

This area of policy is huge and complex each part separate but interlinked.

There are strong interest groups, people with immense experience and people with strong opinions.

We have all been to school and have our memories.

I can remember as a small child head on arms last lesson on a Friday afternoon enjoying and listening intently to Miss Mackay reading out the latest chapter of a story.

I can also remember the sound of the leather strap as it hit the open palms of children.

I also remember the interminable maths lessons multiplying endless fractions in utter boredom.

Our experiences of our own education can lead to strong opinions about what education should be providing. So, in my case that would be the value of good education, and an understanding how demotivating failure can be and a view that teaching children what they don't see the value in learning is not very productive.

I expect all Secretaries of State bring with them to their new department their personal views and this might explain why the Institute for Government identified 64 separate pieces of legislation relating to vocational, FE and skills education since the 1980's overseen by 48 different government ministers. That doesn't include legislation with reference to schools.

Education is delivered in silos pre-school, primary, secondary, further education, sixth form colleges, higher education. Technical, academic and so on

Changes in one area of education can have an impact on another area, sometimes unintended.

Concerns are often expressed as to whether the whole system is fit for purpose and if the initiatives of successive governments have resulted in a worsening of the underlying problems and their effects.

Maybe we need a radical rethink and ask some fundamental questions?

What is education for?

Who is it for?

What skills and knowledge should schools teach and how should they be learned.

How will be the digital age impact on learning?

What should a partnership between schools, parents and the state look like?

What should access to education look like at different stages of our life?

What does accountability look like?

What is the role of schools in safeguarding children?

What is the role of the school in teaching values?

What are our shared values?

How do we support children with very different interests, needs and backgrounds to develop their talents?

How do we ensure that the needs of children are heard and that we have an educational system that is responsive to children including the most able and the most disadvantaged?

The future, funding and dealing with failure are big issues.

How do policy makers and legislators arrive at a consensus in order to provide a stable framework for education which is not changed by successive governments?

I am both a failure and a success

I went to a Grammar School having passed my 11+ and then went to Borough Polytechnic in London to do an external London University degree in Sociology having failed to get high grades in my 'A' levels. I was able to do this because on my 7th attempt I passed 'o' level Maths.

As a child I remember the frustration of having to sit again and again 'o' level Maths and the sense of defeat and failure.

So, I felt a bit depressed on a recent visit to Stockport College when the principal talked about the number of young people who were having to re-sit Maths and English to do the courses they wanted to do and how difficult it was to engage them because they didn't see the point of it.

It can become a barrier preventing them from progressing in subjects they enjoyed and were good at.

The world is changing we don't talk about occupations any more we talk about portable skills sets, understanding data, innovative approaches, teamwork skills, flexibility.

The new proposed T levels mean that young people will still have to pass Maths and English GCSE equivalent as part of the T level.

That seems to me to be a missed opportunity to offer a different pathway to those qualifications instead of asking young people to re-sit exams in subjects they didn't see the point of. Surely there are other ways of teaching them those skills.

Wales are launching a new Digital Competence Framework in 2020. Under four headings, citizenship, interacting and collaborating, producing, and data and computational thinking.

England are to have an equivalent.

I visited Tithe Barn in my constituency the other week where the children are learning to use Google Cloud as a resource.

Year 6 the Digital Leaders gave me a presentation, and these are some of their comments

'We have access to a 'green 'paperless homework system called Google Classroom and we can access all our work from home'

'We are expected to think for ourselves and try and find the answers to our own questions'

'We have also worked in groups, peer assessed our friends work and shared and collaborated on documents and presentations using Google Drive'

'We looked at the history of fake news, two of the best fake news stories of the last century, why fake news is used and why it can be dangerous.'

The ability to communicate, critical thinking, working in teams and creativity are going to be necessary skills in a working world where robots and artificial intelligence will be doing tasks that once employed people.

Digital technology will have a huge impact on how knowledge and skills are learnt.

It may also provide more flexibility to respond to teachers work overload, enable job sharing and more flexible hours .

A very different world than that I was born into.

What struck me was that unlike when I was a child when all knowledge was received from teachers and parents that now children can find out their own information. I recently met the school councillors at another primary school. They were concerned about the plastic island in the Pacific. Both the Head and I agreed afterwards that unlike us, the children knew where it was. What is striking about today's children is their interest in their wider environment

Children bring in their own knowledge to school from the internet.

