We all like to moan. Moan about the government, about the banks, about most institutions. They just don't seem to cut it. But perhaps we get the institutions we deserve.

One way to test this is to envisage what a better institution would be like and to flag the barriers we erect to stop it being achieved.

Like a school. Personally, I would like a school that

♥ is truly community-based - oh, but the distant/private school has a better reputation,
♥ teaches thinking rather than knowledge and caters to the arts and sciences - but there's a prescribed curriculum and we rank by exams and league tables
♥ where the whole family is involved - but I'm busy working; it's the schools job to educate my child
♥ where children are encouraged to stretch themselves - who do we hold as role models?
♥ where all people are respected - this starts in the home
♥ and has strong leadership - how is this assessed, bolstered?

Hmmm, lot's of reasons and excuses for not following my beliefs.

But here I am, a parent with grown up kids. So what did I learn from navigating their school education that makes me realise that the excuses are just that?

Well, you have to trust the local school and its teachers - not easy when you think that you only get one chance with your precious offspring. Later you realise that it is the process of raising kids that is important not the individual decisions, so you are not really taking risks with them.

And involvement? I admit to delegating this to my wife while I was off trying to be a big-shot. But learning starts at home so telling them stories and singing to them when they were small all helped.
Perhaps the main message from this is that we individuals play a surprisingly big part in determining the outcomes that an institution is intended to provide. And so by our own actions we can change them. Which is why we now have the ones we deserve.

It also shows that it is not really the school that is the centre of all this. It's education in the broadest sense and the role this plays in building the society that we desire. School just plays a part.

If we did the same exercise for a supermarket then the bigger picture is really feeding the world. The supermarket plays a part but our decisions should be directed at the wider issue.

Somewhere in there lies personal responsibility and empowerment.