

CLM 2021

Ministers had a chance to improve young people's lives – and flunked it yet again

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The decision to water down the schools catch-up programme shows the obscene priorities of a cabinet of reckless spenders

It was a savage put-down. When Sir Kevan Collins, England's schools recovery chief, left Boris Johnson's office last week, his bid for a £15bn three-year education "catch-up" programme had been reduced to £1.4bn. The government's watered-down package amounts to about £50 a year per pupil, against the US's £1,600 and the Netherlands' £2,500.

1

The battle between Collins and the Treasury was reportedly fierce. Collins claimed that £15bn was essential to make up for two years of lost schooling. He wanted schools to add an average of half an hour to the day and 100 hours a year to sixth-form teaching, with more tutoring. At the Treasury, Rishi Sunak, wrestling to regain control over Johnson's reckless spending, was not convinced this was money well spent. The government's creeping privatisation of school trusts would mean that huge sums would be tipped into bodies beyond Whitehall's control, including training centres and tutorial colleges. In Sunak's mind, there must be a limit – and that limit had been reached.

Sunak's argument might have some virtue if the victim of his renewed discipline were not hard-pressed schools, and if he had not spent the past year hurling public money at furloughed businesses, Tory donors and dodgy procurement firms. Collins' bid was consistent with state extravagance on private firms, public transport, housing subsidies and "levelling up".

2

Collins' only shortcoming was his emphasis on enabling students to "catch up" with an existing regime, rather than attending to the most desperate cases of hardship. Lockdown has clearly affected children in very different ways. Many will not have suffered seriously from being denied classroom experience and have been conscientiously taught at home and online. Indeed, one of the most common complaints has not been lack of education but lack of socialisation.

That, in turn, has exposed the plight of those for whom closed schools have been a disaster. Children's service budgets have been shredded; the direst statistic I know is that over the past decade, urban youth clubs in England and Wales have lost £1bn in funding, a real-term cut of 70%, as a result of austerity.

3

When lockdown started and schools began to close, I had a vision of children briefly released from bondage. Classes did not meet. Exams were not set, passed or failed. “Worst” schools were not humiliated. Children roamed the streets and the countryside, taking risks, earning pocket money, bonding (or not) with their families and social media, fending for themselves.

4

A fantasy, I know, but the sadness of the Collins’ plan is that he did not seize the opportunity to propose a revision, even a radical experiment, in British education. The obsession with the traditional “academy” remains, that school is about rote learning, memory and passing exams. Education for life, for jobs, self-reliance, relationships, health, money and citizenship was all someone else’s job – be it parents, partners, priests, or probably the police. A turn in that direction would have been truly worth £15bn, a national exercise in alternative education.

During lockdown a massive voluntary effort went into protecting each community’s health and relieving loneliness and old age. It was Britain as its best.

5

PART 1.

Ex. 1 PLACE THE FOLLOING PARAGRAPHS IN THE CORRECT GAPS NUMBERED 1 – 5

- A. My fantasy was that 20 years on, Britons noticed a curious fact. A cohort of confident, talented, freethinking thirtysomethings was quietly dominating every walk of life. They were the teenage class of 2020-21. They had escaped the GCSE/A-level rat race and spent two years simply maturing, learning the pains and pleasures of life for themselves.
- B. Besides, Johnson had pledged that school catch-up was “my biggest priority ... our nation’s future depends on us repaying that generation”. When Johnson declares a priority, we should all head for the pawnbroker.
- C. These are costs that will affect young people and society far more savagely than a marginal drop in Britain’s performance in some global maths league table.
- D. Meanwhile, Johnson is spending billions each year simply on building a faster train to Birmingham. For a man who glories in squandering public money, it is hard to think of a more obscene sense of priorities.
- E. But little, to my knowledge, went into helping young people. There was outdoor cooking and outdoor concerts, but no outdoor classes or instruction. Schooling today is an introverted pursuit. It answers to an exam board and a minister, but not to a community. That is the opportunity lockdown missed.

Ex 2. FIND THE SYNONYMS IN THE TEXT. Write the word in infinitive form on the answer sheet.

- 1) Failed:
- 2) Humiliation:
- 3) Weakened (adj):
- 4) Struggling;
- 5) Throwing:
- 6) Dubious:
- 7) Fault:
- 8) Predicament;
- 9) Wandered:
- 10) Looking after:

PART 2:**Ex 3. PHONETICS: write the phonetic transcriptions**

- 1) Socialization
- 2) Anxiety
- 3) Reportedly fierce
- 4) Furloughed
- 5) Regime
- 6) Seize
- 7) Package
- 8) Pursuit
- 9) Conscientiously
- 10) virtue

Ex 4. REPHRASING: rephrase using the words in brackets

- 1) I convinced him to take urgent measures. (talked)

- 2) There were lots of very different proposals on the Chancellor's desk (array)

- 3) I paid absolutely no attention to what he was saying. (heed)
- 4) As well as cleaning the house, he also watered the plants.
Not only....
- 5) It wasn't easy for him to make friends (striking)

- 6) the journalist immediately realised that he was making up the story. (through)

- 7) He was astonished at failing the test (came)

PART 3. PEDAGOGICAL RESPONSE

In no more than 2 pages, outline an oral-based session and its evaluation for a Secondary class following the Carmenta programme.