FORUM
Volume 50, Number 1, 2008
www.wwwords.co.uk/FORUM

Blair's academies: the story so far

DEREK GILLARD

ABSTRACT Of all Tony Blair's education policies during his decade as prime minister, one of the most controversial was his plan to create a network of academies – effectively, private schools funded by the taxpayer. This piece explores the origins of the policy and recounts the widespread concerns and criticisms with which it has been beset.

Origins

The academies programme had two parents, both of which began life in 1988: the charter schools in the USA and the city technology colleges invented by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government.

The charter school movement was a response to the call by American Federation of Teachers president Albert Shanker for reform of the country's public schools (i.e. state schools). The first state to permit the setting up of charter schools was Minnesota, in 1991. California followed in 1992, and by 1995 19 states had charter schools. The schools were publicly funded elementary or secondary schools which were legally and financially autonomous, operating much like private businesses. Although they were not permitted to charge tuition fees, have religious affiliations or select their students, they were free from some of the rules, regulations and statutes which applied to other public schools. In return for this freedom, they were expected to be innovative in their pedagogy and to be accountable for the performance of their students as set out in their charters. Charter schools are still part of the US educational landscape, though they have not been without their problems or their critics.

In the UK, city technology colleges (CTCs) were established by the 1988 Education 'Reform' Act. They were the invention of secretary of state Kenneth Baker, who presented them as a 'half-way house' between the state and independent sectors. A hundred of the colleges were to be set up across the

country, each one funded – 'sponsored' – by a business, with spending per pupil far higher than in the schools of the local education authorities (LEAs), from whom they would be entirely independent. CTCs were presented as offering choice to parents. In fact, they served three purposes in the Thatcher government's overall strategy: they helped to weaken the power of the LEAs; they extended selection (they were permitted to select pupils on the basis of 'aptitude'); and they furthered the marketisation of education by involving private enterprise in the running of schools. In the event, only a handful were ever established because few businesses were prepared to take part and, as usual, the taxpayer was left to pick up the bill.

New Government – Same Policies

Tony Blair's 'New Labour' government, swept to power in 1997 with a huge Commons majority, was to prove something of a shock to traditional Labour supporters and to many teachers. It quickly became clear that Blair would be following the course set by the Tories – extending selection, reducing the role of the LEAs, and promoting privatisation. There was huge disappointment when David Blunkett, Blair's first education secretary, reneged on his pre-election promise to abolish selective secondary education. England's remaining 164 grammar schools would stay, he said, unless parents voted locally to get rid of them. But worse was to come. New Labour's first major education act – the 1998 School Standards and Framework Act – encouraged secondary schools to become 'specialist schools' which would be allowed to select a small proportion of their pupils on the basis of 'perceived aptitudes'.

Meanwhile, the Blair government pursued its other aims – reducing the role of the local authorities and promoting privatisation – in a number of ways:

- Education Action Zones, designed to improve educational opportunities in inner-city areas, involved businesses as partners.
- So-called 'failing' schools were taken away from local authority control and handed over to private companies (The first was King's Manor School in Guildford, Surrey).
- Local authority services were contracted out. In fact, in Leeds the entire local education authority was privatised.

This creeping privatisation of education took a major step forward in March 2000 when Blunkett announced that the government intended to create a network of 'city academies', closely modelled on the charter schools in the US and the Conservatives' CTCs. (The 'city' was soon to be dropped to allow for the creation of academies in rural areas.) The scheme was the brainchild of Andrew Adonis, Blair's principal education adviser during his ten years in office.

Blunkett claimed that the principal aim of the academies programme was to improve educational opportunities for inner-city children. It was 'a radical approach to promote greater diversity and break the cycle of failing schools in inner cities', he said. Yet the real aims of the programme were, as in the case of

the CTCs, to extend selection (under the guise of specialisation), to diminish the power of the LEAs, and to promote privatisation. Academies were to be public/private partnerships. Businesses, churches and voluntary groups would build and manage them, and they would be outside the control of local authorities. In return for a £2m donation towards the capital costs, sponsors would be allowed to rename the school, control the board of governors and influence the curriculum. They were therefore remarkably like the CTCs, as Francis Beckett pointed out in *The Guardian* (9 July, 2004):

> the government's big idea for education turns out to be the one the Conservatives invented 19 years ago, and abandoned as a failure shortly afterwards. It is even run by the same man: Cyril Taylor, the businessman appointed by the Conservatives in 1986 to create 30 city technology colleges.

