

Why private schools should be banned - written by a teacher



Education is always in the news - with the most recent debate concerning disadvantaged pupils and their luckier counterparts. Yesterday the [Sutton Trust revealed the disparities between the educational experiences of children of professionals and those from more working-class backgrounds](#). They also called for longer school days to give these children "more of a chance."

This, of course, came hot on the heels of Labour's new plan to attack the Tories - by showing just how posh they are.

The historical peculiarities of the British education system has left us with a strange scenario which my guest blogger explains below. In today's paper, [Anthony Seldon, head of Wellington College, points out some of the differences between state and private schools](#) and calls for improvements to be made. But he doesn't, of course, suggest that private schools should be closed altogether. I'm leaving that argument to **Kevin Rooney**.

Kevin is a politics teacher and Head of Social Science at a comprehensive school in Hertfordshire. He is also a member the [Institute of Ideas Education Forum](#) and never afraid to speak his mind. Here he explains why he thinks private schools should be banned. What do you think?

"When Gordon Brown recently accused the Tories of [devising tax policies on the playing fields of Eton](#) he prompted a barrage of criticism for bringing class into politics, and rightly so – it was a cheap shot. However for me the playing fields of Eton are symbolic of a much bigger problem – the horrendous inequality of the UK's education system. Education, Education, Education was Tony Blair's clarion call on coming to power, yet one the most glaring inequalities in the UK – the existence of a higher quality of education for the wealthy – was never on the table for debate.

I believe that educationalists and egalitarians should fight for an end to private schools and the extension of an Eton standard of education for every child. Why? Because the current system institutionalises and makes acceptable educational inequality.

If we believe in the potential of every child how can we accept a system that allows the 7% of pupils who are privately educated to take half the places at top Universities like Oxford and Cambridge. And what of the broader implications of this educational inequality? How can we accept that the majority of senior barristers, judges, media and cultural professions will be filled on the basis of whether or not your parents had enough money to send you to a certain school?

Because of what the sociologists refer to as cultural capital and social closure, we are in 2009, still living in a society where the wealthy are able to give their children a massive advantage over children who are educated in the comprehensive system. To me Public schools represent survival of the fittest, the law of the jungle, look after number one and tough on the rest. That politicians can talk about fairness and social justice while private schools exist shows the extent to which they have all abandoned the goals of true equality.

This social inequality should be a shameful blot on our society but somehow it has become acceptable – one of those things we live with – just the way things are. The vast majority of us forced to enter the dreaded post-code lottery and send our children to the school the Local Authority gives us, do so knowing that all the evidence shows that their

educational chances and life-time opportunities are constrained by that. The basic instinct of every parent to allow their child the opportunity to live up to his or her full potential is, it seems, on offer to rich parents but denied to the vast majority of us who know that we are forced to make the most of the 'bog standard' comprehensive on offer.

It's important to stress that mine is not the old-style Labourite opposition to private schools on class terms that Brown was indulging in. And nor do I blame anyone who having been refused a place in a decent state school chooses to make huge sacrifices to buy the decent education that the state has denied their child. My opposition to private schools is rooted in my love of education and belief in the principle of the best education for all. It's not about dumbing down and removing the best education in the country – but about wising up and opening the doors of the best schools to all.

Let's have Eton's for all, let's really aim for a high quality education on a par with the best private schools for every child. Let's storm the private schools like the French once stormed the Bastille and make those wonderful private schools the property of us all, where every child gets to enjoy such fantastic facilities and resources.

With opposition to public schools now restricted largely to a labourite rump, views like mine are branded as anti-elitist. Yet I think the time has come to reclaim the banner of educational excellences from the elites. The battle against private schools is a battle for a better education for all and an honest interpretation of the writings of modern liberal thinkers such as T.H. Green or John Rawls would lead you to a similar position as mine.

I live in Wood Green, a predominantly working class area of North London. I teach in a big comp near leafy Bushey in South Hertfordshire, a stone's throw from several private schools. Next year my son is due to start secondary school. My point is simple, kids in Wood Green and Bushey have equal potential so let's give them a fair crack of the whip. Let introduce every kid to Latin, the classics, the best of literature and political philosophy etc

Of course when we have thrown open the doors of these amazing schools not every child will achieve – but at least every child will have the same opportunity to achieve and the same opportunity to allow education to transform their private and public worlds in the way that a wonderful education has the ability to do – now just imagine how that would change society?"