important is the head's business acumen and their management and marketing skills in order to keep the school full and to manage the school's facilities, growth and reputation. Like any wish list, the different attributes need to be kept in proportion. In any list, the need for an educational vision remains paramount for if that is right, then so will be all that follows.

When I became a head, in a school that provided plenty of challenges at the time, I was able to teach half a load, coach the 1st XI and a rugby team as well as being involved. Today, more organized heads might still manage as much, although I suspect most have moved largely out of the classroom into areas of strategic thinking, supported by teams of senior managers, increasing numbers of administrative staff dealing with human resources and all else and sub-committees of governors that were not in evidence that many years ago.

There is inevitably a tension in headship between the need to ensure a school delivers what parents expect and the need to ensure what it delivers is in the best interests of the child. Max Forman once wrote that "*Teachers are people who start things they never see finished, and for which they never get thanks until it is too late*" which is true, yet very difficult to sell to parents that live in the here and now. Better a child acquires a love of learning, of music, of sport that continues to flourish as they move on than they leave their prep schools burnt out, but it is a difficult message that can only be sold by tracking and highlighting one's alma mater.

So what is the role of a head today? First and foremost, it is to provide a safe and exciting environment for learning and for growing up. Because it is, still, the most exciting and rewarding job there is and is important by any measure we give it. Because children are the future; because children are not their parents and must make their own choices and walk their own paths; because, even despite themselves at times, children want to learn and be inspired and enthused; because it is a job without compare for its variety, its myriad challenges and, arguably its importance to society. Enjoy!

Ten Things that have Changed.

In the period leading up to retirement, I decided it would be useful to reflect on what I had observed from seventeen years of headship. The three lists below are the first part of this process, focusing (in order) on what has changed, what, in my view, has got worse and what has improved. If nothing else, they can serve to encourage people to make their own lists!

Bureaucracy and Compliance: Good teachers and good schools can cope with the huge increase in bureaucracy and compliance and bigger schools, with specialist administrative and human resources better than most, but what a waste, what a deflection of energy and focus from the child to the paper outcomes. And the cost to smaller schools, expected to do the same amount of compliance, is simply untenable without a deleterious effect on education.

Divorce and family break-ups have had more impact on education than almost anything else. The instability caused by split families, the selfishness of an increasing number of parents who put their own interests above those of their children, and even involve their children in marital

disputes, is a major factor in affecting how children learn and their mental health, by deflected guilt, divided affection, insecurity and neglect.

The Business of Education: Whether it is the business model that drives state and independent schools or crises in funding, we are in danger of placing a business model on our schools and wondering why it's not a cosy fit. Measuring schools by results, threatening schools for not performing are knee-jerk responses to a system undermined by government policy over many years.

Curriculum Pressures: There is simply too much information out there for us to teach as we have always taught. Knowledge is fast becoming a resource to access as employers seek teamwork and collaboration, imagination and creativity from their workforce. We have some crucial decisions to make about what to teach and how in order to ensure children leave schools with the skills, knowledge and understanding they need.

Technology: With computing power doubling every eighteen months and schools spending billions on technology without any discernible improvement in educational standards we have to look at how we are using technology and whether our traditional measures of what makes a successful education are redundant. The internet, e-mail and social media has changed life utterly.

Exams and Assessment When the head of ISC can write that 'exams put pressure on children – that is their great virtue,' I despair. League tables and constant assessment means that we know more about our children and are better at teaching them to pass exams, but at the cost of their wider education and their creativity? Is this what education has been reduced to?

Parents, Role Models and the Modern Morality: Schools are reflections of their society and cannot be held accountable for societal ills. Children are desperate for good role models, but the more dubious morals and values exhibited by many adults inevitably reflected in our schools. Parents may feel they are unfairly blamed for their children's behaviour and attitudes. On the contrary, many get off too lightly.

Discipline and Perseverance. Discipline is a pejorative word, and like perseverance, is deemed old-fashioned, yet both qualities lie at the heart to learning. To work, learning needs to engage the learner and be purposeful, to engage and inspire. Too many children are ill-disciplined and lack self-control and purpose.

Too Much Pressure on Children: The fact our children are not happy should be the greatest concern of all, whether reflected in addiction, violence, self-harming or mental illness. Too many of our children are isolated, lonely, anxious. Too much is laid upon them too young, too many boundaries are blurred, too many parents are failing to provide proper role models. As well, the process of selection which starts alarmingly young in London is hugely damaging and a huge waste of talent and is largely a result of league tables. As well as being unreliable, discriminatory and wasteful, selection has the effect of squeezing the childhood out of children

Too much pressure on teachers who are working in an environment where trust and authority have been eroded,
where politicians (who have done more harm to British education than any other interest group), ask more and more of schools who not only have to teach, but also provide wrap round care for their pupils while adding suffocating levels of bureaucracy

Ten Reflections on the Negative Aspects of Change on Education

The rising epidemic of aspergers, autism, dyslexia, dyscalculia and other learning support needs is no accident and not are all genetic or environmental.

Every child matters – didn't they always? We have managed to destroy the idea of the classroom community by an obsession with personalised education.

Group teaching has been undermined by an obsession with meeting every child's individual needs. There is great strength and value in learning as a group, and having to conform to a pattern of learning, as well as the requirement for tolerance, better collaborative skills, has been reduced to education group, the class as an identity

Commonsense and parental intuition has been subsumed and battered by countless, often contradictory articles and opinions about how to raise children. Use your own judgement about what is right and wrong and you are more likely to get it right.

Health and Safety and our obsession with keeping children safe has made them strangely more vulnerable. We have built walls around childhood,

but the cost has been their health, their general fitness and their ability to cope independently.

The sense of trust that used to exist between parents and teachers has been seriously eroded to the detriment of the child's education. Political attacks on the teaching profession have undermined its authority and its ability to deliver.

Manners, humility and a respect for the opinions and experiences of parents and teachers have been replaced by a brooding sense of entitlement.

With a more mobile society and a breakdown in nuclear and extended families and the fraying of local communities, there is more isolation, more loneliness, more obsession with money and self than ever. The Big Society was a great idea, but its time was already past.

The most disturbing change has been in the mental health of the young. By any measure – suicide, mental illness, self-harming, bullying, abuse – our children are under siege like never before.

