

### Inside a Montessori School



**Barbara Roymacauley, as part of her volunteering work for Childline, recently visited a Montessori school in east London. In the following article, she describes her reactions to the Montessori approach to education.**

The cultural climate of the school I visited reminded me of what the Montessori early years` scheme is all about. Teachers were tending to babies and toddlers alike whilst collaborating with parents. The Unit aims to support the family's needs and places the mother and child at its core. It is like an educational home rather than a classroom, with a warm and vibrant climate that seeks to foster the love of learning and help children to reach their highest potential.

*And so we discovered that education is not something which the teacher does, but is a natural process which develops spontaneously in the human being. It is not acquired by listening to words but in virtue of experiences in which the child acts on his environment [1907]*

Where the above Montessori philosophy underpins the school as an institution, then the staff team is both educationally nurturing as well as domiciliary. The displayed photographs were of the children`s art and their artistic activities. It was refreshing to see so many multiple buggies, which enabled the children to go for walks in the fresh air together.

Children are operating in vertically grouped class units, which encourage positive peer group interactions, with older children and siblings being stimulated to learn more and become more caring.

**Barbara Roymacauley**

## Getting the local authority out of education – Part 4



The central message of my three previous newsletter articles was that channelling significant amounts of public money to quasi-private providers of education leads to one inevitable outcome: widespread fraud and corruption. This final article in the series cites some examples of this outcome in relation to academies and free schools.

### A Chronology of Corruption

So, let's wind the clock back to October 2013 when it was revealed that, at Kings Science Academy, a free school previously lauded by David Cameron, more than £80,000 was misused, with false invoices submitted to Whitehall and taxpayers' money used to hold parties and buy furniture for staff. And lest anybody should be held to account for this, Michael Gove, the then Education Secretary, allegedly suppressed the damning findings of the investigation for 5 months. And, a few months later in May 2014, the headteacher of Quintin Kynaston Community Academy, no doubt taking her cue from Kings, was found guilty of charging the school for furniture and widespread personal use of academy taxi accounts..

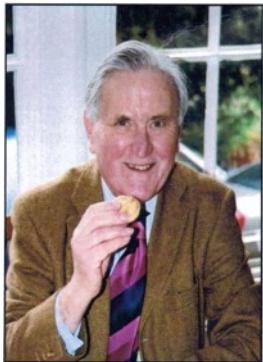
Come September 2015, *The Observer* reported that two claims of 'financial irregularity' at academies and free schools were being made each month and that, in the previous 3 years, there had been 58 such allegations, with the Department for Education refusing to name the schools involved. And 2016/17, has seen no let-up in the propensity of those running academies and free schools to enrich themselves, with the government doing its utmost to turn a blind eye.

In March 2016, it was reported that the Perry Beeches Academy had made payments of nearly £1.3 million over 2 years to a company owned by one of its headteachers. Later, in June 2016, a £4m fraud was reported at another of Gove's favourite academy chains, Haberdashers Aske Foundation Trust. In March 2017, the high-flying Green Spring Academy entered the rogues' gallery with 'exam malpractice' being identified, and the £220, 000 a year headteacher being suspended.

*The Teacher* disclosed in April 2017, that heads of six academy trusts received pay rises of £50,000 or more and 22 saw an increase of at least £20, 000. And, just to round things off nicely, in October 2017, *The Observer* reported that the Wakefield City Academies Trust had been accused of 'asset-stripping', having transferred millions of pounds from its 21 schools to its own private corporate accounts before collapsing.

Owing to the climate of secrecy and the lack of democratic accountability in which academies, free schools and colleges of FE operate, these cases of fraud and corruption that we actually know about are likely to be just the tip of a giant iceberg. When the nightmare of this Tory government is finally over, nothing short of a complete re-nationalisation of the quasi-private sector of our education system will be required.

**Henry Tiller**



### Remembering John Westbury

The Ilford Recorder got it right when they described John Westbury OBE, M.Ed, Dip.Th. as a 'beloved headteacher' and 'a much-loved headmaster'.

It was standing room only at All Saints Church, Chigwell Row, when mourners gathered to pay their respects to John Innes Westbury. Hundreds turned out to remember Mr. Westbury, the man who in 1975 brought together the two secondary schools, Kingswood and Grange, to form Hainault High School and then served as its headmaster until 1993.

His son, Peter, spoke of his father's strong Christian faith and his commitment to comprehensive education. John Westbury's aim was to build a harmonious community, both within the school and outside: he was a caring, courteous gentleman who encouraged and supported students and staff alike.

He and his wife, Joan, believed in offering hospitality, both as a simple act of generosity and as a bridge to better understanding: school governors, teachers and union reps ate at his table.

