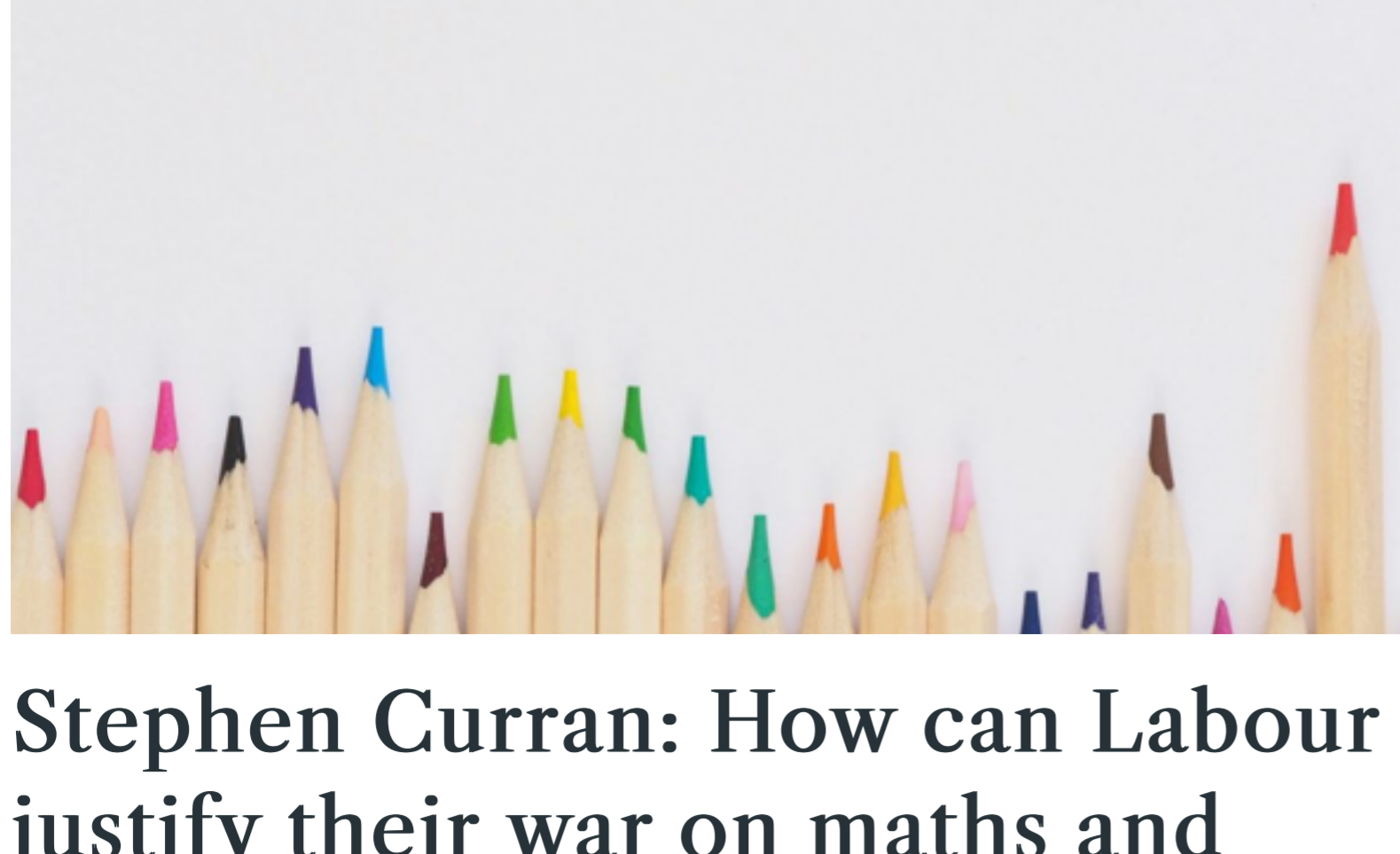




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Stephen Curran: How can Labour justify their war on maths and physics?

February 5, 2025 | Dr Stephen Curran | Comment

Dr Stephen Curran is an education expert who advised on the 2014 syllabus.