Simplicity. Instead of making life more comprehensible, technology and especially the internet, has made life more complicated. More choice, more bureaucracy, more checks and balances, more pressure in jobs and education has taken away the vestiges of childhood as we once knew it.

Ten Reflections on the Positive Impact of Change.

There is a greater awareness of others, locally, nationally and globally. Through the news and the internet, we are better informed than ever before, at least on a superficial level.

There is a greater understanding of how children learn, through new research about the brain and learning styles. As a result, we can tailor our teaching to better meet the needs of children.

While this is a two-edged sword, children enjoy a safer teaching environment. There is more transparency and more accountability in our schools for pupils and teachers alike.

Schools have much more rigorous pastoral systems with a focus on safeguarding children and especially identifying and protecting the more vulnerable.

There is much better identification and help available for those with learning difficulties. Learning problems are more likely to be diagnosed and specific help available.

With an increasingly diverse population and frequent travel abroad by vast swathes of the population, there is a greater understanding of other cultures, languages and religions.

The core curriculum that has been the mainstay of British education for so long has been encouraged to diversity to meet a changing job market. Some of these curriculum experiments have not been successful, but the diversity of new subjects has been a major step towards acknowledging the need for change.

While the old adage that 'only the disciplined are truly free' still holds, there has been much more focus on the management of behaviour in schools and the use of forms of discipline which seek to correct and educate through behaviour modification.

We are constantly being told we are educating children for jobs that don't yet exist and that is true. There will be greater opportunities in new and exciting fields of endeavour - the challenge is to find the best ways of preparing children for the unknown.

Young children have a lot to put up with. The walls are down and the adult world, driven by money, is all over them. What is impressive, however, is that many young people are still more balanced in their thinking, more charitably minded, more concerned about global issues and the environment than the current generation.

Ten Observations for Parents, Children and Teachers:

Having written the three lists on the changing focus of education, I decided to offer some observations on the three major stakeholders in education, parents, teachers and, of course, children. Two of these have been taken as the basis for articles published elsewhere ('children' in the Sherborne Times, 'parents' in Attain magazine). Again, such lists are subjective and, if nothing else, may provoke you to write your own!

Ten Observations for Parents:

Don't be in such a hurry – it does not help to push children before they are emotionally and physically ready. They will develop at different stages, so don't constantly compare them with other children; instead enjoy them as they are.

Confidence and self-belief are important, but have to be grown, not bestowed. Parents should have high expectations for their children, but they must be realistic. Children can be best helped by being encouraged to work hard, to be more adventurous and to enjoy their achievements, however small.

Presentation of work and self are very important, even in an age of computers. Pride in work and dress, clarity of thought and expression as well as good manners are vital components of becoming a successful and fulfilled human beings - and begin at home.

Being organised is vital in work and leisure, yet more and more children cannot manage their day or their possessions while more and more parents end up making excuses for them. Agree some rules and stick by them.

Don't make excuses for your children. Work with schools and teachers, not against them. If you don't respect your children's teacher, nor will your children. Trust your schools and treat your teachers as professionals. They know your children in a way you cannot.

Help them grow a moral compass. Teach them right from wrong, but also the importance of being part of the whole, of thinking of others, of kindness, honesty and similar traits. Ethics are in danger of being swamped by the rapidity of progress **and, again, need to come from home.**

Be techno-savvy. Terrifyingly, (and excitingly), your children are inhabiting a virtual world as much as the physical world, but with lots of doors into dangerous and unsavoury places. Keep computers in public places and learn and talk technology with your children.

They need to learn to cope on their own. Having a specific learning difficulty, for instance, may be a challenge, but it can also prove a strength in the long-term if it teaches the child to engage with learning and become a resilient learner. Nor should data accumulated through screening or testing be used as a crutch or an excuse. A good attitude,

resilience and a healthy work ethic are the keys to success.

Be realistic for your children and don't judge them by your educational standards. Chances are they are already operating on a different plane. You are raising children not writing a curriculum vitae for them.

Be a parent and a role model first and a friend second. Your job is to nurture and support your child so he or she becomes independent. Guide them with their homework, but don't do it. Engender a love of reading for that is invaluable. It is important to focus on the journey not the destination.

Ten Observations for Children

There are no short-cuts in life and work is not a pejorative term. Learn the joy of learning.

Have a purpose in what you do. Work out how to improve what you do and set yourself targets.

Learn to be accurate. There is no reason for careless and sloppy work other than that habit has made it so

Focus on quality not quantity. Don't measure the day by how many hours you have worked, but what you have achieved

Train your memory – not just for rote learning, although that is important, but to exercise the muscle

Learn to listen carefully and to ask questions after thought and then listening to the answers

Get interested in things. Take up a hobby. Beware of entrapment, often in a form of a screen.

Make sure you know right from wrong, that you have proper morals, values and rules to live your life by.

Learn humility. Good manners are important. Entitlement is anathema. Earn your passage through life, by attitude and endeavour, and don't rely on handouts.

Be curious. Learn to ask why and then go and find the answers yourself.

Ten observations for Teachers:

There are good textbooks and bad textbooks. They should not be a crutch for lazy teaching. Avoid sticking blindly to textbooks or, worse, producing reams of photocopied material.

The best teachers aren't those that are the best-resourced, but those that are skilled at engaging and communicating with children.

Set high expectations for the children you teach and then double them. Take time to get to know your pupils and how they learn best.

Learn how to use technology – because you cannot afford not to. Integrate it into your teaching where you can, but only if it adds value to a lesson.

Communicate with parents, work with parents, but know when to keep your own counsel. Remain in charge.

Don't forget you are a role model. Children look to you to see what you say and do and to learn what is acceptable.

Children need to learn good habits, often by practice and routine. This requires the establishment of clear guidelines and standards. Boring, but that's part of our job (and is a short-term investment for long-term rewards).

That whether we like it or not, record keeping, keeping up with administrative tasks, registration, planning, compliance is crucial.

Marking work is the best opportunity for teaching detail by making constructive and specific suggestions as how to improve.

Be interested in education and your profession. Read widely and train to be keen to be a life-long learner

Testing and Educating – Closing the Gap

"Students learn to pass, not to know. They do pass, and they don't know.' Thomas Huxley (attrib)

The news that around 800 primary schools are 'failing' is one that should alarm us, but not for the reasons the government would have us think.

