

The following are pre-publication reviews of *Schooling Scotland* from four people involved in Scottish education

Review by Henry Hepburn, Senior Reporter, Times Educational Supplement Scotland

Daniel Murphy can pick his way through educational policy, but he also knows schools. *Schooling Scotland: Education, Equity and Community* is his clarion call for rethinking an education system that has “reached its limit”. The homogeneity of Scottish education, he argues, is both strength and weakness. He does not make his case from an arch, theoretical standpoint. Murphy has immersed himself in school life throughout Scotland, so much so that his book is accompanied by Postcards from Scotland’s Inspiring Schools, a downloadable collection of richly detailed observations from an education road trip.

The industrious, eclectic thrum of 21st-century schools is palpable in both books. Vivid, jargon-free prose spotlights a diverse mix of characters, and the culture and preoccupations of the villages, towns and cities that surround them. The arid checklist approach of official inspection reports suffers by comparison. Murphy, a former secondary headteacher, is an optimist who likes the general direction of travel in Scottish schools, but does not shy away from sacred cows. He targets the Donaldson report (“reads as if schools exist in a social vacuum”), certain school inspectors (“combining poor interpersonal skills with the overweening arrogance of those who are not themselves accountable”) and Curriculum for Excellence (for its “neoliberal” tendencies and being most effective in affluent neighbourhoods).

Murphy’s book is passionate but measured, forceful but not dogmatic. For a snapshot of Scottish schools in 2014, and where they may head in the future, there can be few better places to start.

Henry Hepburn, senior reporter, Times Educational Supplement Scotland

Review by Ken Cunningham, General Secretary of School Leaders Scotland

When I heard about the concept of the Postcards series and especially one on the education of Scotland’s young people, I looked forward to seeing the outcome. It hasn’t disappointed. This was always going to be a difficult task striking the right balance between professional integrity and public consumption. As the author rightly points out, everyone has a view about schooling since all have participated themselves and frequently also are clients of it through their children and grandchildren. It is difficult therefore to read this with an entirely open mind. I hope as many can, do so. I think the balance is right.

This is a short but surprisingly full book enhanced undoubtedly by an online source of case study accounts. It adds significant colour and witness to the concepts raised in the book itself.

To the book. There is sufficient historical detail to give enough context to explain where we are today and why. It poses the key question, 'Can today's system provide the best education for all children in Scotland?' with an emphasis on the 'all'. In so doing, the author is at pains to draw an early distinction between 'education' and 'schooling'. It is a distinction that has never been far from researchers' and education philosophers' minds over the years. I remember well having to read Kenneth Richmond's quite excellent book of that title over forty years ago. The basic premise is still the same despite all the changes to grace the Scottish (and global for that matter) educational scene: school does not and cannot provide the education needs of our young people and we need to both recognise that and respond to it. As the author emphasises again and again, it takes a community to raise a child.

Despite some very significant enhancements to the process of teaching and learning; the quality of the teaching profession including its leaders, and a very impressive improvement in the fabric of many schools, many children remain isolated and excluded from the benefits that would enhance their life chances. The OECD report, oft quoted since its publication, is used to support that point along with significant anecdote. Whether you ultimately agree with the potential cures or not, this is a must read for every adult in Scotland. It gets to the very heart of the problem that has beset education systems the world over. How do you give every child the opportunity to go where he/she would want go given the opportunity? How do you raise aspiration and ambition and give the means to achieve them? Time and again over the author's and my own lengthy experience in the system we have seen a steady upward trend of success - of that there is little doubt - but the gap between the privileged and the poor stubbornly remains. Danny proposes a number of key proposals covering the thread of his argument from equity through to community to governance and where the future might lead us. Well read and researched, he uses his extensive experience to lay out his case. It is very persuasive. The issues are worthy of debate and discussion whatever the future holds on the back of our referendum. But they demand more than that. They demand a collective will to make a communal difference in the same way that day in, day out individual teachers make that huge difference to individual lives. What is the privilege of some, maybe most, should be the prerogative of all. But we also need to agree what really matters and should be valued and where possible measure that as a judge of our success rather than as is often the case, we measure what we can and choose to value that. That model from our past does not serve us well for the future. The right climate now is in place as Danny painstakingly details but the joining up of the key players still needs to be deliberately driven. And that will be no easy task or it would have already have happened as he rightly points out.

