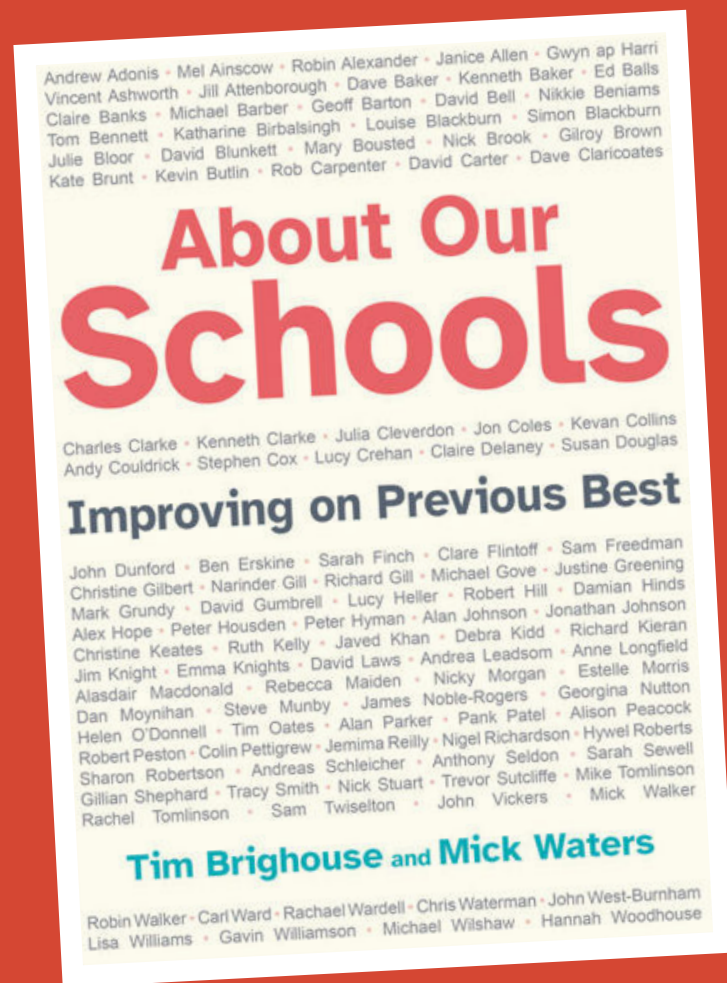




Tide~ would welcome comments, suggestions, or articles responding to 'About Our Schools' in the context of the Connecting Dialogues initiative



School 21 - "Education must be done differently if we are to prepare young people properly for the world they are going into. We need schools to rebalance head (academic success), heart (character and well-being) and hand (generating ideas, problem solving, making a difference)."

We asked Tim Boyes to reflect on his own experience in the context of 'About Our Schools'

If we need a re-set in the English education system educators need to be at the centre of the debate, and know what we are aiming for and why.

Our strident new Prime Minister smiles her assertion that everything will be well with Brilliant Britain. Justifying lower taxes in her first session of PMQs she trusts in a world shaped by market opportunities, telling Keir Starmer he just doesn't understand aspiration. There seemed to be an echo of Norman Tebbit in 1981 telling the unemployed to simply get on their bikes to find work. When the elite, who live in the midst of privilege and endless opportunity, tell the poor that they just need to aspire and try harder, we should get angry.

Similarly, Sanah Ahsan wrote in the Guardian yesterday ...

"I'm a psychologist – and I believe we've been told devastating lies about mental health. Society's understanding of mental health issues locates the problem inside the person – and ignores the politics of their distress."

Sanah goes on to reflect on the folly surrounding her clinical work that thinks 6 sessions of CBT will help when the individual's distress has its roots in poverty, external injustices and insecurity.

As a professional school improver I know the positive difference made by an inspiring leader who builds belief and fosters a culture of high aspiration, growing the confidence that anything is possible.

