

Select Committee Report by ‘*Sceptic*’

As foreseen in my previous sketch, the Minister of State for Children, Young People and Families, was quizzed on the Children Bill by the Education Committee in June.

The Committee was in no doubt that Margaret Hodge was “passionate” about child care – she used the word several times. However, the Committee was not equally convinced that the Bill’s proposals had been thought through, probably because of the speed of their drafting. The Minister admitted that “the thinking started when.... The Government reflected on Lord Laming’s report on ...Climbie.”, i.e. a bare fifteen months before the Bill was published. An incredulous Chairman asked “Are you really saying that the only reason this ... massive change is taking place is one case... however tragic?” Well – not quite! “The focus of the work came out of Climbie”.

Whilst the Chairman seemed conscious of what was dog and what was tail, it was not clear that the Minister was. Challenged on the risk of disrupting the whole of the education system catering for some 95% of the nation’s children, in the hope of improving the protection of the 1% in care and/or at risk, she seemed not to have taken in that there were some nine million the former category, compared [fortunately] with only some 100,000 in the latter.

The Minister maintained that the professionals had been fully consulted, and were enthusiastically supportive. Well, professionals, were you, and are you?

In July the Secretary of State attended to discuss public expenditure. It had gone up. It was going up, if not forever at the recent rate. Quizzed as to how come, historically, low rates of increased expenditure had sometimes coincided with greater improvements in examination successes and vice versa, he agreed that there was no direct immediate correlation between more money, and more exam passes. Sensibly however he resisted the implication that proper resourcing was irrelevant to an effective education system.

On the rationale of committing to 200 academies, when it was too early properly to assess the success of the first few, he was on shiffter ground. If you were going to have a five year plan you had to put them in, was the best he could do.

As to LEAs, Mr Clarke seemed fonder of them than some of his colleagues. He did not, for example, fancy paying out to 25,000 schools direct from DfES – unsurprisingly as he had agreed to cut substantially the Department’s Staff. The general impression was that LEAs would remain to do the dirty work, taking the opprobrium when schools fail, but not getting the kudos when they succeed.

As for Regional Assemblies providing elected planning and supervision of a seamless school, craft, technical, further and higher education provision – sheer heresy! Despite compliments to Tim Brighouse for getting a start to London-wide facilities

and admission systems sans money or clout, there would be no education functions for RAs.

As to the new session, doubtless Tomlinson and 14 - 19s will re-emerge into the limelight, as his final report is due out "in the Autumn"
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(postscript).....and indeed he did! So did the Queen's Speech. More "Order! Order! Order!" than "education, education, education", but, as old Father William would doubtless have said "we have had nine statutes and that is enough!" Nevertheless, we are to get Bills to "streamline the regime of school inspection" "extend financial support for 16 - 19 year-olds in training and education" and "provide innovative safe school transport" "Innovative"? Any pogo stick trainers, pedalo operators, or hot air balloonists amongst you?