That is not without its problems. On –line grooming of children has increased and those who would exploit the vulnerability of children are always looking for new ways to do so.

The role schools have in safeguarding children has increased as has their role in what would be considered social care.

Helping children learn by recognising and supporting their emotional and physical needs needs will overcome their barriers to learning and where better to do that in a school which is a universal provision .

Teachers are to be trained in identifying children with mental health needs.

I think this was a response to the very real concern of those needs not being identified and the preventable loss of life if they had been identified earlier.

But mental health needs develop over time. There is a good understanding in schools of how the significance of child's background or events in a child's life can impact on learning and the importance the importance of being able to give help in and out of school to the child and the wider family at an early stage

We need more recognition of that increased and increasing role schools are having in identifying and supporting children with a range of special needs and disabilities and children with social care needs.

We need a total rethink of how we fund schools which reflects what we are actually asking schools to do in overcoming barriers to learning.

We also need to understand better how we support children through primary and high schools specially those children with vulnerabilities. How do we help children succeed not fail? How do we help children make the difficult transition in their life from child to adolescent from primary to secondary?

This can be a time when they can be especially vulnerable to other exploitative peers and adults.

The response to those questions should bring together what now are different policy areas and different funding streams.

And it also raises questions about what a good school environment look like should?

Do schools safeguard children better and educate better when there is a systematic organisational approach embedding respect, resilience and empathy into every aspect of that school?

Should OFSTED inspect safeguarding in schools? Would not that better be done by local authorities who have a duty to protect all children in their area?

We shouldn't do policy or funding in silos.

And we need to see education as a lifetime resource.

Access to higher education when someone has finished their working life has huge benefits in extending healthy living. Perhaps it should be funded by health.

Lifelong access to education to enable people to learn new skills is of benefit to the individual but also of benefit to employers.

Perhaps there should be an investment fund for that with a fair contribution from the individual, the state, the institution and employers.

Going back to Borough Polytechnic which is now the University of the South Bank looking at some of those issues of pathways and transitions.

University of the South Bank have produced a policy document called a 'locally driven bottom-up solution'. They were clearly fed up with top-down policy initiatives intending to address the UK's need for effective professional and technical education. The university is convening a group of like-minded

specialist educational providers along with employers and civic partners to create a family of educational providers covering the range of educational and skills development from schools through to post graduate provision for south central London. This would mean a student being able to take on subject in an academy and another more applied learning subject at the University Technical College.

Is this the way forward? Where institutions respond flexibly to the individual need of the child. Some multi-academy trusts are also adopting a family approach. It would certainly benefit children with disabilities such as autism where you could look at what that child would be happy doing as a working adult and plot the pathway to that instead of parents struggling for inclusion for their children worrying about what will happen to their child when they become an adult.

Not all the challenges are to do with structure and qualifications. Some are about the fundamental values we have as a society.

All schools have sought to teach basic values of respect and understanding.

But the recent confrontation between a school in Birmingham and parents showed some of the difficulties when parents feel the state has undermined their parental role and is not teaching their children the values they would wish them to have.

Stating support for either side of the argument doesn't resolve the strong emotion. Legislation and guidance although important don't help in themselves nor does recourse to the law which may deal with the demonstrations but not with the underlying issues.

Such questions can probably only be resolved at a community level with local leadership.

Maybe that's a challenge for us as politicians. People who elect us expect us to represent them and their views which sometimes are an emotive response to a very complex situation but valid from their point of view in terms of perceived unfairness and inability to get a hearing. But representing those views may not serve the wider community interest

And there is concern that the democratic institutions are failing to respond to the complex problems of the 21st century world with a resulting rise in populist

leaders. If you look at the history of populist leaders it ends in failure and people turn again to the protection of democratic institutions. Children learning from an early age what is a false fact and learning that issues are complex but having confidence to solve them are a protection of our democratic institutions.

If we can build a culture of community problem solving locally which flows out from those children into their families and neighbours, then we can build from that a national culture.

Our children face a very challenging future and the need for an education system that enables every child to face that future equipped with skills and knowledge for the future ahead has never been more important. To achieve that we need to work together teachers, parents, local and national leaders, local communities. Let's not fail our children. Lets help them succeed.