

Education Rerform Act 1988

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Intro

The Education Act from 1988 was massive, including 238 clauses and 13 schedules in a range of areas. This Act covered England and Wales. The purpose was to raise standards in schools.

This period might have been affected by the Conservative Government, with Margaret Thatcher as prime minister. The Conservative government had their belief in the importance of market forces. (Barlett & Burton, 2016).

Someone might look at The Education Reform Act as an attempt to reinforce a hierarchical system of schooling, influenced by market forces and greater control from the centre. There were four original purposes: to establish an entitlement for all pupils; to establish standards that can be used to set targets and measure performance; to promote continuity and coherence; and to promote public understanding of and confidence in the work of schools. (Barlett & Burton, 2016, pp. 120). Roughly, some of the greater aims was to greater parental choice, establishing central government control over curriculum and assessment, further eroding powers and responsibilities of local authorities, teachers and trainer. (Chitty, 2014, pp. 51).

In this essay, we are going to look at the greater aims and the outcome of The Education Reform Act of 1988.

Funding

Earlier on, it was the Local Education Authority (LEA) who managed the funding to schools. The schools now had the choice to decline and receive funding directly from the central government, acting as a private trust. The head teachers got more control over their budget and secondary schools got more control over their admission policies as well. Also, a new scheme for financial delegation was founded. The funds were now weighted per capita formula, meaning funding based on the number of pupils in the school. More pupils meant more funding. (Barlett & Burton, 2016; Chitty, 2014). Earlier on, the LEA could allocate money as they thought needed. If a school for some reason needed extra money they could get extra funding or a bit more funding than other schools. (Barlett & Burton, 2016).

Admission

As said, schools now had more control over their admission policies as well. The outcome was they got more powers to select which pupils they wanted to enrol. So, in theory they could i.e. decline 'unwanted' or 'weaker' pupils, such as pupils with additional learning needs or some kind of disability, who might become a financial burden and a negative influence on the test results for the school. (Barelett & Burton, 2016; Chitty, 2014).

National Curriculum

With the new act, a compulsory national curriculum was founded. It was argued as a useful form of ‘social control’ and as means of ensuring greater accountability in teachers. (Chitty, 2014). There had not been a great discussion or change since the Education Act 1944. Callaghan, former prime minister, held a speech in 1976 of his concern of the curriculum not being appropriate to meet the needs of a modern economy and not encouraging enough towards courses relevant to careers in industry. (Barlett & Burton, 2016).

Before the Education Reform Act 1988, we had a tripartite school system for secondary schools: grammar schools, secondary modern schools and technical schools. Which type of school you were admitted to was based on a test you took at 11 years old. The different schools gave you different kind of qualification for further education. You could often see a pattern in whom went to the different schools, making a distinction between the working class and the middle class. (Brown, 2016).

The new aim was that all pupils were to benefit from the same knowledge. (Barlett & Burton, 2016; Brown, 2016; Chitty, 2014).

“The government proposed to provide a nationally accredited curriculum that not only developed each child spiritually, morally, culturally, mentally and physically, but also targeted their educational development for adult employability.” (Brown, 2016, pp. 80).

The teachers’ responsibility was with the new curriculum reduced. An outcome the government did not anticipate was the subjects’ working groups attempts to include everything considered important and relevant in their own curriculum. This led to an overload in the curriculum in all levels. (Barlett & Burton, 2016; Brown, 2016; Chitty, 2014).

Some were not pleased with such a change without consulting with those teaching and might even have felt mistrusted. (Barlett & Burton, 2016; Brown, 2016).

It consisted of three core subjects and seven foundation subjects for all pupils aged 5-16. The core subjects were: mathematics, English and science; and Welsh for Welsh-speaking schools. The foundation subjects included: history, geography, technology, music, art and physical education; a modern foreign language for older pupils; and Welsh for non-Welsh-speaking schools in Wales. (Barlett & Burton, 2016; Chitty, 2014).

The SATs (Standard Assessment Tasks) were introduced in four key stages: age 7, 11, 14 and 16. The SATs were tests to cover the progress by the individual pupils. (Chitty, 2014). The results would be made public in the form of league tables, showing pupils’ progress, how schools were achieving, and how standards were being raised. The purpose was to encourage competition among the ‘producers’ - the schools. (Barlett & Burton, 2016).

Outcome of ‘marketization’

The ‘marketization’ of the school system might have reinforced hierarchy. The funding become per capita and the admission policy was now up to each school. LEAs had for the first time had to acknowledge the parental choice of schools, since they now could apply freely. (Brown, 2016). Combined with the published league tables, the outcome could be negative for some schools. (Barlett & Burton, 2016).

The published league tables made it possible for parents to choose the ‘good’ schools. With the per capita funding, the ‘good’ schools got more money in the term of more pupils applying. This made it possible to hire better qualified teachers and made it possible to get better facilities and equipment. The SATs also made it possible for schools to see which pupils they chose to enrol. Also, in some cases the league tables might have been more frequently used by the middle class and not so by the working class, due to interest, reading and understanding. This might be seen as creating academic elite schools. (Barlett & Burton, 2016).

Outcome of the new curriculum

Before the Education Reform Act 1988, there had been no big changes in the curriculum since the Education Act 1944. The argument was that the pupils would benefit from the same knowledge. The abolishment of the tripartite school system might have been an argument for inclusion and not to base the future of the pupils on a test from age 11. Even though the SATs did not officially decide what kind of school they would be accepted to, they could be used from the school’s side to evaluate which pupils they wanted to enrol.

The working groups had some problems to decide what was most important in their curriculum and made extra workload on the teachers. Yet, the idea of a national curriculum might have been necessary. For example, if a child swapped school, there might be a risk the child already knew the taught subjects. Also, a risk would be falling behind because of the differences in the taught material. Might we also interpret the national curriculum as an attempt of equality in education?

Summary

We looked at the four original purposes: to establish an entitlement for all pupils; to establish standards that can be used to set targets and measure performance; to promote continuity and coherence; and to promote public understanding of and confidence in the work of schools. (Barlett & Burton, 2016, pp. 120). Also, some of the greater aims: to greater parental choice; establishing central government control over curriculum and assessment; and further eroding powers and responsibilities of local authorities, teachers and trainer. (Chitty; 2014)

After the Education Reform Act 1988, all pupils had the access to the same curriculum. The new curriculum moved a lot of the responsibility from teachers and schools over to the government. With the new funding system and schools' control over their admission policy and gave parents and pupils a freedom of choice for which school they wished to attend. By bringing in the SATs, they could now measure, evaluate and improve the performance of pupils and schools.

Even though a lot of these ideas and changes might sound good, we need to be critical in the judgement of the outcome. Some might say the outcome might reflect the Conservative government with their belief in the importance of market forces. (Barlett & Burton, 2016). Yet, we also need to remember that it had not been any great changes in school since the Education Act 1944, so these changes were huge, and might have been needed.

References

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