
Breakthrough Britain

Briefing Paper 3

EDUCATIONAL FAILURE

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This is the Executive Summary of the Educational Failure volume of the Social Justice Policy Group's *Breakthrough Britain* report. For further information, or to download the full report please visit www.povertydebate.com

Britain's children are finding it harder than ever to escape from poverty and the effects of educational inequality are devastating to our society. Social mobility has stalled, and despite a 50% increase in education expenditure since 1997, Britain is a world leader in educational inequality.

1.1 The State of the Nation

There has been very little improvement in the educational outcomes of disadvantaged children since 1997:

- Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are five times more likely to fail academically than their peers.¹
- Children from white working-class backgrounds are the most underachieving ethnic group; just 17% of disadvantaged white boys attain 5 or more A*-Cs at GCSE compared to a 56% national average. Only 19% of Black Caribbean boys obtain 5 or more A*-C at GCSE.²
- Children in disadvantaged schools - schools with high proportions of pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) are 2.7 times more likely to underperform.³
- Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) are four times more likely not to achieve 5 or more A*-Cs at GCSE.⁴
- Children in care are the lowest achieving social group with only 11% attaining 5 or more A*-Cs at GCSE.⁵

Almost every aspect of social breakdown is connected with educational failure:

- Crime - 73% of young offenders describe their academic attainment as nil.⁶
- Unemployment – Two-thirds of employers believe schools do not equip young people with the practical skills that they need for employment.⁷

1 www.dfes.gov.uk: KS4 results by eligibility for FSM, 2005

2 www.dfes.gov.uk: KS4 results by ethnicity and eligibility for FSM, 2004

3 National Audit Office, *Improving Poorly Performing Schools in England*, 2006

4 www.dfes.gov.uk

5 Department of Education and Skills, Outcome Indicators for Looked After Children: Twelve Months to 30 September 2005, England www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR

6 A Review of Education and Supporting Arrangements within Units for Juveniles managed by HM Prison Service, 2002, www.inspectorates.home-office.gov.uk/hminprisons/thematic-reports,

7 YouGov Survey for Edge, www.edge.co.uk, 2005

- Health – 32% of young people who have been excluded from school have been involved with substance abuse.⁸
- Unhappiness – People who have experienced educational failure are much more likely to be depressed, in debt, using drugs or be in trouble with the police.⁹

Our education system should help transfer opportunity and wealth across our society, and between generations, yet it is less likely today that a child with parents in a low income bracket will rise to the top income bracket than it was in 1970.¹⁰

1.2 Labour's Legacy

Children only spend 15% of their time in school and our Interim Report concluded that family background, cultural factors and material needs have the most significant impact upon their educational outcomes. Yet the Government has increasingly viewed schools as the prime agents of social cohesion and schools have been forced to become an emergency service for the wider problems of society. The Government's 'top down' approach has compelled schools to be accountable for an increasing range of services to the community. A recent report¹¹ reveals that head teachers can recall 58 externally imposed initiatives. For example, schools now need to provide 'Extended Services' – ranging from childcare to after school tuition - from 8.30am to 6pm.

We believe that this sends out a message to teachers, families and communities that education is something that is done 'to them', not 'with them and for them.' This has undermined parental responsibility and involvement with the education of their children and demotivated aspiring leaders within the teaching profession.

Leadership Crisis

Our schools need 20% more head teachers over the next five years to cope with the current 'generational time bomb' of early retirements.¹² School head retirements look likely to rise to nearly 3,500 per year by 2009 and there are over 1,200 schools without a permanent head teacher. Many leaders are leaving the profession because of the Government's 'initiative overload', inflexible and unfocussed reward packages and poor pupil behaviour.

