If only every child had the quality of education enjoyed at private schools

[Michael Rosen](http://www.theguardian.com/profile/michaelrosen)

In England we have equality but Education is all about making sure that the next generation know what our representatives think they should know.’ Photograph: Alamy

The education spokespeople of the three main parties have said (admitted? confessed? boasted?) that they would be [OK with sending their children to private schools](http://blogs.spectator.co.uk/coffeehouse/2015/04/tristram-hunt-education-secretaries-can-send-their-kids-private/). Anyone trying to explain to a Martian how England works couldn’t do much better than to start here.

What happens, Martian Being, I would say, is that we have governments. You see, we can’t govern ourselves, we need people to govern us. In bad countries, governments are a dynastic club, the governing people just bequeath government to their offspring. In other bad countries, the governing people are the ones who end up at the top of the army. In Britain, we do things differently. The people choose the government. We say: the government “represents” us. One of the ways they represent us is running education. Education is all about making sure that the next generation know what our representatives think they should know. In Britain, this is divvied up across the four “countries” of the UK. Today we’re talking about the ones in charge (or who would like to be in charge) of education in England.

So, Martian Being, you get the idea? The education people represent what we want from education. One of the big problems with this has been to figure out how this doesn’t end up with the kinds of thing that go on in the bad countries. Imagine, for example, if our leading education representatives didn’t experience the kind of education that the great mass of voters experienced. Then, when these people get into power, they carry out policies they made up on the back of an envelope. Imagine they decided that most schools should be accountable solely to their office. Imagine also that if they fancied it they could send their own children to a special kind of school that is outside the whole system anyway. Impossible? No.

You look puzzled, Martian Being. Your logical mind has jumped to a conclusion: you say that surely it is not right that our representatives in this matter of education (the very people who tell us what kinds of schools we should have) don’t think it’s necessary for they themselves to experience the same kind of education as the majority of those who elect them?

We’re not talking about logic here. We’re talking about England. In England we have equality but some have more of it than others. If you are one of the people who have more of it, you do all you can to keep it, and one of the best methods that the more equal people have found to do this is through devising a kind of corridor. They put their children in one end of this corridor and 20 years or so later, most of them come out having as much extra equality as their parents. Just to be clear, this isn’t based on what we call “ability”. It’s based on some lovely stuff called “money”.

Now you’ve spotted another problem with what I’m saying. You’re wondering if there is any direct correlation between ability and money. Well, the people with money think there is. And to make absolutely sure there is, they’ve invented this corridor anyway. The corridor is private education.

[Private schools](http://www.theguardian.com/education/private-schools) are wonderful. The ones that produce our representative leaders have glorious playing fields, theatres, music blocks, state-of-the-art laboratories, fantastic IT provision, a stunningly generous teacher-pupil ratio and indeed a good deal of freedom to avoid much of what our education leaders tell the mass of children they have to do. That’s what we call “irony”. My own view is that every child should go to a school like that. So I’m in favour of what these education leaders are saying. Let’s all have schools as well provided as that and we can all send our children to them. Oh, but then they wouldn’t be private. I’m confused now. Hah, that’s what comes of talking to a Martian.

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