However, over the last 30 years governments have continually failed in systematic school improvement. Considerable effort and resources have gone into targeted programmes to raise standards in poor communities. EAZ's and Opportunity areas have worked for a while or to an extent, but have come nowhere near dealing with the deep systemic nature of poverty and disadvantage impacting on these schools. Improvements are therefore short lived, as individual endeavour and the gospel of aspiration is repeatedly trumped by the weight of systemic factors, and so inequality gaps in the UK continue and widen.



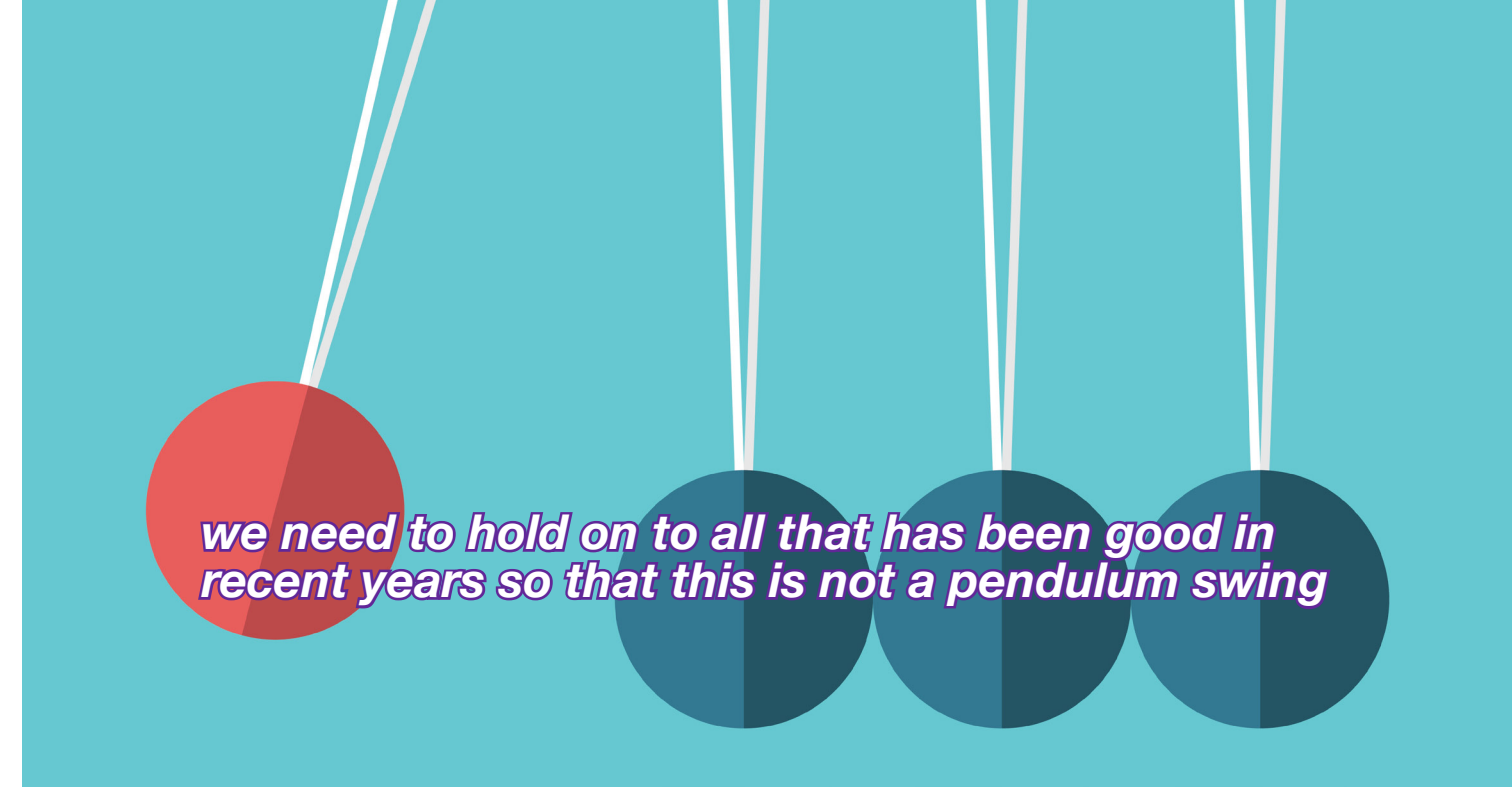
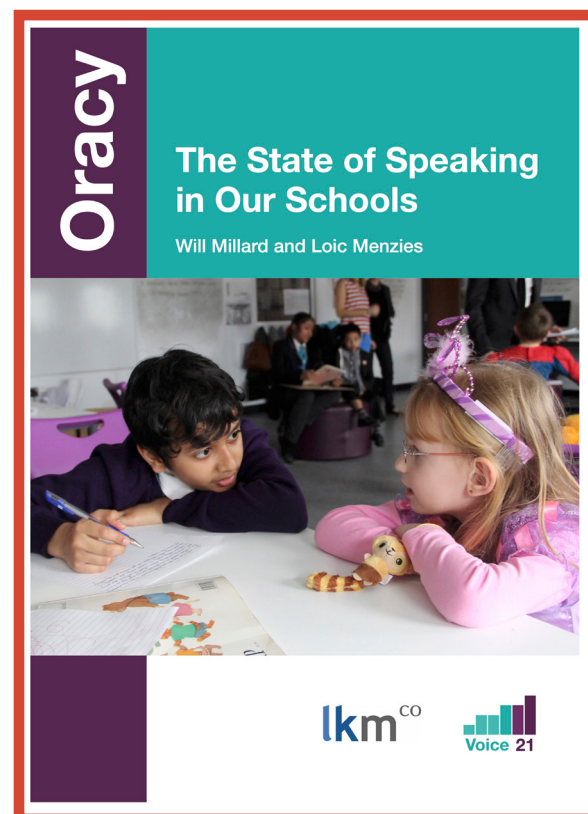
As a head I thought I could build a brilliant team, grow a fantastic school and “win” for our children. This meant competing to recruit the best teachers and expect improved results every year, and because we were winning, we accepted the rules of the game.