Target Tyranny

Our education system has become obsessed with narrow academic targets rather than encouraging pupils to develop a love of learning and an enthusiasm for their education, which will sustain them throughout their careers and life. A recent UNICEF report shows Britain comes 19th out of 21 rich countries on educational wellbeing.¹³ Thousands of young people leave school with little to show for the time and money invested in them but a sense of failure:

- More than one in ten children leave school with no qualifications¹⁴
- 44,000 school leavers each year are illiterate¹⁵
- 12% fail to achieve 5 GCSEs with basic accreditation in English and Maths¹⁶

8 Ruth Kitching, *Violence, Truancy and School Exclusion in France and Britain*, 2001

9 YouGov Survey for Social Justice Policy Group, November 2006

10 Jo Blanden, Paul Greg, Stephen Machin, *Changes in Educational Inequality* 2004

11 Smithers and Robinson CEER *School Headship* NUT 2007

12 Professor John Howson, 'Education Data Surveys Expert Analysis & Commentary on Education Issues', September 2005 www.educationdatasurveys.org.uk

13 UNICEF, *Child Poverty in Perspective: An Overview of Child Well-being in Rich Countries*, 2007

14 13% of children attained no GCSEs in 2005/6 DFES

15 Hansard, Answer to Written Question from John Hayes, 22nd May 2006

16 www.dfes.gov.uk, KS4 Results for Pupils 2005

The Government, and consequently the media, focus on hitting performance targets, which are defined by the 'average' attainment of schools and this means that the dire educational outcomes of some of our most disadvantaged pupils fail to get the attention that they deserve.

The Money-go-round

It is essential that support is provided as early as possible in a child's pre-school years and further developed at primary school. Research shows that a child's developmental score at 22 months is a predictor of educational outcomes at 26 years old.¹⁷ The graph¹⁸ opposite shows that the broad contours of educational inequality are well defined when a child is 22 months old. 'Low socio-economic status' children (bottom line) have a much slower development than children with medium (middle line) or high (top line) 'socio-economic status'.¹⁹

Children fall behind before they have even reached primary school and the trend continues to accelerate throughout the course of primary education and increases significantly by the age of 10.

The Government's pre-school initiatives, such as Sure Start, are not holistic enough and there is inadequate support for our most disadvantaged children in the pre-school period. Furthermore, the progress disadvantaged children make in pre-school is not sustained in primary school or in the crucial transition between primary and secondary schooling.²⁰

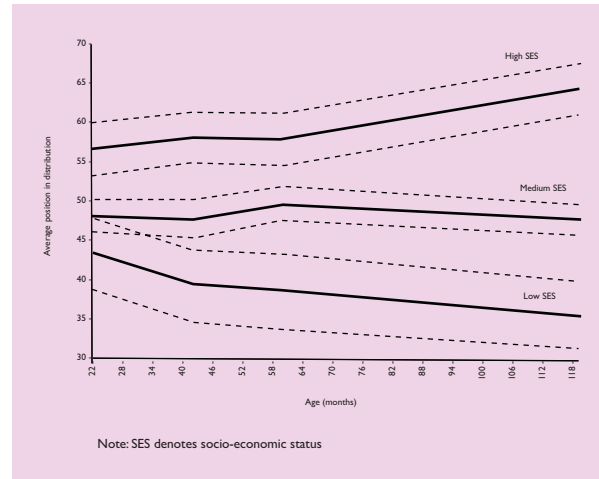
We spend billions on supporting the adult casualties of educational failure in our prisons, job centres and hospital wards as our current system forces schools to play 'catch up'. Expenditure on the disadvantaged is not focussed well enough on the pupils and the years that really count.

Government squeezes out the third sector

One of the best ways in which funding can be focussed and schools can help disadvantaged children who are struggling to make progress is to engage the assistance of the third sector. There are voluntary groups and charities across the country committed to turning around entrenched educational failure and with a successful track record of doing so. However, the Government's centralising approach squeezes out alternative providers of education to the disadvantaged. Forecast educational spending in 2007/2008 is £64.9 billion²¹ yet the DfES gives only £283 million to the third sector.²²

1.3 The Conservative Challenge

There are a number of factors which affect educational outcomes and our Interim Report described how a range of social problems have a devastating impact on the education of our most vulnerable children. We



17 Dfes: *Social Mobility: Narrowing Social Class Educational Attainment Gaps* April 2006

18 Corak, M. Social Mobility metric 2004. *Do poor children become poor adults? Lessons for public policy from a cross country comparison of general earnings mobility*. Paper presented at workshop on child poverty, UNICEF innocent research centre; Educational inequality metric from European Group of Research on Equity of the Educational Systems: A set of indicators.