Following his retirement John Westbury continued to take a great interest in the school: he was guest of honour at the annual prize-giving and guest speaker at assemblies during Christian Aid week. At one such occasion RMT union leader, Bob Crow, paid a warm tribute to his former headmaster, who grinned widely. We all enjoyed the moment and cheered.

Many years later when John was in hospital and then in a nursing home, former pupils, students and colleagues queued up to visit him, such was the affection and esteem in which he was held.

John Westbury, devoted family man and educator, died peacefully 14<sup>th</sup>. December 2017 aged 86.

Maureen Henderson

### The Unseen Killer!

The above title may suggest you are about to read a Murder Mystery! However, unfortunately, this is not the case. My subject is a real-life problem that seems to be common - especially in schools.

I started teaching at Newbury Park Primary School (1976) and was assigned to the Infants department, which was in a separate building. It was when our building was taken over by an outreach program and some minor alterations were being made that it was discovered that the roof and other parts of the building had asbestos. We were not officially informed in any way - it was just rumour and hearsay.

Sometime after that, the old food-hall, which was situated on the car park site was being demolished. If it had not been for a parent, involved in health and safety, we would not have known that building also contained asbestos. Again, we were never informed officially, although the parent did mention it to the local newspaper.

Since then there have been occasions when yet more asbestos had been found in the cellar surrounding the boiler. Ok, not a teaching space but a space where we stored many resources.

I did send a letter to the local authority raising concerns regarding the issue but it was never acknowledged in anyway. Did it get passed on to the right council department? Well, your guess is as good as mine.

Some staff have had cancer related illnesses. But was there a link? I believe that will remain unknown. When I raised the matter with the head teacher, he simply said, 'Well I'm not really sure where it needs to be referred ... have you suffered or been diagnosed with asbestosis or breathing difficulties?' So, in other words, nothing was being done or was going to be done about this unseen killer!

Eve Ewers

## **NEU and Equality: Black Teachers' Conference Birmingham [3-5.11.2017]**

The Conference for the Black teachers' cohort of the NUT met for the first time since the amalgamation of NUT and ATL to form the NEU.

Higher numbers of union registrations since September '17 have also expanded the attendance of the Conference to 200 delegates. We were housed in the Holiday Inn Hotel, which was adjacent to Birmingham Conference and events centre {BCEC}.

Many shared the aim of finding out how our movement would be absorbed by the new structure. In addition, we sought to thrash out current difficulties with the issues of representation on committees and in union divisions. Many also had campaigning initiatives to feed back on relating to racism, Islamaphobia, disability rights, and gender and LGBT matters.

Through debates, discussions and a series of workshops and lectures, motions were put forward for the upcoming national conference at Easter in Brighton in 2018.

New members from the ATL, where there was no BTC division, were warmly welcomed, as were the many teaching assistants. The latter were invaluable in the workshop that I attended about resources and strategies.

As has previously been the case the predominantly popular item was – 'Tackling Racism' /Fighting for Equality for all. This theme was the winner of the competition for motion of the conference.

Equally important is this year's drive towards having more local black caucus groups, campaigns and initiatives. These are being set up by the National and regional committees. In London, Hackney, Newham, Tower Hamlets, and Waltham Forest have already formed their own Black Teachers Networks.

## **Resisting Academisation: a personal view**

Given the reputation of Redbridge LEA, we were surprised to learn that Highlands Primary School was considering the option to become an academy – an option announced by a letter to parents and a glossy brochure.

Realising that the Head's ambition was to academize the school without sufficient time to allow parents and the community to explore the plan, we gathered together key members of the community, including parents, to raise concerns. At the first consultation meeting in November last year, it became apparent that the main intention was to share promotional material and limit the time for real discussion. Thus, forty minutes into a power point presentation, we interrupted to request that parents and others be invited to ask questions..

With feelings running high, we then rapidly organised a public meeting, with several significant individuals from the world of education on the panel. Highlands' staff were invited and although the Head did not attend, his Deputy did, to give the School's perspective.

Our campaigning has been relentless, with numerous emails, a push for a parent ballot (focus groups were offered) and street protests. In addition, welcome support has come from our friends from the Newham Anti-Academisation group and from Redbridge LA, which has offered Highlands the same opportunities as those in the Highlands' proposal and asked the Head and governors to reconsider. As a result, we have managed to push back the academisation time-line to May 2018.

Despite these honourable efforts, the Headteacher and Chair of Governors have refused any dialogue with us until May!

A number of NEU members and many other local people have helped us mobilise support for our campaign. We have a Facebook page , 'Hands off our Highlands parents' and are onTwitter:@HPSstopAcademy.

We thank you for taking the time to read this article and hope you share our view that education is a right, not a business.

**Highlands Primary Anti-Academisation Group**

**Please send contributions to - mikepeters1@ntlworld.com**