



DAILY EXPRESS

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DXIST

Labour is harming the very pupils it should be helping



Students at Ashcroft Technology Academy are achieving impressive results



Lord Ashcroft
Guest Columnist

over time, erode knowledge and artificially reduce the attainment gaps she seeks to narrow.

Instead of raising standards, Phillipson looks set to preside over a calamitous drop. Over time, this will make social mobility even more difficult for our most vulnerable young people.

Previous reforms under then Education Secretary Michael Gove between 2010 and 2014, saw English schools steadily raise standards. These prioritised core knowledge, academic challenge and accountability, and their impact has been positive: English pupils now outperform many of their peers across Europe.

By contrast, in parts of the UK, including Scotland, where standards were relaxed, outcomes have declined sharply. That's why Gove has stated Phillipson's reforms will lower standards, limit opportunity and set back social mobility.

Improvement in education always requires demanding more

– from schools, from teachers and from pupils. Such demands are never popular. They bring pressure, scrutiny and a degree of discomfort. Yet by holding the line, we help young people flourish.

The English baccalaureate (EBacc), which the Education Secretary now plans to scrap, encouraged schools to steer all students – not just the privileged – towards academic and knowledge-rich subjects such as languages, history and science. These subjects open doors to elite universities and global careers.

Importantly, for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, they also provide knowledge, cultural capital and a global awareness, all of which Phillipson's reforms threaten to deprive them.

The Education Secretary started this process when she announced plans to remove the additional funding state schools need to operate the International Baccalaureate, itself an academically

rigorous, global qualification which demands knowledge and civic mindedness. Now she has gone further by rejecting some of the most important recommendations of the curriculum review, namely choosing to dilute "Progress 8", used to evaluate English secondary schools by tracking academic progress from the end of primary school and GCSE examinations.

IN DOING this, she risks reversing progress. In independent schools, academic subjects will remain at the heart of the timetable. In the majority of state schools, however, I predict they will quietly be replaced by less demanding and less examined courses.

Principals and headteachers will not take these reforms lying down. Many have observed first-hand that social mobility cannot be built on lower expectations. I genuinely fear for the consequences of Phillipson's reforms and an ever-increasing decline in standards for the next generation unless ministers see sense.

'Phillipson's changes will lower standards and limit opportunity'

● Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC is an international businessman, philanthropist, author and pollster. Visit lordashcroft.com