Faith

New Labour was returned to power at the general election in 2001. In his second term as prime minister, Blair continued to pursue his selection and privatisation agendas and now added a third: the promotion of faith. The Education Act 2002 legislated for more involvement of the private sector and religious organisations in state provision and greater diversity in secondary education, with more specialist schools and academies attracting private sponsorship.

There was widespread concern over the proposal to allow religious groups to take control of more state schools. A *You Gov/Observer* poll of nearly 6,000 people found that 80 per cent were against the proposal and only 11 per cent in favour (*The Observer,* 11 November, 2001). The policy became even more controversial in the spring of 2002 when it was revealed that at least two state-funded religious schools in England were teaching their students 'creationism' as science. One of these was Emmanuel City Technology College in Gateshead, sponsored by evangelical Christian Peter Vardy. Questioned in the House of Commons about the use of taxpayers' money to fund such teaching, Tony Blair avoided answering the question and claimed that 'a more diverse school system ... will deliver better results for our children'.

Open for Business

The first three academies opened in September 2002. Nine followed a year later, and five more opened in September 2004, making a total of 17 during Blair's second term in office. The *Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners*, published in July 2004, indicated that the government intended to have 200 academies open by 2010, despite the fact that no evaluation had been made of their cost-effectiveness.

There were already serious concerns about the programme, which centred around the following issues:

- escalating costs;
- poor performance;
- the replacement of schools which were not 'failing';
- the imposition of academies against the wishes of local parents;
- the involvement of faith groups;
- selection by stealth;
- pupil exclusions;
- lack of LEA control and support;
- dubious use of public funds;
- a two-tier education system.

Escalating Costs

Sponsors were required to contribute £2m to start-up costs, with the taxpayer finding the rest. It was originally estimated that this would amount to about £8m per academy (making a total start-up cost of £10m). In fact, they proved far more expensive than that. The City of London Academy in Southwark cost £33.7m and the average capital budget for the first 17 academies was £25m.

Poor Performance

Within six months of its opening, the Greig City Academy in Haringey had been condemned by Ofsted for endemic indiscipline and below standard lessons. In London, the Capital City Academy had problems with the design of its building and ran into financial difficulties which forced seven staff redundancies. The head resigned after less than a year in post (John Crace, *The Guardian,* 20 July, 2004). Exam tables for 2004 showed that of the 11 academies listed, six had improved their results at GCSE, five had failed to show any improvement and one had the second-worst results in England (Matthew Taylor, *The Guardian,* 13 January, 2005).

The Replacement of Schools Which Were Not 'Failing'

Academies were supposed to replace so-called 'failing' schools but this was not always so. Northcliffe School, near Doncaster, makes an interesting case study. Of the 17 secondary schools in Doncaster, Northcliffe was the most disadvantaged. 29.5 per cent of its pupils were entitled to free school meals, 17 per cent had special educational needs, and 5.3 per cent had statements of special need – all well above average. In 2001 Ofsted described Northcliffe as 'a good and improving school', a member of the staff won a prestigious Teacher of the Year award, and the school received a School Achievement Award. In 2002 two members of staff achieved Advanced Skills Teacher status and the

school received another School Achievement Award. Attendance levels rose annually for four years and in 2003 Northcliffe students produced the best SATs and GCSE results in the history of the school. Three months later, Ofsted suddenly decided the school required 'special measures' and it emerged that Peter Vardy had put in a bid to turn the school into an academy. Local parents were, unsurprisingly, convinced that the Ofsted finding was simply an excuse to justify closing the school.

The Imposition of Academies Against the Wishes of Local Parents

Academies were often forced on communities which did not want them. In South Middlesbrough, Merton and Doncaster parents campaigned vigorously against proposed academies. Some of these campaigns were successful: in October 2004 Doncaster council announced it had abandoned plans to turn Northcliffe School into an academy, a move welcomed by teachers, local parents' groups and the NUT. In Hackney, a campaign by parents prevented the replacement of Thomas Abney primary school (which had been praised by Ofsted) with an academy.

