

## When 0% is better than 100%

The Department of Education has just published their League Tables for schools' results in 2010, and for the third year running they have caused some controversy. At GCSE they continue to exclude the results achieved by pupils who have studied the iGCSE in Mathematics, resulting in schools achieving 0% in the list of 5 A\* - C grades (including Maths and English). An added complication this year is the rather late introduction of the concept of an English Baccalaureate ie "good passes in Maths English, Science, a language and a humanity (History or Geography)". State schools are angry because they have not been encouraged to follow such a broad curriculum in examinations until now, while many independent schools, who have encouraged pupils to pursue breadth at this stage, continue to score 0% because of the iGCSE problem mentioned above.

The Government decided some years ago that the basic level of competence at which all pupils in the country should aim was A\* to C grades in at least 5 subjects (including Mathematics and English). The result has been a long list of schools all with 95 – 100% accompanied by a smaller list of schools who have had to pick up the pieces and who struggle to get over 50%. This year was much more interesting because there were a number of schools, Eltham included, who instead of being at the top of this particular table found themselves at the bottom with 0%.

Why were Eltham College, along with Eton, Harrow, Winchester and other well-known establishments, put at the bottom – were they being singled out by the Government for claiming Charitable Status? Did all their pupils have a bad day? What was the explanation? Well, the answer lay in one letter – i. This stands for International, and the problem relates to our dissatisfaction with the GCSE examinations in Mathematics (and Science).

The reforms in the GCSE examinations were felt by our staff and many others around the country to be a further dumbing down of the demands made on pupils. Whoever thought coursework in Mathematics was a good idea? 21<sup>st</sup> Century Science may tell young people how useful science might be, but it fails to teach what that science actually is. With this in mind a large number of independent schools decided to opt for a different examination – the iGCSE, or the International GCSE – which stretches pupils and provides a better preparation for A levels.

There would appear to be nothing wrong with that, you might say. Well certainly not if you are only thinking about the opportunities for young people. But as is often the case, it is not that simple. All examination syllabuses, or specification as they are called today, have to be ratified by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA). Despite the lobbying by the Independent Schools Council, and some grammar schools who would have liked to take a more rigorous examination, QCA decided not to ratify the iGCSE for inclusion in League Tables: even though the iGCSE has been in existence for over 20 years and being taken by many schools abroad, particularly in Commonwealth countries where the British education system of thirty years ago is much admired for its rigour.

The Coalition Government have agreed that iGCSE should be included in future, but had not instructed QCA to make this change in time for this year's League Tables. If they had Eltham would have scored 100% with 5 grade A\* - C in subjects (including English and Mathematics). If one was to make the calculation for the English Baccalaureate based on our

pupils' performance the school's score would be 93% with one or two of our dyslexic pupils not being entered for a foreign language this year. A survey of other HMC independent schools shows the average score this year across our sector to be 75%: so Eltham's performance is certainly to be commended.

Therefore when you read your League Tables this year, I suggest that you apply a "topsy-turvy" approach to them this year. Those schools who scored 0% in their attempts to achieve 5 grade A\* - C in subjects including English and Mathematics are probably the schools you should be admiring rather than those with an apparently higher score, because 0% will probably mean that those pupils have taken (and passed!) the iGCSE in Mathematics, a more rigorous and demanding exam; and the same principle can be applied to the English Baccalaureate. That 0% is probably better than other schools 100%!

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