

## **In Ancient Greece, an ‘idiot’ avoided politics. What does that make the students of today?**

When I was ten, I gathered people in politics were the old men who wore fancy suits and enjoyed arguing for television. During my secondary school years, politics appeared occasionally, like a substitute teacher: it was brief, awkward and didn't command much authority. All I remember was being told it existed, it mattered to society and then it would vanish before any uncomfortable topics could appear. I learnt far more about the Pythagorean Theorem than I ever did about how the country I live in was being governed.

The next point I make is not an insult on my generation. However, by ancient Greek definition, many of the younger generation would qualify as ‘idiots’. The original meaning, stemming from the Greek *idiōtēs*, referred to someone who stayed away from public life, someone disengaged from politics. It is an illuminating definition. If the young people of today appear detached from politics, we should ask if much effort was ever made to include us?

The gaps left by the silence of the school institute often seem to fill themselves. I have walked through school corridors, hearing statements of how our system works and great scandals of politicians, much of it nonsense. One debate stuck with me, a girl in my year was arguing with her friends of why we still have a royal family and her main argument was the Queen could simply step in, take over Parliament, and magically fix the economy when things seemed in decline. This belief was wrong. However, what was more concerning was how reasonable it sounded. When political structures are never clearly taught, myths circulate our communities, overpowering fact.

This confusion isn't limited to my school. 34% of 16–17-year-olds say they feel ill-equipped to participate in politics. This is an issue affecting the current government's manifesto, given that this age category will soon be able to vote in general elections. In this context, disconnection is not a refusal to engage but the absence of training.

Unfortunately, in my compulsory years of school politics was treated as something faintly hazardous. I had the odd assembly a year, but they acted like formality rather than education: thin, rushed and carefully neutralised. Any big current event was handled with visible discomfort. Teachers feared showing bias, leading to the safest option being avoiding politics all together. As a result, politics became abstract and bloodless. Surveys showed only one in three young people recall hearing about politics in school over the past year. Silence has become the standard.

As the youth of this county who will establish the future we are encouraged to think critically, analyse texts, debate conflicts dividing many and develop our own voice. We are forced to sit exams that control our future, work, contribute to society. Then we are trusted to vote. Yet discussing the effectiveness of our governance and examining our

system is a step too far. Democracy is something we are encouraged to participate in without it ever having a proper introduction.

Where political education exists is unevenly distributed. Students living in more affluent areas, or in private schools are more likely to be prepared for democratic duties compared to their peers elsewhere. The result is a quiet two-tier system of political literacy, one that mirrors broader inequalities in the current participation crisis. This is not accidental. When education appears inconsistent, political engagement follows the same pattern.

In Ancient Greece, the 'idiot' was someone who refused to fulfil their public role in politics. Today we seem to be manufacturing them. The visible disengagement in politics did not emerge from nowhere. As a society we can't expect participation without preparation. If I am part of a generation of 'idiots' then the failure doesn't lie with us, who supposedly do not care enough, but with a system that never quite decided to teach us properly.

Links to where information was taken from:

[\(https://www.johnsmithcentre.com/summer-polling-2025/#:~:text=The%20top%20answer%20for%20why,%20\(41%25%20vs%2029%25\)](https://www.johnsmithcentre.com/summer-polling-2025/#:~:text=The%20top%20answer%20for%20why,%20(41%25%20vs%2029%25))

[\(https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/media-centre/young-people-want-learn-more-about-politics-and-democracy\)](https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/media-centre/young-people-want-learn-more-about-politics-and-democracy)