The Involvement of Faith Groups

There were serious concerns about the religious involvement in academies, half of which were sponsored by faith groups. Church of England Commissioner Peter Bruinvels gave the game away when he said 'It's about front-line evangelism' (John Crace, *The Guardian,* 20 July, 2004). Vardy's Emmanuel Schools Foundation academies continued to be criticised for teaching their students creationism as science. Keith Porteous Wood, executive director of the National Secular Society, said 'Religious organisations can now have a say in selecting kids and controlling the religious curriculum. They are free to peddle whatever anti-science they like. They are also in a position to recruit and select teachers who share their views. What's even more disturbing is that the government is actively soliciting partnerships with such organisations.'

Selection by Stealth

Academies were supposed to be comprehensive, though, like specialist schools, they were allowed to select ten per cent of their pupils on the basis of aptitude. But they soon found ways around this rule. One parent told *The Guardian* (20 July 2004) that 'the new academy is keeping to the letter of its policy by selecting on bands [levels of academic ability], but places are going to those at the top of each band.'

Pupil Exclusions

In its first year, the King's Academy in Middlesbrough excluded 26 of its 1,034 pupils – ten times the national rate. A spokeswoman for the Emmanuel Schools Foundation said 'Everyone knows the rules. By breaking them children exclude themselves. They know what the consequences are.' (Polly Curtis, *The Guardian,* 24 July, 2004). Academies could afford to expel pupils – they were exempt from the financial penalties which LEA schools faced when they expelled pupils.

Lack of LEA Control and Support

Another serious concern was that LEAs had no control over academies. John Bangs, head of education for the NUT, said 'If LEAs have no control over the running of or selection for academies, they can't possibly plan to make adequate education provision across the rest of the sector. Regardless of the spin, the new academies in deprived areas are always likely to be fragile and in need of support. By cutting them off from the LEA, they are denying them access to the best help.'

Dubious Use of Public Funds

In August 2004 it was revealed that two academies had paid large sums to organisations owned by their sponsors. The King's Academy in Middlesbrough was billed for £290,214 by organisations and individuals connected with its sponsor Peter Vardy, and the West London Academy in Ealing paid £180,964 to businesses and a charity with connections to its sponsor Alec Reed, chairman of Reed Executive. The payments were for marketing, recruitment, training and 'educational advice' (Polly Curtis, *The Guardian,* 14 August, 2004).

Teachers' Pay and Conditions

In November 2004 *The Guardian* reported that teachers in seven of the 17 existing academies were being made to sign 'gagging clauses'. Union officials said it was evidence that the schools were opting out of national pay and conditions (Polly Curtis, *The Guardian,* 1 November, 2004).

A Two-tier Education System

In a confidential report commissioned by the government, PriceWaterhouseCoopers said the academies programme threatened to create a two-tier education system based on social class (Matthew Taylor, *The Guardian,* 19 February, 2005).

These concerns were not restricted to England. In the US, the charter schools were having their own problems. In August 2004 the American Federal Education Department reported that the performance of charter schools was

worse than that of publicly funded schools, and that they usually achieved poorer results than other schools serving similarly disadvantaged communities (Polly Curtis, *The Guardian,* 17 August, 2004).

Teachers in the UK called on the British government to heed the warning. But Blair wasn't listening. By the end of 2004, with 17 academies open and 42 more planned, he was nearly a third of the way to meeting his target of 200 by 2010.

The problems, however, wouldn't go away.

In March 2005 league tables based on test results for 14 year olds in English, maths and science, showed that nine of the 11 academies came in the bottom 200 schools in England.

Two months later Unity City Academy in Middlesbrough, sponsored by building firm Amey, failed its Ofsted inspection. The inspectors' report revealed a 'very low standard of attainment' and 'significant underachievement' among pupils, an 'unsatisfactory' level of teaching, poor staff morale and concerns about management. It noted that the academy's GCSE results were worse than at the two 'failing schools' it had replaced (Matthew Taylor, *The Guardian,* 19 May, 2005).

The following week staff at Unity voted to strike over proposed job cuts and plans to make new teachers work early mornings, evenings and weekends (Matthew Taylor, *The Guardian,* 3 June, 2005).

Meanwhile, the tide of criticism was growing. At the end of August 2004, businessman and philanthropist Sir Peter Lampl – who had been knighted by Labour for his services to education – criticised the academies programme as an 'expensive and untested' experiment (Rebecca Smithers, *The Guardian,* 31 August, 2004).