19 Feinstein, Leon, 'Very early evidence: How early can we predict future educational achievement?' August 2006

20 Galton M, Gray J and Ruddock J 2003

21 Department for Education and Skills, *Departmental Report* 2006

22 Department for Education and Skills, *Departmental Report* 2006

believe that we cannot break the UK's cycle of educational under-achievement unless we tackle family breakdown, drug and alcohol abuse and welfare dependency. Our education policies are designed to have significant social impact, but they should be read in conjunction with, and implemented alongside, other policies advocated by the Social Justice Policy Group. Education is a 'pathway' out of poverty but we also recognise that stable families and communities provide the conditions for all children to flourish. Our policies therefore value the important role of families and communities and give them a stake in the education of children.

Every Parent Matters

Government should encourage parents to realise that helping their children to learn is as important as feeding and clothing them. It is not so much 'Every Child Matters' as 'Every Parent Matters'. We need to build a partnership between school and home which helps parents take responsibility for their children's education, supporting them to get involved and empowering them to make the best decisions.

We believe that one of the factors driving the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their peers is that they often lack the individually tailored support that many other pupils take for granted. Many families spend increasing amounts of time and money on supplementary educational activities, including maths, language and music lessons, to improve the quality of their children's education. We therefore need to ensure that disadvantaged families have access to a range of educational opportunities, improving both their educational outcomes and well-being.

Moreover, when local schools are failing, more affluent parents sensibly use their resources and knowledge to find a better school by, for example, moving into a better catchment area or transporting their children to schools further away. In contrast, disadvantaged parents too often find their children trapped in schools which fail to improve over a long period. Our policies will ensure that these children are not forced to endure prolonged educational failure.

Better Leadership in Schools

Our work shows that head teachers have a critical role to play in improving schools and maintaining a steady flow of high quality leaders is very important. We need to address the reasons why so many teachers do not consider working in disadvantaged schools. Our policies will attract and retain talented head teachers leading strong teams with the training and resources to turnaround performance and improve pupil behaviour in partnership with parents.

Creating a culture of learning

Developing a partnership with parents and encouraging parental engagement in schools is part of a wider battle to place a love of learning at the centre of disadvantaged communities. The anti-schooling culture of some of our poorest neighbourhoods must be challenged and defeated and we need to use new creative methods to inspire children to learn. These must be tailored to their backgrounds and demonstrate how formal education is relevant to their communities and their own future success.

Tackling Disadvantage Early and Creating Pathways to Success

To lead a fulfilling life and sustain employment in the modern workforce, disadvantaged children need to have a love of learning fostered within them from as early an age as possible so they can build academic skills alongside vital practical and social skills. We therefore propose much more early intervention and support for children and families both at pre-school level and primary school.

We must also ensure that children are not 'blown off course' as they progress through school by managing the transition to secondary education more carefully. This will entail dealing effectively with poor pupil behaviour but also making learning more exciting by building strong bridges between schools, businesses and local community groups.

Champions of Social Mobility

These policy objectives are designed to build a new 'launch pad' for our nation's disadvantaged children and make the end of educational inequality a fundamental policy priority. The Conservative Party is the party of aspiration and these policies will foster a society in which where you have come from need not dictate where you are going to and where schools are powerful engines of social mobility.

1.4 YouGov Polling

The Social Justice Policy Group commissioned a YouGov polling²³ exercise in April-May 2007 to assess public opinion about educational failure which revealed the following key points:

- 74% of people think that educational failure is a “severe problem” and 57% of people believe that it is not seen as a high enough priority by politicians.
- 79% of people believe that parents are primarily responsible for ensuring that children ‘work hard, behave well and attend school’. Just 7% of people say that the responsibility lies with head teachers or teachers.
- 65% believe that “parents have a vital role to play in children’s education and parenting classes would help them understand their responsibility”.
- 69% judge that “placing a member of staff who is not a teacher or social worker in schools to liaise with parents and make home visits to families” is a “good idea”.
- 69% think that teacher training should “prioritise spending time in difficult schools to prepare them for the challenges of teaching”.
- 64% agree that “teachers and head teachers should be given performance bonuses if they dramatically improve results for children”.
- 79% of people think that “many children who are not academically gifted would be better off doing vocational training, rather than being forced to study academic subjects”.

