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Reforming schools - A self-correcting system [1]

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Plagued by persistent regulation, our system of state education is barred from reaching the level of quality that teachers not only aspire to, but are fully capable of achieving. Schools themselves are better placed than local government to decide where they should be allowed to set up and how they should function.

It takes only a small reform of our current system to allow the potential of our teachers and schools to be fulfilled - the creation of a system where schools of all kinds, whether they are state, private or charity-run, provide free and universal education, funded on a per-pupil basis by government, and given the freedom from burdensome regulation that the private sector enjoys. This is not an imposed reform, instead enabling schools to run themselves, opting in of their own accord, with government acting as the financier rather than the provider of free education.

The beauty of the reform is its self-correcting nature - the first of these free schools will appear where education is most in demand. As a school becomes popular, more parents will choose to send their children there and since it is paid per pupil, its income will increase. If a school is unpopular, then fewer and fewer pupils will be sent there until it either improves or fails. Schools will be able to innovate, directly rewarded for successful models of education through their popularity. Even if the amount paid per pupil is too low, then fewer schools will opt into the system until it can be increased.

However, this reform requires that all schools that have opted into the system be allowed to make a profit - something that the opposition party have shied away from, despite it being the principal reason for the system's success in Sweden. Without the entitlement to make a profit, not only will uptake of the system be slow, but successful schools will also be unable to expand and spread that success to other parts of the country for all pupils, parents and teachers to enjoy.

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