I learned with amazement that the Government is to cut by half funding for the hugely successful Advanced Mathematics Support Programme (AMSP). While recovering from this shock I learnt that it was also axing the Stimulating Physics Network (SPN), which gets more girls studying the subject.

These latest attacks on our children follow the government's decision to become one of the only administrations in the world to tax education by introducing VAT on private schools, and the restrictions it is placing on academies.

As someone who advised on the maths part of the curriculum changes in 2014 and has advocated for more students to take the subject at A Level, I find it hard to fathom why the AMSP should be targeted.

It was introduced in 2018 and followed the Further Mathematics Support Programme which began in 2009.

The AMSP provides support for teachers and students in state-funded schools and colleges across England. It also targets areas of low social mobility and low participation in Level 3 maths to increase opportunities for all students to study the subject after their GCSEs. All good Labour stuff, you'd think.

The programme has 40 'area coordinators' across England who work with schools and colleges.

The Government justifies the cuts by saying it needs to save money. So how much are Labour saving by wielding the axe to the AMSP? Currently, the programme costs £17 million over two years. That is all.

It is the same amount the Government is sending to Gaza aid agency UNWRA - an organisation that had Hamas terrorists working for it, including some who took part in the grotesque October 7 attacks. £17 million is equivalent of 0.01 per cent of the whole education budget. It is peanuts.

Thanks to AMSP and its targeted support, entries for maths A Level in England rose from 64,500 in 2009 to almost 100,000 last year. In the same period the number of students taking further maths increased from 9,400 to almost 17,000. The AMSP also drove an uptake in the core maths programme.

The Stimulating Physics Network has also proved successful at a tiny cost - the latest phase of the programme received just £2.7 million of funding. A report showed that A Level entries for physics rose swiftly in schools that were part of the network - and the number of girls taking the subject soared.

One of the great ironies is that the Prime Minister has vowed to unleash AI in the country. He wants us to become world leaders in technology. Does he not understand that STEM subjects are vital if his ambitions are to be realised?

For some years we've known that take-up in STEM subjects was not as high as it needed to be - which was why these schemes were first introduced. And they've been working.

So why does the Government want them to end? They claim it is about saving money - the mythical 'black hole' is trotted out as a reason. But this is bunkum when you consider the vast sums of tax-payer cash it has thrown at UNWRA, train drivers, foreign farmers, and an assortment of new quangos and other batty projects.

Perhaps the reason is more sinister and ideological. Bridget Phillipson seems to want to crack down on any part of our education system that gives freedom and autonomy to schools and teachers.

Her department has made clear that it wants to curtail the freedoms of academy schools, which have drastically improved the outcomes of children who pass through them.

Tellingly, when Phillipson was asked in the House of Commons to congratulate for its astonishing success the Michaela Community School - a free school that uses traditional teaching methods that are anathema to the Labour ideologues - she refused point blank.

Socialist thinking - to use a maths analogy - attempts to bring everyone down to the lowest common denominator. These dangerous 'comrades' would rather no one excelled if the alternative was just a few excelling.

Envy is dressed up as equality. Discrimination is called fairness. Outcomes are irrelevant. Pragmatism is replaced by purity. Marks become Marx.

Their socialist instinct is to control everything that is taught and how it is taught. Abolishing education programmes that are separate from schools gives them more control over what happens in classrooms.

