

When might we have child-focused education?

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The furore about the treatment of pupils at two supposedly 'top' academy schools in Hackney, London, is growing.

The Guardian and Observer have [been documenting](#) these concerns, noting that:

A group of nearly 30 parents and former teachers has spoken out about treatment of children at Mossbourne Victoria Park academy (MVPA) in Hackney.

The secondary school, rated outstanding by Ofsted and known for its high examination grades and tough discipline, is in the same federation as the acclaimed Mossbourne Community academy, also in Hackney and originally run by Sir Michael Wilshaw, the former chief inspector of schools for England who led Ofsted from 2012 to 2016.

Both schools are now subject to investigation.

The allegations are of bullying, victimisation and intimidation of pupils, and a brutal policy of expulsion to ensure desired results for the school, but not the children it served, were achieved.

Of course, schools like this were the epitome of Tory education thinking. Management was (and is) outsourced to supposed education entrepreneurs, and results rather than education were (and are) prioritised. And now the abuse inherent in such thinking becomes clear.

As I had to sometimes remind governors when I chaired governing bodies, schools exist to serve children. Balancing budgets, meeting policy requirements, ticking boxes, Ofsted inspections and much else comes second to that, but not in the Tory-created world of education that, so far, Labour seem to have accepted without much question. Performance is the goal in that world. Children come a distant second.

Excuse me noting, for a moment, that changing this order of priorities is key to re-establishing politics that matters. It typifies all that is wrong in politics that this is the case.

But then, let me note something else: this education policy is neoliberal to its core. Its aim is to produce a homogenous child who can be a useful cog within the money-making machine that these 'academies' are presumed to serve. That is the sole purpose of education, which these 'academies' exist to supply and which people have been indoctrinated to accept.

Diversity of personality, aptitude, or pre-disposition in the child is ignored. Special needs are an inconvenience. Worse, they offend that assumption of homogeneity that underpins all neoliberal thinking. Meeting key performance indicators is the goal of the staff of such places; education is not, and the child comes nowhere in the list of their considerations, in my opinion.

That there is a crisis in such places is unsurprising. I have loathed all that they stand for since I first learned of them. That abuse might happen was obviously a very high risk.

The question is, when will Labour deliver child-focused education that meets the actual needs of society, whether or not it is directly comparable to the factory schools of Singapore and their supposed educational achievements?