Critically, as long as the profession, leaders, governors & MAT boards, buy into this same game, nothing much will change.

Accountability gets tweaked and cranked up, but the schools that struggle to recruit great teachers and carry more than their share of need, will continue to have the poorest inspection outcomes.

And now with the political imposition of EBacc and the Knowledge Curriculum, **what is offered to our children is the narrowest it has ever been, measured via lots of remembering as they are squeezed through high-stake terminal exams.**

So, along with all the possible groupings that sit around the profession, we need to take every opportunity to fuel a national debate about the madness of keeping the status quo. While the poorer a school's intake the more it must focus on chasing results, elite schools are focussing on additionality for character and self-esteem. I was recently struck by the headteacher of Rugby School explaining that all his staff were trained in coaching to ensure that all their interactions with staff and pupils were deeply humanising.



So where should we start?

Look at [‘Voice 21’](#) and [‘School 21’](#) to see an approach to curriculum that starts with empowering young people.

We need to grow curricular opportunities that are centred on giving learners real purposes to which they can apply their learning. We need to give much greater thought and value to structuring residential and immersive learning experiences that are based in processes that are relational and collaborative.

As we do these things internally at school level, we need to work together in local and national communities to build a sense of connectedness and shared investment, bringing young people together across all our deep social divides, sharing their learning and action locally on the global priorities of climate, sustainability and justice.

.... and while this might be a deep re-set, it needs to not be a reaction. In the spirit of Tim and Mick's book, we need to hold on to all that has been good in recent years so that this is not a pendulum swing - or a marginal irrelevance.

Tim Boyes is Chief Executive Officer,
Birmingham Education Partnership