The Commons education select committee complained that 'it is difficult to detect a coherent overarching strategy for the government's proposals for education'. The committee recommended that the projected £5,000m budget for setting up 200 academies was withheld until they were proved to be cost-effective (Rebecca Smithers, *The Guardian,* 17 March, 2005).

A fortnight later, Britain's two largest teacher unions united to fight the academy programme. NUT members voted unanimously to halt all planned academies through a nationally coordinated campaign involving staff, parents and students; and the president of the NASUWT said the initiative amounted to privatisation by stealth (Rebecca Smithers & Matthew Taylor, *The Guardian,* 29 March, 2005).

Third Term Blues

New Labour won a historic third term in office at the general election in May 2005, though with a much reduced majority in the Commons. There was a public outcry when Blair announced that Andrew Adonis was to be appointed an education minister. He had never been elected, had no ministerial experience, and was widely seen as one of 'Tony's cronies'. Blair ignored the concerns and

gave Adonis a life peerage and the post of junior education minister in May 2005. Adonis's elevation was a clear sign that Blair had every intention of pushing ahead with the academies programme.

The events that followed speak for themselves:

In June 2005 two major sponsors pulled out of projects in Milton Keynes and north London (Will Woodward & Rebecca Smithers, *The Guardian,* 14 June, 2005; Rebecca Smithers, *The Guardian,* 22 June, 2005).

A PriceWaterhouseCoopers report said academies faced a number of 'significant problems', including widespread bullying and inappropriate buildings. School standards minister Jacqui Smith told *The Guardian* the government would be making some modifications to its flagship programme but was determined to press ahead with it (Rebecca Smithers & Lucy Ward, *The Guardian,* 16 June, 2005).

The academies programme was condemned in a report for England's local education authorities which called it a 'hugely expensive' use of taxpayers' money and an unproven way of transforming failing schools (Rebecca Smithers, *The Guardian,* 30 June, 2005).

In July 2005 it emerged that Adonis was overseeing a new framework for the setting up of academies, which would include a re-evaluation of the building of the schools, who sponsored them and how the sponsorship funds were spent (Polly Curtis, *The Guardian,* 23 July, 2005).

The schools' adjudicator announced that St Mary Magdalene's primary school in Islington would be replaced by an academy, despite opposition from parents and teachers (Polly Curtis, *The Guardian,* 23 July, 2005).

In August 2005 chief inspector of schools David Bell defended the academies, claiming their progress was 'broadly positive'. But an Ofsted report revealed 'serious concerns' about the West London Academy in Northolt. The report criticised the school's curriculum and leadership, pupil behaviour and the 'extremely high' rate of exclusions (Matthew Taylor, *The Guardian,* 4 August, 2005).

Labour MPs were concerned that around half the planned academies were to be sponsored by religious organisations. Commons education select committee chair Barry Sheerman said 'If we are going to not have divided, ghettoised communities we have to be very careful of this enthusiasm that some in the Department for Education have for faith schools, and we have got to be very careful about the growth of very religious minorities getting a hold on academies' (Gaby Hinsliff, *The Observer,* 7 August, 2005).

In September 2005 ten new academies opened, four of them backed by Christian organisations and one sponsored by the former boss of Saga holidays (Matthew Taylor & Rebecca Smithers, *The Guardian,* 5 September, 2005).

An EducationGuardian/ICM poll revealed that only six per cent of head teachers supported plans for more academies (Rebecca Smithers, Michael White & John Crace, *The Guardian,* 13 September, 2005).

Blair brushed aside criticism from former education secretary Estelle Morris, the TUC and head teachers, and vowed to press on with the academies

programme. But in a sign of growing anxiety that not enough sponsors might come forward, the government announced a special offer. Sponsors were told that if they funded more than three academies, the 'price' for each school would be only £1.5m rather than the standard £2m. Four for the price of three (Rebecca Smithers & Matthew Taylor, *The Guardian,* 16 September, 2005).

Ministers gave assurances that academies would only replace failing schools in disadvantaged areas, but they continued to break this pledge. 13 of the 27 schools which had been replaced by academies up to October 2005 had been in special measures or had serious weaknesses in the three years before they were taken over, but all were improving. The last Ofsted report on Brackenhoe High School in Middlesbrough, for example, described it as 'a rapidly improving school that has identified its main weaknesses and is making inroads in resolving them'. It was replaced by the King's Academy. And Thorne grammar school in Doncaster was, said Ofsted, 'an improving and increasingly effective school, which cares well for its pupils'. It was replaced by the Trinity Academy (Matthew Taylor, *The Guardian,* 8 October, 2005).

