

The current education system could be said to have its prime base in the Education Act of 1944. But since 1945, and the post-war period, we have experienced in this country, changing legislatures and changes in the opposed dogmas (by successive governments of Conservatives and Labour, in our two party system) have resulted in an education pattern that is generally patchy and, overall, unsatisfactory. The establishment of the comprehensive concept most favoured by Labour governments but adopted, too, in some Conservative controlled areas (e.g. Devon) for some years since 1945, has not yet, it seems, proved itself beyond doubt; but more on that later. The grammar schools system based on the 10+ selection test structure has, in some areas, survived, albeit, in other areas, alongside a comprehensive one, whilst the public schools have continued and positively thrived, against the other systems, where money was available to parents to enable them to opt out for their children. The Labour objective that all children in their education should have the same opportunities to achieve the highest educational point, has not been achieved due to the political conflict and its changing fortunes under government controls which has brought about the patchwork system referred to above. No government has tackled decisively the grammar and public schools continued existences, consequently the situation is much more chaotic, perhaps than it was in the pre-war period up to 1939. The comprehensive system in essence would appear, as it were, on paper, to hold the answer to a system that could provide equal opportunities to all children but it does not have seemed to have fully provided such a state. Moreover, the period of trial of that system did not prove anything absolutely conclusive and there are still Conservative controlled authorities who are not convinced of its possibilities and consequently, the grammar schools and public schools survive and produce, in the main, the greater number of those young people who get to Universities and especially to Oxbridge. Thus, up to the present, the desired equality of opportunities in education are not an absolute fact.

It seems probable that, leaving out the so-called preparatory schools for pupils, up to the age of 10/11 years, the majority of our children achieve a reasonable standard and equalable education. It is after 11 years of age that the variations in opportunities occur.

To turn back to the comprehensive system, it may be that the concept of a school engendered to cope with up to 2,000 pupils in one unit is not, thereby, an optimum one since, it seems, after a total of pupils, perhaps 5 or 600, the required administrative, resources provisions and controls, tend to reduce in effect, directly in proportion with such increases in totals. In addition it seems that discipline, perhaps one of the most adjacent matters to pure education, lapses at the same rate. And it follows, that the theoretical advantages of the comprehensive system are bedevilled by these sort of adjacent factors. Vandalism too seems in incidence, high. It might well be that middle schools and 6th form colleges, thereby splitting up the comprehensive concept, may well provide a better solution. Numbers would be reduced in units thereby increasing individual attention and discipline. The 6th form colleges (age groups, say, 16 to 19) could be organised on a type of campus system with a nucleus of practical education sectors and a grouping of social colleges on the same campus, each containing numbers of manageable proportions of children and young people. Certainly the present organisation of education appears wasteful in manpower and other resources, hence the present efforts to reduce costs that have incensed the teaching staffs and resulted in union actions, are not in the interests of pupils nor the system.

There seems no doubt however well intended are the various dogmas and concepts, our present education system is deficient in a number of ways and seems unfair since private money can still give advantages. Perhaps it is time for the setting up of a Royal Commission on Education to examine in detail the present deficiencies, and find a way to a more equitable and satisfactory system that will give our children reasonable chances if they have the wills to take them.

Meanwhile, staff, parent teacher bodies, Governors and the local education authorities must endeavour to make the most of a bad job in effect. The right curriculum, prudent use of resources, reasonable staff attitudes and regard to achievement of discipline that may well have fallen in the comprehensive systems, are all items that need attention until such time that better parameters for our education system can be discovered and proven.