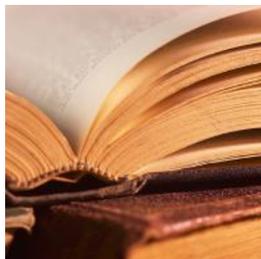


## What would we like in a school system? [1]

Written by [Tim Worstall](#) [2] | Sunday 25 May 2008



Seriously, start with a blank page and ask yourself what we actually desire in a school system? This would be a good start of [course](#) [3]:

*The country that came top of the Unicef report and did consistently well in the international league tables was...*

Yes, all in favour of that, being one of the best in the world means that you're at least doing things better than many, perhaps as well as it can actually be done.

*But what it really means is that parents don't snare themselves in mortgages to get into catchment areas they can't afford, or pay expensive school fees or face the humiliation of having to rediscover a lapsed faith.*

Yes, that sounds like something to be desired as well: not having to face financial ruin simply to educate the ankle-biters would appeal to most.

*There is choice though, and ... children are in the upper quartile of the international tables, which might help explain why the ... is rated as the best place for a child to grow up in the developed world.*

Oh, my, yes, that does sound like a good idea. So, how is this done then? What's the magic secret here? Clearly it's going to cost a fortune, yes?

*If we want better schools for our children we need to spend more money, don't we? Well actually, no.(....) The surprising answer is that their results have nothing to do with money ? in fact, they're spending quite a lot less than we are.*

Really? Better schools, better education, the best place in the world to grow up, and it costs *less* money? Where? How?

*They can choose whichever school will suit their child best. Not all parents make an active choice but enough do to influence the standard of schools everywhere. All this is based on the fact that parental choice in education is a part of the Dutch constitution. It assumes that one size does not fit all.*

Yes, it's Holland, the Netherlands. The how is that they have a variation of the voucher system that we

argue for here at the ASI. The parents choose the school, any one of them that they wish subject to minimal licencing requirements and the government pays the bills. Yes, top up fees are allowed, parents making that decision for themselves as well. We might also note that the Netherlands is a great deal more egalitarian than the UK and I wouldn't be surprised to find out that it has greater social mobility as well (for those who worry about such things).

Engineers have a saying that you can have "better, faster, cheaper, pick any two" for you can't have all three. But it appears that we run our current education system so appallingly badly that we can indeed make it better, fairer and cheaper.

So why is there anyone at all who opposes such voucher systems?

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