Of course, the standards of literacy and numeracy amongst children leaving our schools, allied with our fall in the recent PISA tables, is unacceptable but before beating up the schools, let's look at the culture that SATS has created and what it has done to teaching in our schools.

It is six years now since Ken Boston, chief executive of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, told schools to stop drilling children for national tests and forcing them to sit practice exams.

His concern was that schools were increasingly "teaching to the test", not to improve the educational experience of the child, but to ensure their schools meet their targets in regard to the league tables.

The national debate about the excessive time we spend testing our children in England rumbles on without resolve or resolution. Even the unfavourable comparisons made with other countries which do significantly less testing than we do (and start their children at schools later than in the England) and have higher levels of achievement at 18 years, do not appear to sway the government from pursuing its relentless programme of regular testing as a means of raising standards.

It is apparent in talking to colleagues from primary schools that a huge amount of time is spent in preparing pupils to pass the tests, particularly at KS2, time that could and should be better spent in educating the children.

The vast numbers of books and resources designed to prepare pupils (and parents) for the Key Stage tests inevitably raises questions about the type and method of education being promoted.

What we have as a result is the worst type of learning and teaching and a culture that promotes teaching to the test, that mitigates against the pursuit of a broader curriculum and against creative and inspirational teaching.

Head teachers and teachers are often placed under undue pressure to meet targets with catastrophic effect, as the type of teaching that results too often turns children away from learning, and teachers from teaching.

After all, how well children perform in tests is but one measure of a child's abilities and when these tests are done in a pressure cooker and of a narrow skill set, are of dubious value.

So what should be our 'targets?' Reading and writing and basic numeracy of course, but taught in a way to ensure the skills and learning is embedded rather than to help some institution meet some arbitrary target.

Ironically, the schools that are under the most pressure to respond are the very schools that should be looking at different ways of engaging children and finding different methods to improve their core skills.

For enduring effect, learning has to be a positive experience and children need to be engaged. This must not weaken our ambition for them; quite the contrary as we should always seek rigour in our teaching and discipline in our classrooms.

To allow effective learning to take place, however, children should have fewer tests and be allowed broader measures of their abilities. What our children actually need is the desire to learn (which propels all else); the ability to work collaboratively; a ring-fenced education system, protected from political interference; and greater support for our teachers and their schools.

Targets can make victims of children and excessive testing can deflect and distract schools from their core role.

A S Neill once wrote: 'If we have to have an exam at eleven, let us make it one for humour, sincerity, imagination, character – and where is the examiner who could test such qualities?'

Probably, I would think, not working for the Ministry.

The Art of Handwriting

"Patients at Manchester Royal Infirmary are being put at risk because the handwriting of doctors is so bad nurses cannot read medical notes."
May 15, 2014 Manchester Evening News

Handwriting is part of our civilization, it's part of the identity of our culture and not just a tool for communication . . . . whilst the printing press transformed the written world it didn't make handwriting obsolete.
J. Richard Gentry

Handwriting has been under attack since the start of the technological revolution. The internet and its many offspring, i-pads, i-phones, i-charts, systems for voice activation and the like have become the weapons of

choice in the ensuing communication war. Witnessing the effect of texting and messaging in every home, restaurant and street corner, it is little wonder that in recent years, the value of learning handwriting has been diminished, even thought redundant. That is, until recently, when a number of experts, real and self-proclaimed, have launched a counter-attack, asserting the importance of handwriting in the classroom and in society at large, specifically on the grounds of it being a functional skill with various accompanying cognitive benefits. Recent research in the United States, based on brain scan studies has shown that early handwriting skill helps children learn to read and that handwriting anything from messages to ideas helps them break the code.
Advocates for the pre-eminence of pen over processor make a number of subjective points for the defence: the freedom of thought given to those writing in shorthand; the extra learning and understanding that comes from the physical act of writing; the ability handwriting gives you to write creatively without the temptation to edit as you go; the lack of physical restrictions and the fact that handwriting is a unique and irreplaceable part of our culture.
In Britain we have placed a higher emphasis on handwriting than in the United States although, interestingly, during the past year, several American states have legislated that the teaching cursive writing is to become a requirement under state law.

There is no doubt of that neat and legible handwriting makes reading easier than when written work can be read sentence by sentence rather than word by word, thereby aiding clarity of understanding and being able to follow the development of argument. And there are, of course, counter arguments, that the focus on handwriting discriminates against children who struggle to write neatly if at all through no fault of their own. All I can offer in response (and while this may read as apocryphal, it is more akin to an affidavit) is the following. Early in my teaching career, I taught with a very experienced junior teacher whose penchant for handwriting was well-known. I remember one year twins going into her class whose writing was completely indecipherable. They struggled with all aspects of learning, including physical coordination, which made handwriting particularly difficult for them, but at the end of that year, they, along with all their classmates, emerged with copperplate writing, a cursive script anyone would be proud of. How she achieved this transformation, I am still not sure. Sometimes (not always) I suspect, we just need to demand more, expect more and wait to be surprised.

The new research supporting the teaching of handwriting has been endorsed in many quarters, including the National Handwriting

Association which sees it as an important way of improving literacy. Of course, we have to be wary of various branches of Graphology, the study of handwriting, that might dissuade anyone putting anything in their own hand. While generally regarded as a pseudoscience, as it poses its questions (Is the flat topped 'd' really dangerous? Is the 'big looped d-person' always full of blame? Is a 'looped d' bad or good?), it is still taken very seriously in many quarters. Like it or not, the analysis of handwriting has long been used as part of job interviews, including, in my own experience, the application I once made for a headship!

This wholehearted advocacy of the value of handwriting is not to ignore the benefits of texting and technology as methods of communication – quite the opposite. Indeed, no one method has a mortgage on communication with a richness of different forms existing for different uses. But having a fluent, legible hand is still an important part of an individual's character and unique personality and should be celebrated. Perhaps handwriting courses should become a mandatory part of tertiary education. A bad idea? Just ask the families of the estimated 7,000 Americans who die each year as the result of doctors' bad handwriting.

The Leaning Tower of Pisa (i)

"The uncomfortable fact is that most kids in this over-entitled, under-boundaried, celebrity-obsessed culture of ours simply do not have the hunger that drives their Asian counterparts." Allison Pearson

"We should be wary of aspiring to the educational systems of Pisa's high-scoring countries such as Singapore, China and South Korea. Any nation could technically emulate such stringent systems, but it would come at a price." David Hanson

The publication of the latest PISA results has, once again, had the government in a flap, trying desperately to explain away Britain's continuing fall down the international rankings. Inevitably the Government have been quick to blame Labour for failing a generation whilst they were in Office, while Labour has responded by criticising current government policies. With politicians, especially those involved in running education, it was always thus.