1.5 Summary of Policy Proposals

A. Every parent matters

Our new approach, RISE, will focus on four key areas which are crucial to partnerships between parents and schools: Responsibility, Involvement, Support and Empowerment.

Responsibility – Home-School Charters (4.1.2)

Every school would have a mandatory Home-School Charter describing the rights and responsibilities of parents, teachers and children. We recommend that charters should be developed from the ‘bottom up’ and have a strong emphasis on the school’s values and aims, building on the success of similar initiatives in Australia, the United States and good schools in the UK. Parental commitment to the Charter would trigger additional incentives described later in the report.

Involvement – ‘Be a credit to your child’ courses (4.1.3)

These courses would help parents to get the best out of the education system for their children. In particular, they would show how children learn successfully and explain the ways in which parents can support their development. The courses would build on the pre-school support recommended by the Family Working Group and target parents of disadvantaged primary school children. Courses would be run by the school or accredited

23 Please see the introduction of Breakthrough Britain for a full explanation of the polling process

local alternative providers and be co-ordinated by Home-School Support Champions (see below).

Support – Home-School Support Champions (4.1.4)

Home-school links need to be improved in schools serving deprived areas. We recommend providing a full-time Home-School Support Champion to disadvantaged primary schools at a cost of £31,000 per school. The Champion would help parents to support their children's education and therefore improve attainment, attendance and pupil behaviour.

Empowerment - £500 p.a. Educational Credits for Disadvantaged Children (4.1.5)

A major reason for the underperformance of disadvantaged children is that they do not have access to supplementary educational services, such as extra tuition, music and language lessons taken for granted by many families. These services are shown to improve the educational outcomes and well-being of children.

Our proposed £500 per annum Educational Credit would fund supplementary educational services such as a year's extra maths tuition, six months intensive literacy support and a year's group music lessons.

Parents of disadvantaged primary school children who have fulfilled their obligations under Charters and attended the 'Be a Credit to your child' course would be eligible for the Credit.

Pioneer Schools - Power to Parents (4.1.5)

Overseas research shows that parental and third sector groups can find innovative solutions to deeply entrenched educational failure by setting up new schools. However, in the UK there are big barriers hindering the creation of new schools, even under the Academy programme, and we believe that these obstacles should be removed. This would mean that organisations with a sense of mission and commitment could set up new schools in the most deprived areas.

We also believe that it is inequitable for disadvantaged children to be trapped over the long term in schools which are failing to improve. Every child has the right to attend a good, local school.

We therefore propose that parents of children in schools which are failing to improve over a three year period can move their children with the funding for that pupil to another school within the State system, including a Pioneer School.

B. Better School Leadership

An end to bureaucratic overload (4.2.2)

The Government has made schools responsible for countless interventions designed to tackle social problems. We believe that this trend should be reversed by implementing our Every Parent Matters policies and ensuring that the Secretary of State reduces bureaucracy for head teachers.

Disadvantaged Primary School Personnel Fund (4.2.3)

We want to improve the chances of challenging schools of getting the very best leaders and no longer rely upon a dwindling number of 'hero heads' who are expected to achieve miracles without adequate financial incentive.

We propose the creation of a fund for disadvantaged primary schools which trained school governors will be able to use to reduce the administrative burden on head teachers, attract new heads by increasing base pay rates by 25% and reward heads dramatically improving performance with bonuses of up to 50%.

Improved head teacher training (4.2.4)

We propose a new MA qualification specifically equipping teachers with the skills to take on the challenge of running schools in deprived areas. The course would be delivered by experienced successful heads of such schools and involve job shadowing, in-post training and the sharing of best practice.

C. Creating a Culture of Learning

Family Literacy Classes (4.3.1)

A key obstacle to parental involvement in education is low parental literacy levels. We recommend much greater use of family literacy classes both at pre-school level, using the Family Services Hubs recommended by the SJPG Family Working Group, and at primary level. Studies²⁴ show that this approach has significant impact and is good value for money.

