

# Conservative Political Centre

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## PRESS RELEASE

Prime Minister<sup>2</sup>

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### SAVE OUR SCHOOLS

A pamphlet by the "No Turning Back Group" of Conservative MPs argues for radical changes in the system of financing and accountability of schools.

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The members of the No Turning Back Group of MP's are Michael Forsyth, Michael Brown, Christopher Chope, Michael Fallon, Eric Forth, Neil Hamilton, Alan Howarth, Gerald Howarth, Robert Jones, Edward Leigh, Peter Lilley, Michael Portillo and Ian Twinn.

The pamphlet is entitled "Save our Schools", and will be published by the Conservative Political Centre on Friday 25 July.

The press launch of Save our Schools will take place on Thursday 24th July at 10.30am at Conservative Central Office.

The authors acknowledge the mounting concern of their constituents, as parents, that, despite the Government's efforts, many of their children are leaving school ill-equipped for life and its opportunities.

/... Too much

Too much evidence has now appeared for the shortcomings of our educational system to be any longer denied.

66% of German children in the lower half of the ability range can answer correctly a sum involving additions and subtractions. The figure for equivalent British children is only 4%. The average 15 year old Japanese child is better educated at maths and other testable subjects than the top one quarter of British 16 year olds who get O-levels. Perhaps one third of our workforce have a minimum of 1 O-level or the equivalent; the figure for our major competitors, Germany, Japan and the USA, is two thirds.

Parents feel powerless to affect the system as it is. The basic defect of our education system is that it is not accountable to parents.

The authors wish to build on the element of parental choice introduced by the Government in the 1980 Education Act. Too often that right is negated in practice on the grounds of "educational efficiency".

The educational system in Britain bears the hallmarks of producer capture. There is a marked tendency to concentrate schooling in larger units, and to pursue policies which lead to the closure of small schools. This is convenient for administrators and teachers. It allows for more advanced career structures, it allows teachers to specialise more, and brings administrative convenience. The fact that it is widely disliked by parents is neither here nor there.

Different children have different educational needs. Yet there is little variety within our education system and very few specialist schools.

Deeply offensive to parents is the way in which some teachers and LEAs are using schools to promote their own ideological view of the world. "Peace Studies which cloak unilateralist propaganda. A so-called "maths" paper asks children questions about military spending by the USA and the USSR. The growth of this kind of extremism would not be possible if parents had choices as consumers.

The problems of British education are with its very structure. There is no reason to suppose that new money poured into spending on education would be allocated any more efficiently than existing funds. There is gross overspending on administration and over employment of non-teaching staff. Before spending on education is increased changes are needed to ensure that it can be spent efficiently and to the real benefit of education.

The No Turning Back Group's major concern is for the 93% of the nation's school children who are educated within the state sector.

The pamphlet reviews various means that have been canvassed to enfranchise parents as consumers in education. The authors reject large scale extension of the Assisted Places Scheme and the implementation of the voucher scheme.

The No Turning Back Group calls for three critical reforms which could combine to transform the producer domination of education into a system genuinely responsive to the needs and concerns of parents, and which could produce an immediate and sustained improvement in the quality of schooling.

First, schools should become effectively self-governing. School Boards - consisting mainly of parents elected by postal ballots, but also including teacher representatives and representatives of local business and the professions - would actually run the schools. They would take legal responsibility for the administration and policy of the school. Their most important job would be to appoint the Headteacher.

Secondly, the Group proposes that schools should be funded directly by the DES, receiving a grant based on the number of pupils enrolled. The School Board would be free to allocate funds according to its own view of priorities. Schools would thus be free to pursue different policies and to place different emphasis on the various aspects of education. In place of the current national scales of teachers' salaries each school would determine teacher remuneration.

The role of LEAs would be drastically reduced as funding and powers to determine policy would be devolved directly to the schools themselves. The actual amount available to be spent on each child would be increased as the unnecessary and wasteful

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layers of bureaucracy were removed.

School Boards would be entitled and encouraged to tap new sources of finance over and above the basic grant.

The state should make funds available on a matching basis for existing and new schools raising funds for capital investment. Higher matching grants could be made to help schools in deprived neighbourhoods. Schools would also benefit from the tax concessions on charitable giving introduced in this year's Budget.

The authors believe that their proposals would favour the growth of new community schools.

"These would start life perhaps in rented premises, at the behest of a group of parents and teachers ..... we suggest a lower limit of 28 pupils would be sufficient for the school to be established as a state school and qualify for the capitation grant".

Standards would continue to be set and vetted by HM Inspectorate.

The third major reform called for by the Group is open entry combined with the right of schools to determine their own admission policies. It will be entirely for parents to decide which school they would prefer their children to attend. Each child will bring with him to the preferred school the grant to which he is entitled. At the same time schools will have the right to determine their own admission policy.

/... The arguments

The Group believes that once the right of all parents to exercise effective choice in education has been established no political party would ever dare to take it away.

The arguments which now rage about which type of schooling should be imposed would become meaningless in a system which encouraged variety. Selective, comprehensive, large schools and small, single sex and mixed, specialist and denominational schools would all flourish or fade according to the real demand for them.

The pressure for standards arising from the reality of parental choice would benefit schools of all sorts.

Legislative changes to the 1944 Education Act and the Remuneration of Teachers Act would be needed. But change under these reforms would be gradual and cumulative, arising from the exercise by individual parents of the rights which they would gain.

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