In Saturday's papers, Elizabeth Truss, the Education Minister, was very clear as to what we need to do to respond to the challenge. We should, she assert, "adopt Chinese-style tactics such as evening classes" and

"learn from the Asian Tigers" in order to "out-educate the rest of the world." It is a laudable ambition, but so lamentably unrealistic and limited in scope that it is most unlikely to convince anyone that the government's educational vision is anything other than naive.

Of course, we want our children to be more ambitious, more aspirational and to work hard, but we need to consider what that means, how it can be achieved and to what end. If it means jeopardising the mental health of our children as happens in South Korea which now has the highest youth suicide rate in the world then we need to tread very warily; if it means extending classes into evenings, extending the length of days and terms, then we need to ask why some of the some of the most successful nations teach considerably fewer hours than we do and to much greater effect. If we want our children to work harder and longer hours, we have to convince them of the value of education and the benefits of doing so in a society that doesn't always reward hard work or ambition. If, instead, we spend some time examining the type of education already being practised in Singapore or Finland or asking why we trail countries with similar school systems including Australia, Canada and New Zealand, then there are valuable lessons to be learned which could inform us as to which way to proceed. It might be sensible ascertaining what works best within our culture rather than throwing more hours, precious hours, wrested from an ever-diminishing childhood, for no obvious end.
If we are honest, I suspect we are not going to be able to compete with those Asian and other economies where education is an economic imperative, and often the one opportunity for families to break out of poverty. Children in many emerging countries are hungry to learn and willing to go to great lengths to do so. By comparison, most of our children are comparatively well-off, too distracted and comfortable to make the sacrifices necessary - and that is not their fault, but a consequence of our standard of living and the resultant adjustment in their expectations.

However, all this is a distraction. Au contraire, I do not think we should be trying to emulate the methodology of the Asian Tigers with its extra pressures and longer working hours, for a raft of educational reasons - after all, teachers in England already spend more than 100 extra hours a year in front of their students compared with those above them on the PISA table (and spend over $15,000 more on the education of their 6 – 15 year olds than the international average) and certainly more than the three commonwealth countries. We could cite the example of Singapore, placed in the top three countries in the world for mathematics, reading and science, a country that spends less on education, has fewer timetabled

hours and bigger class sizes and ask some salient questions about why we are setting out to do the opposite.
Instead of trying to replicate the style of teaching practised by the 'Asian Tigers' by trying to match their work ethic, we would benefit by spending more time thinking about 'learning smarter' and focusing on what will be important in the future, especially the ever-changing role of technology in our schools. We need to hone our soft skills, improve our core subjects, especially mathematics and ensure that what we are teaching is providing the best possible mix of skills and knowledge for our children as well as a breadth of learning and experience that will make our children more employable and better citizens in the future.

To do that we could do three things: The first, is to instil more discipline in our schools and self-discipline in our children, a task that resides as much in our families, and our society, as in our classrooms. Our children need to know how to work hard and how to use time and opportunity to maximum effect; second, we need teachers who can engage and inspire children, who can plant in children knowledge and skills, but also the hunger to learn and the purpose for doing so. We want to encourage teachers who are highly motivated, aspirational for their pupils and who would be, in turn, duly rewarded, both financially and in the status afforded them. Thirdly, we need to look at what we are teaching and ensure that we have given priority in time and emphasis to what will really count in improving the quality and relevance our children's education. We need to show pupils it is possible to beat the economic odds, that hard work gets its just desserts although to achieve that, we need to continue chipping away at the iniquitous glass ceiling that holds back aspiration. We need to get children to believe that time and effort expended will be worth it. We need to think about what they should be learning, to make them more inquisitive, more able to use knowledge rather than just acquiring it, and to know how to communicate with all groups within society and all cultures, preferably in more than one language. For I fear they will not be able to compete in the simple acquisition of knowledge by emulating Asian Tigers – but the good news is nor do they need to.

(i) Programme for International Student Assessment

There is a Cost for Everything

As we read of the open letter signed by more than 1200 teachers complaining that stress is destroying the profession, it might be worth

pausing to ask what has happened to make teaching, once the most rewarding and satisfying of jobs, so deeply frustrating and unfulfilling? How have we allowed so many initiatives done in the name of 'improving standards' to wreck havoc on our schools? How, in the interests of trying to improve the quality of the education, have we got it so disastrously wrong?

When it comes to compiling a charge list, where to begin? Perhaps with the extension of schools into their extended role as providers of wrap-round care and the extra pressures that has placed upon teachers? Perhaps with the amount of time required to be given over at inset days and staff meetings to topics as diverse as child protection, safeguarding, e-safety, inspections, changes in legislation, health and safety updates, risk assessments and compliance, all valid in themselves, but leaving no room left to discuss the education of children? Perhaps in encouraging parents to act as champions for their children without any account of their own responsibilities in raising and disciplining them? Or in society's expectations that schools are where all social problems should be dealt with? Perhaps with the quite unreasonable demands placed on teachers to constantly record evidence, work to targets and be subject to endless monitoring, appraisal and inspections? Perhaps with the retreat from class teaching to more differentiation, more individualised learning, more focus on the individual until the whole becomes less important than the parts, with empathy, cooperative learning and a sense of community the casualties? Perhaps with the ever changing regulations for inspections and compliance designed to keep us on our toes or show that someone is out there constantly tweaking? For however well-intended, each initiative, each change has exacted a cost and the cumulative effect on the profession has made it almost untenable.
No-one would dispute that the safety and well-being of children is of paramount importance. Yet in our efforts to make children safe, we have made many more vulnerable and less able to cope. Trust has been eroded, caution has become the byword while the hinterland of children's lives has shrunk to home, car and school. We keep them indoors (and expose them to the greater dangers of the internet) rather than allow them to walk and cycle about the neighbourhoods. Too many children have become vulnerable, scared of life as they learn more of the dangers 'out there' instead of being excited by its opportunities and challenges. Worse, as our children are more aware at a younger age of the perils and pitfalls of the world, whether through more graphic PSHE lessons, a more visible underworld or through the internet, so we are faced with a growing epidemic of mental illness, self-harming and teenage suicide.

