

Press Release:

80% of parents reject Gove's demand that schools promote patriotism

80% of parents don't want their children to be taught a patriotic version of British history, according to a new poll published tomorrow for the education journal, Impact.

Four fifths of parents say they want instead a balanced view of British history taught in schools, with 80 per cent agreeing with the statement, "Teaching should contain a mixture of positive and negative aspects of British history, with no attempt made to persuade pupils to be either proud or ashamed of the way Britain has evolved."

The new research by YouGov was carried out to accompany a pamphlet by philosopher Dr Michael Hand which is also published today.

Dr Hand argues patriotism is too controversial to be promoted in schools. Instead schools should teach about the benefits and drawbacks of patriotism and encourage young people to make up their own minds about loving their country.

The pamphlet responds to Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove's declared commitment to 'building a modern, inclusive patriotism' by teaching all school children 'to take pride in this country's historic achievements'.

Dr Hand says love of country has some real benefits, such as motivating citizens to do their civic duty. But it also has the significant drawback of clouding civic judgment.

'Citizens of democratic states are required to elect governments and hold them to account,' he writes. 'They can only meet these requirements if they maintain some critical distance from their political representatives and institutions.'

Dr Hand said, "Michael Gove wants to build patriotism through school history lessons, but this isn't a justifiable aim of education: the arguments against patriotism are at least as strong as the arguments for it. It's right and proper for these arguments to be explored in the classroom, but schools mustn't prejudge the issue by deliberately promoting love of Britain."

This point of view is backed by parents in the poll. Only 17% of parents agreed with the statement "Teaching should concentrate on mainly the positive aspects of British history, so pupils are taught to be proud of the way Britain has evolved".

But teaching love of your country is a political issue. Twice as many Tory voters (22 per cent) thought that "Teaching should concentrate on mainly the positive aspects of British history, so pupils are taught to be proud of the way Britain has evolved" as Labour voters (11 per cent)

The You Gov poll also suggests that parents need to have more information about what is taught in schools, as one in three do not know how British history is taught in schools at present.

The YouGov poll also shows that

Conservative voters are much more likely to feel proud of their country than Labour ones. 46 per cent of Tory voters agreed with the statement "We should be very proud of the way Britain has evolved over the centuries. We produced the world's best democracy and finest empire, we have not lost a major war for centuries, we stood alone against Hitler in 1940 and have more reasons for pride than the citizens of any other major country" compared to only 26 per cent of Labour voters

Most people (79 per cent) believe Teaching should contain a mixture of positive and negative aspects of British history, with no attempt made to persuade pupils to be either proud or ashamed of the way Britain has evolved with 83 per cent of Tory voters believing this compared to 75 per cent of Labour voters

Some 44 per cent of people though say they do not know how British history is taught in schools, falling to one in three among parents.

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