The book is an easy read but a challenge for all of us. Well constructed and well reasoned, it is also well supported both by critical research commentary and as I mentioned earlier by the accounts of seven successful stories across the country. It is writing full of optimism as all good postcards ought to be. Makes you wish you were there! Maybe some day soon we will be.

Review by Eileen Prior, Executive Director Scottish Teacher Parent Council

Schooling Scotland warmed my heart and fed my soul: Danny's passion for education, for schooling but most of all for children shone through on every page. Danny recognises the critical role of families and communities, and ushers them into school with a handshake and a smile.

Best of all, Danny reminds us all about the primary purpose of school education: to teach young people how to live in community, and sets us a challenging vision: one where there are 'no walls between home, school and community', where teachers are strict but caring parents and where schools are a family. Where all of Scotland is engaged in raising all of Scotland's children.

Schooling Scotland also places on the table some interesting and challenging ideas for structural changes Danny feels are needed if we are to move our schools in the right direction and really make a difference to outcomes for our young people. These set an agenda for very necessary, if sometimes challenging, debates. But throughout the debate we need to remind ourselves - as Danny does - that schooling is a human service.

We must not allow ourselves to become bogged down in systems and processes, but ensure we guide and steer and nurture the relationships that can transform lives for the better - because that's what matters.

Review by Jackie Dunlop, Depute Headteacher

Schooling Scotland: Education, equity and community is an energising, uplifting read. It makes clear, good sense of the policies and attitudes that influence (and sometimes limit) current school practice in Scotland. For teachers, it gives voice and shape to aspects of practice that are often deeply buried, vaguely sensed but not able to be confronted and challenged in the quotidian: for example, it shows how even actions we consider "fair" often have an unfair effect. It provokes consideration of the underside, in an easy, understanding and sympathetic, non-threatening, non-judgemental style that makes the book essential reading in this time of teacher self-reflection in Scotland's schools.

Teachers will recognise that what it has to say comes from a lifetime's experience of real classrooms, real schools. The author's "real teacher " voice is strong. The tone throughout is honest and candid- much needed, in a world where such conversations are few. So many people seem scared to speak openly now about anything.

Teachers will also welcome the clear synthesis of "A Curriculum for Excellence", an important reminder its key aims at a time when an over-dependency on systems, examination and other demands might be in danger of distorting its laudable intentions. The on-line journal gives five very different illustrations of policy in practice. I loved the Journal. There are ideas here, provided by real people, in real places the length and breadth of Scotland, people who face the same challenges and limitations in responding to Education Policy. The Journal's style is heart-warming in its personalisation: the contextualising of each school that starts each chapter is loving and lyrical (the description of the geographical location making it read like a real postcard) but also illustrates a key point of argument, namely that schools and schooling don't operate in isolation from their immediate and wider social context. Any teacher reading it will be stimulated to reflect on their own school and how it is responding to the challenge of C for Ex.

The extended online references make up a useful list of key "go-to" sites. They amount, collectively, to a formidable body of work yet too few individuals make sufficient use of them. To some extent that's because there are so many they can overwhelm. In the body of your text their separation focuses the mind on each document's unique contribution. The list also acts as a synthesis of the educational thought of recent years and bringing it all together affords the reader the opportunity to observe this " collective thinking. There's a story here, but we rather tend to take one policy at a time and forget there is a broader, deeper, wider perspective to be found.

For parents and general readers, this is a most readable, interesting text that captures for the non-specialist what it is like currently in Scotland's schools - exciting, interesting, challenging. The reader is drawn gently into the main point of argument: schooling should involve them, in new and particular ways. This will challenge and possibly unsettle - but it is an engaging, encouraging stimulus to personal reflection. There is no doubt, here, that " Society" DOES exist ! Many people will be relieved to know it, and to know they can have a part to play in it. This leads to the central concern of the book for all readers: what kind of schooling ought we to seek in a future Scotland? Alert readers of the text will not allow themselves to fall into the "comfortable complacency" that the opening statements warn against. Here the schooling of the future is redefined and a clear way forward identified.