Likewise, as we have placed more pressure on schools to ensure their risk assessments are watertight, so schools themselves have become more risk and litigation averse, less enthusiastic in outdoor education, in planning trips or promoting competitive sports. Just as league tables have focused the mind on meeting targets, so teachers and schools have become more concerned with the reputation of their institutions and the safety of their jobs than with the holistic education of their pupils. Meeting targets have become the function of our schools and our obsession with exam results has meant that so many vital skills and attitudes, including the ability to ask questions, to display initiative and learn off-piste, attributes we so crave in our young, have been jettisoned. Worse, good teachers, those who can challenge and inspire children, are made bland.

Are our children safer? Perhaps a very few, but I would contend that many have been made vulnerable and prone to anxiety and depression, suspicious of others and fearful of taking even measured risks. Are they better educated? Probably not, although teachers have undoubtedly become more skilled at teaching to the test, the results of which can serve to deceive. Are children better prepared for the world they about to enter? Possibly, but at what cost? So as we ponder these invisible faces in the Ministry, in the universities and training colleges, at Ofsted and the numerous think tanks and bodies that make up Orwell's dystopian Ministry of Truth, we might be tempted to ask, has all of this improved the lives, education and well-being of children, all this pressure through prescription and regulation that has been placed on teachers and schools? In balance, I fear not.

And teachers? Suffice to say, as I prepare to leave the profession that has been my life and joy for so many years, I would not go there again, not as it is now. The excessive demands of compliance are making the profession almost untenable and I fear for the next generation of teachers, setting out to make a difference to young lives and whose idealism will be sorely tested For their sake, at least, it is time to rescue the profession from the bureaucracy that has almost destroyed it.

This article appeared in the Daily Telegraph On-Line on 29 April, 2015 under the headline '*How have we got Education so disastrously Wrong'*

Too Much Information

"Some parents and educators believe that a child is like a huge container. To insure the child's success, they think it their job to fill it up with as much information as possible, as quickly as possible. This misconception is damaging the brilliance of millions of our youth."

- JW Wilson, Advanced Learning Institute

"What shocked me was how much pressure her generation are put under to do everything by the book. Her generation enters motherhood overburdened by too much information." - Jane Gordon

"Recent statistics made available by Childline that over the past twelve months there had been an increase of 43% in the number of children aged 7 to 18 who had attempted suicide"

We live in an age that is information saturated. We all know too much about everything, but often without the means of filtering what is actually worth knowing. More and more parents seem hell-bent on stimulating and pushing their children further than ever before on the premise that the more young children know, the more they do, the better their chances of success later in life. This is not just a desperate fringe group - in a recent poll, over 87% of parents said they believed that the more stimulation a child receives, the more successful they will be. This misplaced ambition, which ignores the prescribed stages of development, which encourages children to jump from concrete concepts to abstract concepts before they are ready, is not only of dubious benefit, but as research now tells us, risks the over-stimulation of children's brains in some areas at the expense of others. The effect can be to damage neural development that can lead to severe psychological and emotional difficulties later in life. And yet, from the time of a child's conception, parents are swamped with advice on how to bring up their children, ignoring the simple tenet of readiness in favour of making their children special and competitive. In all things, maternal instinct, parental intuition and common-sense, so necessary to build an emotional bond, parent to child, are swamped by pressures as artificial as they are dangerous.

The danger of over-riding 'readiness' doesn't just rest in the early years. Nor is it a matter of volume, but of timing. In our current world, children are subjected to a veritable surfeit of information that, unfiltered, can destroy their innocence and produce social and emotional problems on a scale that we are only now properly recognising. We know it for we see it everywhere - the effects of 'too much information', much of which is delivered via an unregulated internet, on mental health, on self-image, on

diet, self-harming and so on. Yet while we struggle to teach children how to use and filter the internet, we have other sections of society determined to inform young children about issues of sexuality, of adult problems, of diseases and behaviours at a younger and younger age without any consideration of the social and emotional effect on the child. The result is that we have an epidemic of mental illness as children struggle with 'too much information' or 'too much, too soon', with the effect evident in increased depression or, in extremis, such appalling manifestations of distorted youth as sexual crimes committed by children often against other children and suicide. What is going so terribly wrong?

Part of the problem, and a significant part, is directly related to social media, but not all. When last week, there was a report in the national press of an Ofsted inspector questioning ten year old children about lesbian sex and transsexuality, it raised a number of issues about how we can protect our children from such intrusions into the realm of childhood. For too long, Ofsted along with other government agencies and an endless queue of educational journalists, academics, do-gooders and social engineers seem to be hell-bent informing children about issues that they are neither intellectually, physically or emotionally equipped to handle. To this list there is now a growing number of parents who now seem to think it fine to air their dirty washing in front of their children, especially over their own relationships, asking them to take sides, to be involved, and to know all. This adherence to some warped political correctness that says all knowledge should be transparent and freely available has led to children being exposed to issues of sexuality, criminality, disease, in fact, all the angst of modern life at a young age. It is an act that borders on criminal. Those who feel that exposure to the grim realities of adult life doesn't require age limits or some form of protection have clearly never paused to consider the correlation between their understanding of children and the statistics on the mental health of over-anxious, frightened children. To treat young children as sounding boards in discussions of adult issues, emotional, social, physical or even financial, when all they want is for their parents to provide security and stability, is hugely destabilising and damaging to young lives. We can see it in the way that social services who do so much good work have inadvertently demonised families in the past or traumatised children when a more responsible and age-appropriate approach was required, by planting ideas, asking leading questions, without ever, it appears, considering the long-term effects on the child.

Of course, children need to know about different stages of physical development and about social, health and emotional dangers that confront them, but at the right time when they are ready and able to handle them. They need to understand the physical, emotional and neurological

changes that will occur to them during adolescence. They need to know about e-safety. They need to know about potential dangers. But we need to be careful.

When I was teaching in a Senior school some time ago, I was aware of the PSHE or Life skills programme that we had for our 14 – 15 year olds. The programme consisted of lessons on alcoholism, on drug abuse, examining the effects of smoking by studying diseased lungs, a visit to a morgue, moratoriums on bullying, self-harming, mental illness and so on. There was not one ray of joy: no talk of family celebrations, festivals, reunions, no talk of well-being or the joy of living; no talk of music, drama and sport or other outlets. Is it any wonder our children have growing incidence of mental illness? Is it any wonder that our teenage suicide rate is where it is?

