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Personalised governing through behaviour change and re-education

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Personalised learning has become a buzzword in UK education policy, particularly in England. An interpretative analysis allows us to unpack personalisation in education as a discursive formation which generates a particular vision of the 21st century child and a particular conception of the public value of education. A personalised education system relies on re-imagining the 'ideal citizen' and can be associated with a moralising and responsabilising turn in public service reform more generally. This paper examines the implications of personalised education for the young people and families at which such reforms are aimed – examining how they are variously positioned as expert and inexpert in their own educational decision-making. This analysis is then extended towards governmental tactics and strategies of 'behaviour change', and the move towards 'soft paternalist' modes of governing, of which personalisation can be said to be one prominent mechanism. The example of personalised education indicates the broader development of new pedagogies of governing – initiated by both state and non-state agencies – which seek to 'nudge' people towards the 'right' decisions and to compensate for a perceived lack of expertise in the sciences of self-governing.