Tony Blair told delegates at Labour's 2005 party conference that academies were helping children in the country's most deprived communities. 'The beneficiaries are not fat cats,' he said. 'They are some of the poorest families in the poorest parts of Britain.' Yet *The Guardian* revealed that the percentage of pupils from less affluent families had dropped, in some cases dramatically, at almost two thirds of academies, when compared with the 'failing' schools they replaced. 'The government claims that academies are to serve the disadvantaged, but this suggests a trend in the opposite direction', said Liberal Democrat education spokesman Ed Davey. 'If the new, privately managed academies are cherry-picking the better pupils, that will only make the situation worse for neighbouring schools.' (Matthew Taylor, *The Guardian,* 31 October, 2005).

In January 2006 Des Smith, an adviser to the academy programme, resigned after it was revealed that he had promised that wealthy individuals who agreed to make large donations to the programme might be rewarded with knighthoods and even peerages. He was later arrested (Rebecca Smithers & David Pallister, *The Guardian,* 16 January, 2006; Will Woodward, Steve Boggan & Rebecca Smithers, *The Guardian,* 15 April, 2006).

GCSE results published in January 2006 showed that half the academies were among the worst-performing schools in England (Rebecca Smithers *The Guardian* 19 January 2006) and Ofsted inspectors branded the Bexley Business Academy in Kent as 'inadequate', highlighting poor teaching, bad behaviour and lower than expected exam results (Matthew Taylor, *The Guardian,* 21 January, 2006). Ofsted inspectors also highlighted 'significant weaknesses' in the sixth form at the £26m academy at Peckham, south London. Standards reached by pupils in both the sixth form and school overall were 'exceptionally low', inspectors said (Rebecca Smithers, *The Guardian,* 23 February, 2006).

Adonis claimed that ninety per cent of local parents were in favour of proposed academies in Leicester. But as Allan Hayes pointed out in a letter to

The Guardian (7 February, 2006) this figure was based on just 236 responses to 10,000 questionnaires and in answer to questions like 'would you want a good school for your children?'

In March 2006 it emerged that plans to close Hurworth School, the top-performing state school in Blair's Sedgefield constituency, and replace it with an academy, were meeting with hostility from staff, pupils, parents and governors (Martin Wainwright, *The Guardian,* 7 March, 2006).

Unity City Academy in Middlesbrough was again criticised by Ofsted inspectors in March 2006. Low attendance rates, poor teaching, inappropriate buildings and 'exceptionally low' results meant the academy had made 'inadequate progress' since March 2005, inspectors said (Rebecca Smithers, *The Guardian,* 20 March, 2006).

New league tables showed that more than half the academies were among the 200 worst schools in the country (Rebecca Smithers, *The Guardian,* 30 March, 2006).

In May 2006 *The Guardian* revealed that most of the sponsors who had agreed to fund academies had not paid the £2m they pledged. Four academies which opened in September 2005 had received no cash at all, and ten others had received less than the promised sum. Only four had received the full amount. In all, 23 of the 27 academies were still waiting to receive what had been pledged (Matthew Taylor & Rob Evans, *The Guardian,* 3 May, 2006).

Ministers repeatedly defended the programme, claiming that the schools had brought about a dramatic improvement in academic standards, particularly the number of children getting five or more good GCSEs. But a study by a senior academic at Edinburgh University found that the academies had failed to improve exam results compared with the comprehensives they replaced. The number of pupils getting five GCSE A*-C grades including English and maths had increased by just 0.2 per cent – equivalent to three pupils – across the first 11 academies (Matthew Taylor, *The Guardian,* 22 May, 2006).

In May 2006 more than 200 parents attended a meeting to complain that Peter Vardy's Trinity Academy at Thorne, near Doncaster, was excluding large numbers of pupils and that it was 'pushing an aggressive religious agenda'. A DfES spokesman responded 'Quite rightly academies are putting discipline first because it is vital to help children learn, and the early signs are that behaviour is improving and the number of exclusions falling' (Matthew Taylor, *The Guardian,* 30 May, 2006).