I wonder whether those who feel we should tell young children everything when they are old enough to talk have any comprehension at all as to the damage they do or even any understanding about the stages of human development. I well remember days devoted to Drug education at a senior school and the fact that the result of all the information, intended to dissuade experimentation was that it inevitably did the opposite. In the weeks after such days, we saw a spike in children being picked up for experimenting. Why? Because that is how adolescents are wired to respond. In such areas, they need a different approach and the best I know was that proposed by the authors of the excellent book entitled 'The Great Brain Robbery' that did not say directly, 'don't touch drugs', but rather, in your teenage years as your body is growing, drugs can do much greater damage than when you are older and therefore just wait until you are out of your teenage years (the hope being by then that the young adults will be more aware and less impulsive and will make their decisions more rationally).

Who are these people who think it is important to teach young children about sexuality, about gender, and about some of the extremities and dangers at such a young age? Surely they know that too much information, delivered too early, is hugely damaging? Children need positive messages and to feel that there is such a thing as normality, that not every stranger or family member is a threat. Sadly, they must grow up seeing the world as a very sad place and adults as people to be adjudged guilty until proven otherwise.

Perhaps the wheel is turning. The debate about sex education continues with the attempt to introduce a bill to make sex and relationship education compulsory was met with the contention that sex education as a concept had failed and the problems had got worse. Inappropriate, ill-timed, education was always going to fail. The issue, however, is not how we protect children by sheltering them from the ugly excesses of the world;

simply how can we convince those who should know of the need to only tell them when they are ready, and need, to know. They deserve that much.

(Un)natural Selection

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

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

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

In addressing the subject, I will focus on three key issues. First, to ask the question as to how long the process of selection can be delayed in order to allow children to mature and develop and for other factors to even out before making the decision to divide a cohort. In asking this question, it is important to note that it is not selection per se that is on trial, for that is an inevitable and necessary part of life, but whether selective entry based on

academic testing when used by schools (and especially in the primary years), best serves our children and our society or is anything other than a convenience. Second, to look at the criteria used in such selection and ask whether the end result of entrance tests caters for children and young adults who are carefully prepared and able to pass examinations, but which fail a large percentage of the population without such advantages. And third, to look at the social, emotional and physical cost of driving children too far, too soon, and the toxic underbelly that can result from early selection, something too rarely acknowledged especially by selective schools.

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

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

In essence, the selection criteria used in almost all instances are there to help identify the brightest and most able pupils, regardless of other considerations, including socioeconomic factors, maturation or dependence on external factors such as tutoring. It is a process with no defined ceiling that ultimately produces children layered in different strata based, in the main, on examination or test results. The pressure placed on children, parents and schools at each point where selective criteria are involved is often irrational and can have little to do with education per se, but everything to do with enabling selective schools and universities to sort the wheat from the chaff. Except it doesn't. What it produces is children and young adults who have been placed in schools where expectations and the standard of teaching are high and examination results are impressive, but that often lack the ability to intellectually scrap with or learn off children with different abilities. Of more concern than those it isolates and benefits, however, is that the system rejects those whose trajectory is slower, who take longer to mature, who lack the support and preparation yet who, in time, could well be better students, given a greater opportunity and lead-in time. Children don't need to be pushed as far as they can endure at an increasingly young age since this often results in considerable collateral damage, usually not recognised until later. This is not education. This is a form of Social Darwinism in which the strongest survive, but only while they remain in the comfort zone of the like-minded. Whether these children develop the resources or resourcefulness to cope once the tutors and teachers undo the ropes is far from assured; in essence, what they have been taught is how to maximise their performance in exams whether this is healthy or not or whether it curtails their intellectual development; what they have not been taught is how to relate to a range of intelligences and abilities, to mix with those not the same as them, whether in aptitude, background, ability or aspiration. Such a process does not allow the child to show what has been learned outside academia, offers few opportunities to share any original ideas or conversational skills and only a muted ability to engage beyond the four walls of prescribed thought. George Orwell recognised such entry tests as a 'sort of confidence trick' in which the student's job was to 'give an examiner the impression that you knew more than you did' dependent as much on the skill of teachers to teach the techniques required to pass exams than anything else.[i] It was, and is, the system that favours the advantaged rather than the able, and its cull of talented children is lamentable. If we are to get the best from all our children and thereby increase social mobility and raise aspirations, we should start by fixing a system of school entry that does huge damage to the social fabric of our society and, worse, discriminates against the majority of the school population.

Selection lies at the heart of this form of education. In itself, it does nothing to encourage reflective thinking, intellectual initiative, the ability to work in teams, the need for highly developed communications skills or to learn to relate to people of different abilities. Its focus is on outcomes, on producing results, on raising standards by a very limited measure, even if such results are not enduring and divide communities. In running a school for many years, I have always had one simple premise, one overriding question I have asked myself at any point in time, viz., what is the best education my school can provide for its children (that is, each and every child)? This is distinct from the question so often asked by heads which is: 'What are the best results I can get for my school?' While the two questions are not mutually exclusive, between them there is a gulf that raises the one overwhelming question, of how we judge the success or otherwise of an education. Do we take it from grades achieved through a series of entrance exams, SATs, Common Entrance, GCSE and the like which measure a specific ability to pass tests, often under duress; or by an education that is inclusive and which produces successful, adaptable, globally aware adults committed to life-long learning? For one of the more disgraceful acts of selective education is the annual culling of students after GCSE on the grounds that either the school cannot properly cater for them (for which, shame on the school), or worse, that they will affect the school's results and therefore, its academic standing.

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

factors such as work ethic, levels of maturation, attitude and background didn't tell us otherwise. And therein lies a multitude of problems, not least in determining what constitutes a good education and at what age these judgements can be made. Even as a means of producing the best academic results, it is flawed, as evidence from non-selective, non-streamed school systems would indicate. Setting, in turn, has the merit of not separating students from their peers across the board, while allowing for specific abilities and talents to be nurtured. Unlike streaming, setting is more likely to be fluid, especially with common assessment across the entire cohort and has much to commend it as a way of meeting children's educational needs although, again, it should not be introduced too early in a child's schooling where separation can have a generally deleterious effect.