'Booster Classes' for Pupils Falling Behind (4.3.1)

'Booster' support should be available for primary school children falling seriously behind in English and Maths. This should be provided by specialised literacy and numeracy teams, identifying and helping small groups of pupils. Programmes such as 'Reading Recovery', a programme that delivers intensive literacy coaching, have a track record of dramatically improving results for the most under-achieving pupils.²⁵

Improving pupil behaviour (4.3.2)

The following proposals aim to improve the prospects for those children at risk of exclusion and re-integrate those who have been excluded.

Greater use of Iceberg programmes (4.3.2)

These on-site part-time and full-time programmes provide a different but integrated and relevant timetable with separate breaks and start and end times to the school day. Work is undertaken from the main curriculum but emphasises discipline, literacy and numeracy with strong individual support.

More Alternative Provision to Pupil Referral Units (4.3.2)

OFSTED²⁶ states that Pupil Referral Units (PRU) are the 'least successful of all' provision in ensuring pupil progress. Yet excluded pupils are regularly sent to PRUs costing £228 million per annum.²⁷ Government should use a proportion of these funds to stimulate the expansion of successful alternative providers.

Managing Transition Years more carefully (4.3.2)

Many disadvantaged pupils encounter problems in the transition between primary and secondary school and find it hard to cope with the curriculum and expectations of their new school.²⁸ Secondary schools do not always have a good understanding of the backgrounds of new pupils. We propose more structured sharing of information between schools and suggest that parental courses, home-school support and family-based learning activities could help to smooth the transition.

Pathways to Success (4.3.3)

The 14-19 Curriculum is currently undergoing fundamental reform. Government must ensure that, because every young person has different aptitudes and skills, there are more vocational and practical options available. Reform must give children better exposure to vocational options before the age of 14 and grant them parity of esteem and funding. Many countries, such as The Netherlands, recognise this and high quality vocational subjects are a key element of the secondary school curriculum for pupils.

Practical learning helps young people to increase their confidence, literacy and numeracy and improves levels of self reliance, communication and innovation which business value highly.

24 R.G Lynch, *Early Childhood Education and Early Adulthood Education*. Economic Policy Institute of Washington, DC 2004

25 *Reading Recovery Annual Report 2005*

26 *OFSTED Annual Report 2005/06* p.64

27 www.dfes.gov.uk

28 National Foundation for Educational Research 2004

Building better links with Business and the Community(4.3.4)

Our proposals envisage a much more significant role for third sector organisations in tackling illiteracy and innumeracy and our Third Sector report describes how the third sector can be stimulated by lower regulation and more flexible funding.

Schools could also attract more investment and involvement from local businesses and individuals if there were a wider range of tax reliefs available. State schools could be given charitable status or a special position in the tax system to attract tax relief.

Conclusion

Too many young people leave school without the skills and qualifications to secure a sustainable job and lead a fulfilling life. This 'failure to launch' has corrosive effects on their fortunes and the social fabric and economic prospects of our country.

This report recommends reform which puts the education of disadvantaged children at the top of the political agenda. Our schools must be escalators of opportunity offering disadvantaged children a real chance to improve the quality of their lives, transferring wealth and happiness across the generations.

EDUCATIONAL FAILURE WORKING GROUP

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Tom Stancliffe, Senior Researcher
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ABOUT THE SJPG

The Social Justice Policy Group was commissioned by Rt Hon David Cameron MP, Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition, in January 2006 to make policy recommendations to the Conservative Party on issues of social justice.

The Policy Group is chaired by the Rt Hon Iain Duncan Smith MP, former leader of the Conservative Party and Chairman of the Centre for Social Justice, and its Deputy Chairman is Debbie Scott, Chief Executive of Tomorrow's People. The Policy Group's Secretariat is hosted by the Centre for Social Justice.

The work has been done through six working groups, which have examined key "pathways to poverty": family breakdown, educational failure, economic dependency, indebtedness and addictions. A sixth group has studied how the third sector might be supported to do more to give vulnerable people second chances and help them escape poverty.

For further information, or to download the full report of the Social Justice Policy Group, *Breakthrough Britain*, please visit www.poverty.debate.com

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