

The education system in England and Wales is probably the best in the world and its importance in maintaining a stable and mature society cannot be overstressed. In a society faced by greater competition for jobs of all descriptions it is more important than ever for our educational establishments to get the most out of their pupils and help them fit into and take their place in society. To this end I must express regret at the passing of the tripartite system, the allocative functions of which were far more efficient than the socialist conception of the all-in school which has taken over most of the country, though, thanks to our councillors, it is still retained in some form in Plymouth.

There is no question that the distribution of ability is uneven in society. Why try to paper over natural differences which only re-emerge in a comprehensive with the resulting rounding down of standards? Some kids are more intelligent than others, some are stronger, etc. and it is the job of the education system of the country to prepare its future workforce, inculcate the right values and allocate the school leavers to their appropriate station in the economy and society.

To do this, exams must be maintained and I would counsel against any further disguising of differences with the adoption of the GCSE in two years' time. Employers must have some credible and accurate measure of ability, more necessary now as applications exceed vacancies so markedly.

To make sure all pupils have as fair a chance of success, children must be streamed and settled into teachable groups of similar ability. If you adopt an "all-in" procedure, the bright ones will be held up, become discontented and counterproductive. How can they be helped when being taught alongside the thick ones? During the war, we always used to recognise the speed of the convoy was the speed of the slowest ship. Well, that would totally waste the ability of the quick ones who would remain permanently unextended. What a waste of resources!

Unfortunately, since the days of war and with full employment in the '60s, the expansion of the teaching service saw the recruitment of teachers who thought of themselves as social reformers. There seemed to be attacks on what was to be taught, the discipline system and the whole organisation of a school. Uniforms and rules were abandoned or changed beyond recognition, subjects like social education (nowadays personal, social and moral education), sex education, sociology, politics and other keyhold and commonsense subjects were being taught. When in 1975 Sir Keith Joseph competed with Mrs Thatcher for the leadership of the Conservative Party, he wrote that one of the things he wanted firmly re-established in Britain was belief in "The Family". Now we all know how social standards have fallen. Divorce is rife, many kids' names don't coincide with parents' names on reports and the modern school curriculum seems to condone all this. Now perhaps he will see to it that traditional values are reasserted and headmasters should be appointed on a pledge to see that this is done. After all, who pays their salaries?

When parents tell me that their children come home saying they've had media studies, world studies, sex education, etc. I can sympathise with them. Media studies is an excuse for letting children watch the box all day. World studies? Why should our kids learn about that without first finding out about their own back yard? Surely sex education can be left to parents and doctors - it only promotes promiscuity and adds to the profits of sexy shops, thankfully due to close in Plymouth soon.

Perhaps the most disturbing slide in standards is in the problem of discipline. The simple truth is that it doesn't exist. If teachers use the stick - which never did me any harm - they can be taken to courts and successfully prosecuted. Kids talk in class, answer back, don't do homework, chew all day and are generally noisy. And they've got too much money.

Unfortunately, there's too much emphasis on this pastoral stuff, treating troublemakers as if they were misguided and in need of treatment (when a bloody good beating would have done!). The woolly approach of courts and an emasculated police force don't help either. The church is playing a less conspicuous role. One wonders where our youngsters will obtain discipline if parents continue to ignore their obligations and governments fail to restore power to the courts, teachers, police and other officials. Perhaps the Govt should consider the unmentionable - not employed in Britain since 1960 - conscription. With all the unemployed plus the discontent surrounding Youth Training this might be a cheap effective answer though politically unpopular amongst the wets.

It is important for everyone in power to remember that what they allow to pass for education today will be reflected in future values. Too much social claptrap, the teaching of bright kids alongside the dolts, the absence of any real assessment and the absence of any firm disciplinary hand will produce a population of normless, dispirited, aimless, idle adults ... and imagine what they will be like as parents and imagine how their

children will turn out? I am afraid that by tolerating anything and everything, explaining bad and often criminal behaviour away as being the result of deprivation and so on will lead to an anarchistic society which will be beyond salvage ... so it is up to teachers, politicians, employers, churchmen and even the social commentators to get round a table and sort out with the Education Secretary a plan to restore the good and right things in our education system which have gained the system's good reputation over the years, before it is too late.