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

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

Schools use a variety of increasingly sophisticated tests to select their pupils although a few, such as Eton, now rely on interviews or other more appropriate means of assessment as much as data. Durham University's Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring has become associated with many of these often bespoke tests, but too often their services are sought by schools as a means of convenience because other measures would take more time and effort, even though using such data alone is fraught with danger. Looking at early attempts to measure intelligence, the widespread use of the IQ test in the first half of the twentieth century came about for a variety of reasons, including the need to identify mental retardation in children. One of the pioneers, French psychologist Alfred Binet, a key developer of what later became known as the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scales, however, came to the conclusion that intelligence was multifaceted, but came under the control of practical judgement 'otherwise known as good sense, practical sense, initiative, or the faculty of adapting oneself'.[ii] Intellect on its own is not a measure of potential success; sadly, it is often the opposite, as Binet was to evidence himself when his tests were used by the eugenics movement in the USA as a proof of intellectual disability, resulting in thousands of American

women, most of them poor African Americans, being forcibly sterilised based on their scores on IQ tests.[iii]

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

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

So much of current practice is based on the assumption that by selecting children earlier, we end up with better educated – not just more knowledgeable – adults. Hand in hand with the disquiet caused by league

tables, the competition for places at top schools and universities, the calls to start formal education earlier and the referred pressures placed upon teachers and schools to deliver, however, has come an epidemic of stress related diseases, eating disorders and mental illness. We ignore the statistics at our peril and the fact that an estimated 80,000 children in Britain suffer from severe depression,[iv] that the number of children with sexually transmitted diseases has nearly doubled in the last decade,[v] and that the number of teenagers who self-harm has increased by 70 per cent in the last two years, should be of paramount concern.[vi] Add to that, children struggling with eating disorders and body image and with the residue of family breakdowns, and the priorities change, along with our definition of what constitutes a balanced and successful education. Is this reality really any surprise when we have an approach to education that is focused on driving up standards without ever appearing to consider how such a thing might be best achieved or even the fundamental question of what, in this day, represents the best education for our children? How do we go about building character and resilience, growing aspirations, and having less emphasis placed on summative exams which can stifle curiosity and independent thought? What place does discipline – including self-discipline – have in learning? What is the best mix of knowledge and skills? Naturally, we should insist on excellence and try to improve examination results – but not at any price. Instead, we should be looking at how we measure children – and why.

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

lack of effectiveness in raising performance and aspirations; and schools sacrificing children on the altar of league table for their own ends. All of this is a disaster. We seem to be looking everywhere and nowhere: the Far East, Australasia, Finland, as if there is some trick to it. There is not for we know that education is simple: it is about the effectiveness of the engagement; developing attitudes and a good work ethic; raising expectations; inspiring and facilitating ideas; and setting students new challenges and the intellectual freedom to deliver. It is about engendering self-discipline; it is about the quality of what is delivered and acquired, not the quantity; it is about starting children on a lifelong journey, not subjecting them to a marathon, before their brains and bones are set. We should focus more on character and values, nurturing creativity and initiative and less on prescribed knowledge if we are really wanting to get the best from our children.

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

And finally, what are the lessons for parents? Do not be seduced by schools that are selective based solely on an entrance examination. Treat league tables with caution as sometimes all they reflect is how selective schools are. Avoid schools that refuse siblings for the sake of a few percentage points or who cull at the end of GCSEs. Ask how they differentiate their teaching (and setting and streaming could be part of this). Good schools use interviews as a key part of their process. Be wary of schools that lack the staff to be able to differentiate (and especially those who employ staff based on the universities they attended rather than their ability to teach); ensure your children are comfortable in the schools that they are going to, for they need to be challenged, but not overwhelmed. Look for schools that measure their performance by value-added or by the breadth of what they offer. Whether schools stream and set their pupils is fine so long as classes and sets are not set in stone, but

allow for development (and regression). Make sure their selection process, if they have one, is not based solely on a desire to move up the league tables for that is one way to ensure your child will not get the education that will sustain them throughout their lives. After all, the best measure of education is the skills, knowledge, attitudes and values that survive formal schooling, not by how much is learned, jettisoned and forgotten on the way. The happiest, most successful adults are those who have been challenged and enthused by their education, not downtrodden by it.

[i] G. Orwell, *Such, Such Were the Joys*, London, Penguin Great Ideas, 2014, p.9.
[ii] A. Binet and T. Simon, *The Development of Intelligence In Children*, 1916,
pp.42- 43.
[iii] The principal advocate of Binet's work being adapted for this purpose was Henry Goddard: H. Goddard, *The Kallikak Family: A Study In the Heredity of Feeble-Mindedness,* New York, Macmillan, 1912.
[iv] Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, 'Steep Rise in Children Suffering Depression', News and Campaigns, 30 September 2013.
[v] A. Gregory, 'Teen STIs Plague: 15,000 Underage Teenagers Caught Sexually Transmitted Infections in Last Three Years', *Daily Mirror*, 22 March 2013.
[vi] I, Johnston, 'Number of Children who Self-Harm Jumps 70 Percent in Just Two Years', *The Independent*, 11 August 2014.
[vii] C.K. Stead, *Mansfield,* London, Harvill, 2004, p.176.

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

"In looking at the evidence from New Zealand, noting the country's position on the PISA's rankings and its paucity of selective schools, Katherine Mansfield's compatriots might add something to the debate as to whether selective schooling helps children succeed. From the evidence, it would seem unlikely. If we consider Felicity Lusk, Headmistress of Abingdon College, Sir Graham Davies, former Vice-Chancellor of Liverpool and London Universities and now Chair of the Higher Education Policy Institute, John Hood, recently retired Vice Chancellor of Oxford University; and Dame Judith Mayhew Jonas, former Chair of the Independent Schools Council, we might reflect on the fact that all

were educated at non-selective state schools in New Zealand; as were, more recently, Elizabeth Catto, winner of the Mann Booker prize for 2013 or film director, Peter Jackson. Almost certainly their first significant exam would have been the equivalent of GCSE and, like GCSE, at a level not far above the Common Entrance exam that is used in independent schools and that the Minister for Education has suggested be adopted as a measure for all schools. A more recent example would be the appointment of Ross McEwan as Head of the Royal Bank of Scotland whose business degree from Massey University in New Zealand was notable (in terms of all he has achieved since) for the fact that he failed the accountancy module – twice!

