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Schools don't need a new curriculum, they need freedom [1]

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Today?s announcement of the reforms to the national curriculum have been met with both praise and displeasure from varying sides of the debate, with Anthony Seldon, head master of Wellington College, heralding the new curriculum as giving essential ?building blocks? to allow children to progress with more complex ideas, whilst Brian Lightman, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders reacted more critically, suggesting that, ?unlike previous versions of the national curriculum, which were drafted with a heavy involvement of teachers and school leaders, these proposals have been driven and closely directed by politicians without that professional input."

However, it is not the allegedly more demanding content of the curriculum which is concerning, nor the way in which many regard it as too heavily under the control of politicians rather than teachers themselves, rather, the continued way in which the government forces what it feels is right upon parents and school children, instead of giving them influence over what their own child learns. Not only does this exemplify the overarching nature of government in the UK, but the emphasis this new curriculum puts on force feeding facts to pupils, under the pretence of providing them with ?core knowledge?, besides removing any individuality or element of choice, also is likely to reduce interest in the subjects amongst the pupils, as its less independent nature prevents the students from taking the initiative and developing their study into areas which interest them.

Furthermore, this ?one size fits all? approach to the curriculum does not take into account those children with special educational needs, who are approximately 20% of the student body in the UK. This only highlights the problems with the inflexibility of the government and this new curriculum, and shows the need for more choice within schools and for parents to allow them to ensure that all children can receive an education appropriate to them.

Fortunately, this new curriculum is not being enforced on the country?s academies, whose independence allows them to better provide for children individually. However, it must not be forgotten that in fact, although the government has less direct control over academies (e.g. they are not subject to the new curriculum) this may be replaced by the influence of the academy?s main sponsor, rather than parents, so they may not be ideal for providing a more independent education.

Whilst academies are not necessarily the only or ideal solution, currently they appear to be the best available option, due to their relative independence. In addition the way in which they specialise in one area of study allows parents to find a school more closely in line with their children?s strengths and weaknesses. On the other hand they have been criticised as being too selective, meaning that schools choose pupils, rather than the other way round, removing their key justification. Therefore, although they are a step in the right direction, more needs to be done to create both a more flexible curriculum and school system, as while they make up over 50% of English secondary schools, they represent only 13% of the overall maintained sector, which badly needs an injection of freedom.

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