

# **LONDON EDUCATION**

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London education by Sidney Webb

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EDUCATION**



# LONDON EDUCATION

## BY SIDNEY WEBB

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## PREFACE

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THE Education Acts of 1902 and 1903 make, for the first time, all grades of education a public service. To construct a complete educational organisation for a city of five millions is no light task. This little book is an attempt to survey some of the problems thus presented to the London administrator.

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Its subject-matter is, therefore, not politics but administration. It does not discuss what the law ought to be, or what we should like it to be, but the practical problem of organisation under the law. The parliamentary candidate, the party leader, and the statesman have, necessarily and legitimately, other considerations to take into account, in education as in all branches of the public service, besides administrative efficiency. Those considerations, important in their own sphere, find no place in these pages. To prevent misapprehension, I must therefore

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state, once for all, that if I avoid in this book, as far as possible, the religious and political controversies connected with education, which Parliament has to settle, this is not because I am contented with the law as it stands.

However cordially we may welcome the unification of education under a single local authority, however valuable we may think the extension of the powers of this authority to all grades and all kinds of education, no practical administrator can regard the Acts of 1902 and 1903 as anything but imperfect instruments. The very fact that they arouse an intense feeling of dislike in many thousands of citizens is, in itself, a drawback to their efficient working. I need hardly say that, in the various respects in which I regard them as defective, I want these Acts amended at the earliest possible date. But I for one intend to keep politics—even educational politics—apart from administration. Whatever we may think of the policy of the new Education Acts, or of the likelihood of their being amended, the smooth running of the existing educational machinery must, at all hazards, be maintained under the new law as under the old one. Moreover, in this rapidly moving world, merely to



maintain the *status quo* is to fall behind. We cannot afford to let London education mark time this year, or next year, or the year after, pending the possible transfer of political power from one party to another. Whoever may be chosen to administer London's thousands of schools, and to direct its million of scholars, must necessarily work out some plan of educational organisation under the law as it is for the time being, and shape that organisation according to some administrative policy.

Looked at as a mere matter of civic administration, London's educational service is, at this moment, plainly inferior in efficiency to its police or its fire brigade, its lunatic asylums, or even its water supply. The educational provision is scrappy and disjointed; its fragments are ill-adjusted and unco-ordinated; it is uninspired by any vivifying principle; there are great gaps in some directions and redundancies and duplications in others. It is therefore not surprising that in spite of an expenditure every year of four millions of public money, and a large but unknown amount of private money, London education falls far short of decent efficiency at many points. It fails alike at the

bottom and at the top—we succeed neither in maintaining a high level of common schooling for all London's children, whatever their poverty or the creed of their parents; nor yet in disseminating culture, developing reasoning power, or promoting original research. The time has come when London, in this matter of educational organisation, must, with a single eye to educational efficiency, deliberately set its house in order.

SIDNEY WEBB.

41 GROSVENOR ROAD, WESTMINSTER,  
*December 1903.*

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