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

And, of course, we can find numerous examples at home. To mention only two: Amanda Foreman, who won the Whitbread Prize for her biography 'Georgina: Duchess of Devonshire", based on her doctorate thesis from Oxford. At A levels she got two Cs and, disastrously, an E in English. She re-took her English at a crammer - and still got an E. Although she applied twice, not one British University made her an offer. Such is the way we measure our children. Thankfully, by going to the United States and beginning her tertiary education there, all came right, but how many others have been similarly lost to a patently flawed system? Another example from a different field of endeavour is that of David Hemery who was born in Gloucestershire, but educated in the United States. As a youth, he was dyslexic and unable to read until the age of ten, and at 14 years weighed six stone and was only five feet and three inches high. Not the resume one would expect from someone who went on to win a gold medal in the 400 metres hurdles and who since has written four books and accumulated four degrees from Boston, Oxford and Harvard - and who didn't specialise in a single sport until he was twenty. How far would he have got in the rigorously selective environment of his homeland? What chance would he have had?

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

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

Of late, there has been a clamour for more grammar schools, a debate that will rumble on. If we accept the historical constraints to accessing a 'good school', the disproportionate numbers of students from independent schools securing internships and job opportunities through networking and nepotism, the distorted school system and the comparative failure of the comprehensive system to inculcate aspiration

and provide a breadth of education, not through its own failings, but because of government's lack of ambition for them, then the ongoing clamour for an increase in their number is not surprising. So long as entry to grammar schools is based exclusively on an academic entrance examination, however, all the same problems would remain, exacerbating the problems of selection. It may be, in the eyes of many, the devil's work and also run counter to the principle of deferred selection which I have advocated, but in a society where social divisions are widening despite all the government has tried to put in place, including more overt social engineering, academies and free schools and pressure on the charitable nature of independent schools, then at least one leaky conduit may be better than nothing at all. It is not and can never be the answer, yet in searching for pragmatic responses to a system so full of potholes one can understand why it has so many advocates

What do we mean by Global Awareness?

"*Each era has its own distinct geography. In the information age, it's not dependent on roads or waterways, but on bases of knowledge*" Prof Viktor Mayer-Schonberger Oxford Internet Institute

According to IAPS, the role of preparatory schools in Britain is to deliver an excellent, well-rounded education, including high quality pastoral care, excellence in teaching and a focus on all-round development including opportunities in sport, music and drama. If we dig a little deeper, schools also display a range of aims based on character, such as developing grit and resilience, independence or realizing potential. It is the same model used abroad in schools seeking to deliver a British education, designed and packaged in Britain, founded on British values and culture and representing the kite mark of excellence.

This is, of course, what the majority of our parents want for their children - but is it enough in a world that is so different to the one our parents grew up in? Technology has transformed our learning and teaching; social responsibility has changed our outlook and our mission; and new subjects have changed our curriculum. But one change that is seldom acknowledged, except through the teaching of languages and world religions, because it doesn't fit neatly into any timetable is that of global awareness, an understanding of other cultures, other languages and other attitudes and norms.

We are doing many things right as evident from the premium being placed on British education, across the globe. Geography is no longer a constraint. Yet, at home, we need to be mindful that we are educating

children to work across national borders in a world that demands them to be global citizens with a facility with languages and a sense of 'global awareness' especially as our schools look abroad for development and funding. The fact that that there are more British independent schools abroad is indicative of the changing landscape. As of the 2014 ISC census, 23 ISC schools declared a total of 39 overseas franchises, ten more than the year before, educating over 22,000 pupils. The rise of the BRIC economies and the requirements of multi-nationals have, likewise, changed our economic landscape and the way we think, driven by an economic imperative. No longer does Goldman-Sachs state they require a business degree, but rather, a fluency in two languages and the ability to work across national borders. HSBC in their search for top graduates 'appreciates' a third language and a corresponding knowledge of its cultural background.' By the end of this decade, four out of every ten of the world's young graduates are going to come from just two countries - China and India as graduates targeting the hi-tech professional jobs that have become the preserve of the Westernised middle classes. Already, in Scandinavia and northern Europe, science and technology jobs requiring graduate qualifications or levels of expertise account for about four in every ten jobs. While the west still controls the institutions, this situation is unlikely to continue. Businesses are not only gravitating to the East, but many of our own traditional names and labels are already owned by overseas' interests: Jaguar, Asda, P&O, the British Airports Authority, all British ports, British Energy, Camelot, Cadbury, Boots, House of Fraser, ICI, Thames Water, Newcastle Breweries, the Savoy, Harrods, Scottish Power, to name but a few – and, of course, the majority of our premier football clubs.

At a time when higher education is more directly related to economic performance, when the world is moving from mass production to a knowledge economy, this is what we should be focusing on in our schools, not just to prepare our children to work for multi-nationals abroad, but for travel abroad, for attending overseas universities and, most important, as preparation for life in multi-cultural Britain.

So what are the lessons for prep schools? Interestingly the attitude of many schools to global education, and especially to growing their overseas' boarding is strangely muted. Some see it as an economic lifeline or, interestingly, as a way to attract good students who will boost schools' academic standing although neither reason should be the justification for taking in more overseas' boarders. When Eton, for instance, aim for 10 – 12% of its roll to be overseas pupils, they don't do so to augment their roll or improve their academic results, but (I would

assume), to make the College more representative, culturally richer, more diversified, more global. When I listen to schools who are reluctant to admit any overseas' boarders because that is the position their parent bodies would prefer, then I would strongly suggest it is time to educate their parents. While it is important to retain the ethos of a British boarding school for that is what parents at home (and from abroad) and not to have large blocs from any national group, the two-way educational value of having international pupils is inestimable.

For the majority of prep schools, however, the challenge will be rather more modest and centred around the question, 'how do we make our pupils more globally aware.' There are various routes that schools can take: by expanding the number and diversity of languages taught; by having overseas' boarders share their cultures; by building links with schools abroad; by taking a more global approach to teaching, particularly in the humanities, including art and music; by incorporating world affairs into assemblies and PSHE lessons; by charitable links abroad; by links especially in Africa and Asia; and by championing the rich diversity of overseas boarders bring to the school.
Why are we doing this? Because we know an awareness of global issues, other languages and cultures is very important for our children. Because we want our children to be educated for just for their country, but for the world. And because parents would rightly see it as our responsibility to do so.