

"What is the matter with the world that it is so out of joint?
Simply that men do not rule themselves but let circumstances rule them."
Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1803-82

I have often thought how neatly Emerson summed up the human condition and how pertinent his observation remains today as for any other point in history.

It is, quite simply, just as important for the individual as for the great mass of humanity that we learn to live in harmony with each other and our physical environment and, as far as "formal" education is concerned in our schools and colleges - there is no contradiction between the essentially utilitarian concerns of the State on one hand and the celebration of individualism on the other. Individual and collective freedom, confidence and strength need a stable social, economic and political environment and, sensibly, that requirement must be reflected in our educational aims and objectives.

This is, I feel, well put in the following statement about the goals of education which we have adopted as a Statement of Endeavour for our school:

They are, first, to enlarge a child's knowledge, experience and imaginative understanding and thus awareness of moral values and capacity for enjoyment; and secondly, to enable him to enter the world after formal education is over as an active participant in society and a responsible contributor to it, capable of achieving as much independence as possible.

This implies a curriculum concerned with skills, attitudes, concepts and knowledge which is broad, balanced, relevant and allows for individual differences: it should also be readily understandable by parents and others who should know how a pupil's progress in learning is monitored and assessed.
All of this is much easier said than done!

Thinking about how such aims can be realised, I am attracted to the extension of a commitment we have at our school to ensuring that our curriculum and the way we operate reflects our concern for the importance of the 3 'C's for all of our pupils, i.e. that the process of education should nurture and promote their CONFIDENCE, CAPABILITY and sense of CARE. We have the same commitment for our parents in their relationship with our school.

When I look at the provision of State maintained education, I would like to see the same commitment.

CONFIDENCE in the system rests in part on knowledge and in part on trust and, in my judgement, both would be enhanced if the "leaders" of our society, e.g. in business, manufacturing, public service and politics, entrusted their own children to be educated within a common system of State maintained education. Such an act, as a statement of CONFIDENCE, could only be unifying especially when supported by Cabinet and other ministers whom we entrust with the government of our nation.

Such confidence would, of course, be based upon an informed assessment of the CAPABILITY of the system, appropriately resourced, to work successfully towards clear and agreed goals: in everyday language, "to deliver the goods".

And, not least, there would be evidence of a shared CONCERN that all our children receive an agreed educational "entitlement" and an acknowledgement that education is a life-long process which, when properly supported, benefits the nation as a whole.

Sadly I am bound to conclude that on the basis of my experience to day, and in the light of impending legislation, I cannot feel confident that there is an agreed national commitment to the simple criteria of the 3 'C's for a common system of State maintained education and, to that extent, our future unity, stability and freedom are threatened.