Two weeks later parents' groups began legal challenges against the imposition of academies in the London boroughs of Islington and Merton and in Sheppey in Kent. The challenges focused on the alleged reduction of parents' and pupils' human rights at academies. Because the academies were legally independent, they said, the education acts which gave parents and their children rights in ordinary state schools – to withdraw from religious education, for example – did not apply (Rebecca Smithers, *The Guardian,* 13 June, 2006).

In a letter to *The Guardian* (20 June 2006) Felicity Taylor of ISCG (Information for School and College Governors) pointed out that academies

were not subject to the Freedom of Information Act or the Data Protection Act and did not have to comply with the normal system of independent admission and exclusion appeals.

In July 2006 parent Rob MacDonald was given permission to seek a judicial review of Merton Borough Council's decision to close Tamworth Manor and Mitcham Vale schools and replace them with an academy (Rebecca Smithers, *The Guardian,* 6 July, 2006).

Another government-commissioned report by PricewaterhouseCoopers showed that the academies were achieving mixed results, with many suffering from poor pupil discipline, bullying and badly designed buildings. Truancy had increased twice as fast as the national average. The study looked at 11 academies and found that seven had improved their results at 14 and GCSE. Standards at the other four had deteriorated (Matthew Taylor, *The Guardian,* 28 July, 2006).

In February 2007 the National Audit Office reported that academies achieved poor GCSE results in English and maths, fell well below the national average in performance at A Level, failed to collaborate with other local schools and their communities, and had cost millions of pounds more than anticipated. The GCSE results were particularly appalling. Nationally, the proportion of students getting five or more good GCSEs including English and maths was 45 per cent. In the academies it was a dismal 22 per cent. Education secretary Alan Johnson welcomed the NAO's findings. 'Academies work – and are worth it,' he said. 'I am delighted it is such a positive report.' (Rebecca Smithers, *The Guardian,* 23 February, 2007). A spin too far, surely, even for a New Labour minister.

Yet despite all these concerns and criticisms, the academies bandwagon rolled on. Before Blair finally resigned as prime minister, he declared that he wanted to see 400 academies open by 2010 – double the previous target – and to extend them into the primary age range (James Meikle, *The Guardian,* 24 March, 2007). In September 2007 six new academies began catering for pupils aged from three to 19.

Many had hoped that a Gordon Brown government would be much less enthusiastic about the academies programme, given that Brown had said very little about the academies – and had never actually visited one. Such hopes were dashed when Brown joined Blair at the Mossbourne academy in Hackney for the launch of a range of new policies on public services during which he praised the 'tremendous success of the academy movement' (Patrick Wintour, *The Guardian,* 20 March, 2007).

Unaccountable

What are we to make of all this?

The government has repeatedly claimed that the aim of the programme is to improve the educational opportunities of children in deprived areas. But as the reports above indicate, this improvement certainly hasn't happened yet.

While some academies have achieved better exam results than the schools they replaced, many have not and some are conspicuously bad.

Many are concerned that the academies programme is just another ploy to extend selection. As Roy Hattersley put it, 'The city academies will take their place as another tier in the hierarchy of secondary schools – more special than specialist schools, more technological than city technology colleges and, of course, superior in public esteem to the bog-standard comprehensive schools. This is just another item in the programme of covert return to selection.' (*The Guardian*, 25 February, 2002).

Others are seriously concerned about the increasing influence on state education of churches and other faith groups – including some pretty crackpot extremists.

Standards, selection and religion are, however, not the only concerns about academies. Even if all the academies had raised their pupils' achievements (and given the vast sums of public money spent on them there is little excuse for their not having done so); and even if none of them selected their pupils or weeded out the difficult ones; and even if none of them taught their pupils that creationism is science or that it's fine to be homophobic; even if all these things were true (which they're not), serious concerns about the academies would remain.

Those concerns centre on the issue of accountability. The nation's schools are being taken away from accountable elected authorities and handed over to unelected individuals, businesses and religious groups who often have their own axes to grind.

'Tremendous success'? What on earth would failure look like, Mr Brown?

DEREK GILLARD taught in primary and middle schools in England for more than thirty years, including eleven as a head teacher. He retired in 1997 but continues to write on educational issues for his website (http://www.dg.dial.pipex.com) and for *FORUM*. *Correspondence*: Derek Gillard, 60 Oxford Road, Marston, Oxford OX3 0RD, United Kingdom (dg@dial.pipex.com)