



LIFE MAGAZINES

MONTHLY A5 LOCAL LIFESTYLE MAGAZINES

OPINION - Education, Education, Education!

I must confess to being a bit of a moaning Minnie where education is concerned. When my babysitter comes dancing up, full of glee because she's just got 5 A*s in her A levels, I'll probably mutter something about them giving A grades away in Cornflake packets these days. This is grossly unfair because I know full well that she'll have worked far harder for those grades than I did for my somewhat less impressive A Level results all those years ago.

It's the same with league tables. I grumble that the only informed choice they enable parents to make is where they need to move to in order to ensure their children get a decent education. What's more, because the measurement used to compile the tables is the proportion of children achieving fairly average results, league tables motivate head teachers to focus on pupils with fairly average abilities at the expense of underachievers and gifted children.

But I'm wilfully ignoring two very important facts when I make these rather negative judgements. Firstly, SATs, league tables, dumbed down exams and the benighted national curriculum are all centrally imposed policies. They are not the fault of the schools or the teachers and they're certainly not the fault of the pupils, most of whom are giving it 100% as far as I can tell. The second point is that I took my A level classes in leaky prefabs and shared ancient text books because there weren't enough to go round. My children, by comparison, are educated in an architectural masterpiece and have more high tech kit than Roman Abramovich's latest yacht.

I suppose that my real point is that it is more important now to get a good education than at any time since the early Eighties, which is when I sat my own A levels, coincidentally. Why is this? Well, for starters, unemployment

is rising three times faster for unskilled people without qualifications than it is for other workers. Unemployment among 18 to 24 year olds is running at around 17% and it will get worse before it gets better. What's more, unskilled young people entering the job market will have to compete against our burgeoning immigrant population who have two key advantages over them; they generally have a reasonable amount of experience and they usually have a work ethic driven by the need to feed, clothe and house their kids.

Meanwhile, many of our universities are already facing serious financial shortfalls and that's before the inevitable cuts in public spending start to bite next year. The result can only be fewer university places and stiffer competition for those places. Then you have to think about the ever increasing tuition fees – those completing A levels are going to think long and hard about saddling themselves with tens of thousands of pounds of debt to gain a degree that is unlikely to lead to a job. Consequently, more students are going to opt for vocational or business oriented degrees and that will ratchet up the degree of competition still further. And, you've guessed it; the best way to compete is to get good A level results.

So, I've decided to have an amnesty on my incessant carping about all matters educational. Instead I'm going to get behind my local school, get behind the teachers and, most importantly, get behind my kids to make sure they become everything they can be. But, before I do, one last moan; why don't they teach children to punctuate any more? Apostrophes, semi colons and commas have all been replaced with something called "innit." What's all that about then?

Howard Clemmow