Published on *Adam Smith Institute* (http://www.adamsmith.org)

Markets in Education [1]

Written by **Tim Worstall** [2] | Sunday 5 October 2008

I fear that Melissa Benn doesn't understand one of the reasons that we like marketsso much [3].

> And there is now a surprising amount of agreement across the political spectrum about what constitutes a good school.....There is widespread recognition of the need for human scale institutions, be it smaller classes and now smaller schools. It's also widely agreed that we need good order in the classroom; more engaging teaching; strong, autonomous heads, and more spending on those with the greatest needs; the so-called "pupil premium".

That these things are now agreed right across the politicl specturm means, according to Ms. Benn, that all schools should thus be like this in one rigid system. Which is to miss one of the basic reasons why we have markets at all: they're the way that we can have innovation, the way that people can try new things and see what works.

Leave aside the point that what everyone now agrees makes a good school was exactly what everyone agreed did not make a good one in former decades, leave aside education itself in fact. We don't presume that we now make the very best computers that anyone will ever make, there are any number pointing out that cars need to be powered differently, there are, you might have noted, those who wonder whether our method of financial regulation is quite the best one that could ever be devised. And how are people to try out the possible new ways of doing things? By doing them of course and seeing what works, what people actually want at the price that it can be done. In a market in other words.

Exactly the same is true of schools and education: it's the height of hubris to assume that we, now, have had the revelation denied to all previous generations as to how a perfect school system should be run, that those who follow us will not devise better methods. And for them to test what may or may not work we need a market in alternative methods of education organisation rather than one huge system devised from the centre.

After all, it was the fact that we did not have a single rigid system, that there were alternatives to central State control, that led us to overturn the previous orthodoxy and agree now on the above list of things that does make a good school. Arguing that we should now abolish such markets in organisation to to argue that we abolish the very thing that allowed us to uncover this precious knowledge.

blog comments powered by Disqus [5]

Source URL: http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/education/markets-in-education

Links:
[1] http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/education/markets-in-education
[2] http://www.adamsmith.org/taxonomy/term/5778
[3] http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/oct/04/davidcameron.education
[4] http://disqus.com/?ref_noscript
[5] http://disqus.com