

Our government is making young people believe that cheats do prosper

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It must be very confusing at the moment to be a young person who wants to do the right thing.

We tell them that crime never pays. Yet we've just seen the Chancellor write off £4.3 billion stolen from taxpayers by criminals who abused the furlough schemes. Lesson: don't be exploited on the minimum wage by amoral firms kids, set up your own one.

We tell those who want to become a senior public servant, such as an MP, that they must swear an oath to the Queen vowing "true allegiance" to herself and all her "heirs and successors, according to law".

Yet one of them, her second son, is Prince Andrew. The very sight of whom, I'm guessing, makes most young people want to swear in a different way.

Then there's Robert Halfon, chair of the Commons Education Select Committee, claiming that if schoolkids want to succeed they need to follow the example of James Dyson. That's the vacuum cleaner tycoon who championed Vote Leave due to the economic opportunities it would bring British industry before moving his global head office to Singapore.

In other words, kids, talk the talk, then screw your country, and if anyone complains, tell them to suck it up. But what must really puzzle them now is why they need to be truthful. We teach them that honesty is the best policy and cheats never prosper, yet the man elected to the top job in the country is acknowledged by even his closest colleagues to be a liar and a cheat.

Treating the truth like a house guest with fleas hasn't done the Prime Minister's prospects any harm, has it? What must young people make of that?

What must they make of Britain spending the last couple of months in political paralysis over Downing Street's refusal to admit it was Party Central when their parents will soon struggle to heat the house and Russia threatens war? All because Boris Johnson lacked the moral decency to be honest when Partygate surfaced.

There would have been no need for a drawn-out Sue Gray report or the drip-drip of leaks about illegal drinks in No10 if the people who made the rules we were all ordered to follow had owned up to breaking them and faced the consequences.

And as Johnson looks to ride out whatever damning conclusions are in that report and carry on as though nothing happened, what does that tell young people on the cusp of adult life?

Especially one who has a Tory MP, who, rather than call Johnson out for what he is, cheered him on as he brazened out his shame in the Commons.

Or a Tory MP who waits to see how the report's conclusions play with their constituents before calculating the best course for themselves.

Then there's the country's top cop, whose skin has been repeatedly saved by the PM, refusing to investigate criminal allegations against him until a report about them is set to be released, then stepping in to effectively censor it.

Our revised advice to kids should be that cheats do prosper and honesty's not the best policy. Looking after No 1 is. But the next time you give a young person a lecture about decency don't be surprised if, like the people running the country, they laugh in your face.