

Education

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It is my belief that in this country we offer a very good standard of education to our children and, if they have help and guidance from their parents, children can achieve good results. Obviously the children themselves have to put in some hard work along the way but so many of us do not realise the importance of learning and studying hard for our examinations until later in life.

In my own experience I have no complaints about the standard of teaching at the schools which I attended and I did get quite good results up to 'O' level. But my parents were not able to afford to keep me at school past the fifth form and were of the opinion that further schooling was wasted on a girl who would probably get married and have a family. So I left school at 16 and got a job in Local Government.

My husband was sent to a boarding school and was very happy there but at this school it was left to the boys to decide which lectures they attended and there wasn't a careful enough watch kept on their results and, therefore, some of the boys, including my husband, did not reach a high enough standard to actually sit the 'O' level examinations in subjects like Mathematics and English. He, too, realised far too late just how useful it would have been if he'd had those precious 'O' levels. The fact that his parents were not terribly interested in his education was not the only reason he was sent to this particular boarding school but was also another reason why no-one complained to the school about the fact that some of his results were not of a very high standard.

In both our cases, therefore, it was because we hadn't received the proper advice and guidance from our parents (and the boarding school in my husband's case) that we didn't really do as well at school as we could have done. It was for this reason that when our two sons began their education we tried to give them the encouragement that we hadn't had. They both progressed quite happily through infant and junior schools and then on to Sutton High School where they both chose to stay until sixth form and to go on to university - one going to King's College, London, and the other to Southampton University. I don't think that either of them has any regrets as they have both enjoyed university life and learned a great deal from it, not only about the subject they were reading but also about life itself. Unfortunately even a degree doesn't necessarily guarantee them a job but they have got more to offer a prospective employer and with so many people looking for work at the moment the employers are getting far more selective.

I've worked for the Open University now for five years and in that time I've seen hundreds of people trying to get their degrees later in life and finding it very difficult to manage this as part-time students and whilst trying to hold down a full-time job. Others are realising that the reason that they are unemployed is because of the lack of qualifications and some of these people have therefore got plenty of time for their studies but very little money to pay for their course fees and set books, etc. We should try to make sure that our children are given the advice whilst they are at school which would prevent so many from missing the opportunity of going on to university if he or she so wishes. We should make sure that each child gains as much knowledge from school as he or she is able to absorb and therefore leaves with as high a qualification as he or she is capable of reaching. Hopefully there will always be places where people can go on even further and increase their knowledge just as far as they wish. From our own experience at the Open University there has been an explosion of interest in adult education courses. Our first aim was to offer people the opportunity of studying towards a B.A. degree but we have found it necessary through demand to offer Community Education and Continuing Education courses in a great variety of subjects. So people do not only want to improve their job prospects but some want to use their spare time constructively to learn a new skill for their own pleasure.

Education in our schools in future years is obviously affected by government policy and the economic situation but we must surely all hope that if there are any changes at all it will be for the better and that everyone will be working together towards even higher standards and more opportunities for the young people.