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My personal views on today's education system are fairly mixed, especially in the areas of quality, effective use of resources, discipline and the management structure. Whilst there is a great deal of good basic work being done in many schools, some of the essentials are being neglected in others.

By 'essentials', I mean the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic. Without an appreciation of these it is extremely difficult for students to integrate themselves into modern society, as they form an essential part of a student's presentation to would-be employers. There appears to have been a reduction in the amount of time and effort devoted to writing and spelling. I can appreciate the arguments in favour of allowing children to express themselves with the emphasis on content rather than presentation. However, to ignore presentation entirely, as seems to be the case at times, defeats the theory, especially when the finished product is practically unintelligible. This trend is neither desirable nor acceptable and contrasts with the objective of preparing students to take their place in modern society.

The comprehensive system attempts to provide each student with an education appropriate to his (or her) needs and abilities. This has been achieved in main-stream subjects by grouping the children in 'sets' according to their abilities. This approach is beneficial to teachers, in that they are dealing with a group with roughly similar ability in a particular subject, and children, for whom the rate of progress can be adjusted to match their development. This arrangement is preferable to the old system of 'streaming', but there is a trend towards full-ability range groups which I believe leads to a standard of mediocrity as teachers have to cater for a much wider range of abilities. This approach creates further problems for both talented children and those requiring remedial support, in that they do not receive the attention they deserve or are entitled to expect.

My third concern is with discipline, and whilst many of our educational establishments endeavour to achieve acceptable standards, there is a serious trend towards the unacceptable in this aspect. The problem is not solely affecting schools, but manifests itself in every-day life, with increases in violence on the streets and in a host of other places. The increase in the number of instances where teachers are assaulted by both parents and pupils is unacceptable and must not go unchecked. The re-establishment of an acceptable code of conduct is important and I believe that the school has a vital part to play in this process. Some responsibility for the present situation must be taken by those adults who carry out a campaign of undermining authority in everyday life. Another group which must bear some responsibility are those adopting the 'progressive' approach, which, from the outside, appears to offer plenty of freedom with little guidance being given on standards of behaviour. Children rely on parents and teachers to 'set an example', and it is difficult for them to establish a style of behaviour when they see and hear the widely different attitudes in today's society. If everyone can be persuaded to acknowledge the problem, that may help to achieve some improvement, although a more radical approach may be required to overcome the efforts of those intent on anarchy.

I acknowledge that there are other problems with our educational system, but feel I must emphasise an earlier comment that much good work is being done. Despite the financial 'cuts' which appear to get more severe as time goes on, many schools still endeavour to provide a wide range of subjects and good quality tuition. In addition to 'cuts', the system is faced with the need to change, to keep pace with advances in technology. This involves teaching staff in keeping abreast of developments in their own particular field and those of a more general impact on everyday life. It is important that this aspect is not overlooked when resources (both staff and financial) are being considered.

I am also concerned about the limited funds being made available for maintenance of school buildings. Children's attitudes are affected by their environment, and when they see buildings being neglected, they in turn tend to lose respect for that establishment.

My final point of concern is with the existing structure of governing bodies. Despite changes in 1981, and further changes due in 1985/6, the position of parents has not improved. Parents (and teachers) are elected, by the people they represent, for 4 years. However, they can only hold the position as long as they have a child in the school, which means that few parents can be certain of providing the level of continuity which the position requires. There are no provisions for Parent-Governors to communicate with the people they represent as the use of school facilities are normally not available, and with the large numbers involved the problems of disseminating information are ruled out on a cost basis.

Finally, I should say that these are my own personal views and reflect my attitude to our education system in general, and do not represent a criticism of any educational establishment with which I have been involved.