

Markets require excess capacity we have not got

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In a [damning piece for the Guardian's Comment is Free](#) site today, Mona Sahlin, the Swedish Social Democratic party leader, says her country is about to abandon the school reforms the Tories want to install in Britain. Sahlin says:

The free school system, implemented without imposing clear standards, has seen schools opening in sub-standard facilities, often without libraries, and with a far greater number of unqualified teachers.

What's more, the introduction of free schools has led to increased segregation where pupils from the same social background increasingly concentrate in certain attractive free schools.

Creating a free market as the Conservative proposals do without providing the funding to allow for the surplus capacity you need will certainly harm standards.

This is an argument I have made here, often.

Markets can only work when there is choice. By definition that means there needs to be excess capacity. Unless there are vacant spaces in all schools there is no choice. But excess spaces are wasteful in terms of productivity. We can't afford that waste.

Nor can we afford disparate standards.

We can only afford one system, and one standard. Admittedly, only the best is good enough. But it can be delivered at a lot lower cost than competition could ever offer.

And yet the Tories want to create competition, take resources away from the best state schools and do all this at a time when we can't afford to do so? That is dogma gone mad.