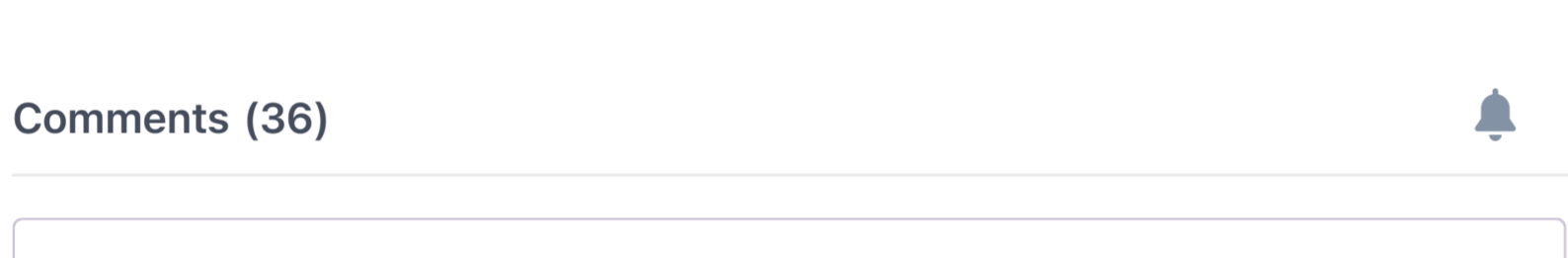
Their policies are not evidence-based but ideologically-driven and they will do great harm to our children.

Having attacked private schools, free schools, academies, and maths and physics support programmes I fear Labour will soon set their sights on our few remaining grammar schools.

COMMENT HIGHLIGHTS

BRIDGET PHILLIPSON MP EDUCATION EQUALITY LABOUR FAILURE MIC

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- RC** **Re con** 15d
Socialists prefer appeals to emotion rather than data and evidence.
The vast majority of their allies in the media and Commentariat seem to lack numeracy or the ability to interrogate data.
And Labour no longer seem to value manual work - e.g. tradesmen.
So it seems unsurprising if Labour downgrades Maths and Physics.
But the answer is not more A-levels.
There is a sizeable cohort who are not academic.
They are practical.
Some schools have introduced things like car mechanics.
That "back door" teaching of physics, maths and a bit of chemistry improved exam results.
Read more
- BL** **Barry Longford** Re con 11d
The man who claims climate scientists don't talk about temperature fluctuations over time is now talking about emotion over reason. Classic!
- CK** **Christine Kisby** 18d
I wasn't aware Reeves needs anything about maths. She is only the Chancellor, so hardly needs it, does she? Maybe the same applies to Phillipson in the common sense category.
- NR** **Neill Rubidge** 18d
Don't forget that Maths and Physics have a tendency to work in absolutes (although one should not forget the scene in 1984 where Winston Smith is required to agree that 2+2=5 : the current Labour textbook?). This makes it very difficult for 2+Labour (and their Union masters) to teach propaganda, rather than the subject that is supposed to be taught.
There is also the risk that if you teach people maths, they will be able to untangle the numbers that the government puts out and understand just how innumerate our leaders are.
- B** **Bruce** 19d
"War"!... who is responsible for these headlines.
- FC** **Fergus Crowley** 19d
Every child in the U.K. is entitled to be educated for free up to the age of 18. That some parents try to buy an advantage suggests they are buying something of value so it should be taxed. It was also in the manifesto they were elected on and is a popular move.
And I would suggest the removal of the education support Grant had a far bigger impact on education.
- RC** **Re con** Fergus Crowl... 15d
"That some parents try to buy an advantage..."
...might suggest that most parents know that children are different.
...so one-size-fits-all comprehensives can never tailor education to meet different abilities, temprements, interests and aspirations.
- RC** **Re con** Fergus Crowl... 15d
Two efforts "moderated"...
....and not one word of abuse - even about "socialists" !!
- BL** **Barry Longford** 19d
Is this serious? Our party welcomes science deniers into its membership and as MPs. But we are worried about science and maths education? Incredible.
- RC** **Re con** Barry Longfo... 13d
1. The "science deniers" are those climate alarmists who pretend that:
- Global Warming has never occurred before.
- So that Warm periods cannot be natural.
- That temperatures in those previous warm periods didn't peak around 2 degrees higher than currently - so are in denial that another 1.5 degrees may be inevitable regardless of costly Net Zero policies.
2. Even "scientists" can be corrupted when their salary depends on supporting the narrative of their employers.
edited
- Drummond Base** 19d
These cuts are regrettable and point to Labour's "big state" attitude where union priorities seem to come before attainment and choice. But I'd like to point out that the headline of "war" evokes invasion and murder, it's over-egging the pudding a tad to evoke this when classroom schemes are being tweaked, however regrettable the changes might be.

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