

Charity Begins at Calais: Redbridge NUT in action



On October 17th around 20 people from Newham and Redbridge joined the convoy to Calais organised by Stand Up to Racism to deliver money (3600 euros) and aid that had been locally collected. Most were teachers from local boroughs' NUTs.

We were reminded of the grim reality of the situation there early in the day when we were delayed two hours at the Channel Tunnel due to two more young people being killed at its entrance, bringing to 16 the number who have lost their lives since June trying to seek refuge in Britain.

Later we were able to visit the warehouse of Auberge des Migrants. This is the reception and distribution centre for goods coming from Britain. It is run by a team of volunteers, mostly British, who sort donations and arrange for them to be given to the refugees. It is large, stacked high with food, clothes, footwear and camping gear. Saturday saw many arrivals, with vans and cars coming in while we were there from different parts of the UK.

There was a small demonstration of support for the refugees outside Calais port, which most of the group attended. It took place in the shadow of the layers of high fences, which represent the contribution of the British Government to this human crisis.

The Jungle

Many people from our group went into The Jungle during the afternoon. It is a sprawling camp in the dunes under the main motorway out of the ferry port, a long way from the town and totally isolated from it. Apart from water from stand pipes, there are no services whatsoever provided by the State or local government. The Camp has no roads, but mud tracks already deep in water. There are wooden huts roofed with plastic sheeting in the middle, with some shops or eating places run by refugees. There is a church and a mosque, a library in a hut and evidence of some activities, such as English classes. A medical team was working from a tent. Away from the centre, everywhere there isn't a bush or a tree, is a tent. There's a women's section of the Camp, which some of us were also able to visit.

It was a cold, rainy day. Winter will make the situation far, far worse. What is most striking is that the conditions here are deliberately engineered as an act of policy by governments. The refugees are kept in isolation and degradation in a calculated act of cruelty in order to give a clear message that new migrants are not wanted.

It's hard to know how to conclude, except to say that all who went remain determined to continue to support the refugees in Calais and to work with the organisations which help refugees in our area.

Andy Brown (Newham NUT)

Schools Then and Now

How have London schools changed since the 1970s? In this article, retired Redbridge NUT member, Barbara Roy-Macauley, interviews two teachers to find out.

1970s

Behaviour and Discipline

In this school, very high standards of behaviour were upheld in a top down model by an experienced and popular headteacher. The behaviour codes were written into a policy document that advised on how to reward and when to refer children to the head if needed. Stickers, stars, attendance certificates and assembly announcements re-inforced good behaviour. The Head of Lower school and a senior teacher would become involved with 'problem' young people.

Non-Contact Time

Teachers had 30 minutes non-contact time each week, made possible by the headteacher conducting a weekly 'singing assembly' on Fridays, to enable staff to do any urgent administrative tasks or marking. There were no official arrangements for 'cover' - e.g. no teaching assistants. However, in the event of teacher absences, classes were distributed amongst the remaining teachers. Non-teaching tasks included putting up displays, organising SEN activities and preparing for practical sessions. Also it was a regular responsibility to create a range of learning zones across the classroom.

Performance Management

When I started teaching, lesson observations were used to uphold what were then known in my school as professional standards. These observations were conducted by the headteacher twice each academic year, with findings discussed and written down. This was in addition to the half-termly monitoring of planning and record keeping.

INSET /CPD

There was regular half-termly professional development for the whole school, often arranged by the local authority. Each week there was a weekly staff meeting, of which the first hour was given over to delivering a session devoted to a curriculum area. This was intended to offer support to teachers in the delivery of the 'core' primary curriculum.

Year 3 teacher in an Outer London Borough

2015

Behaviour and Discipline

In this school, behaviour is on the whole very good. There is a structured system of rewards and this forms the focus of the discipline policy, with more emphasis put on it than on sanctions. A traffic light code system is used, so that if children are on red they are referred, after a short series of warnings, to the SLT (Senior Leadership Team). Children behave consistently well, with only a very small percentage of referrals. A SENCO (Special Needs Coordinator) becomes involved with pupils who have been referred.

Non-Contact Time

Staff have 1 hour 30 minutes non-contact time for staff development each week. I have a HLTA - (a Higher Level Teaching Assistant) who does displays and provides a range of teaching and learning support, so I am able to delegate certain tasks. In other schools which I know, this is not always possible. It was formerly common to use evenings and weekends for planning and paperwork.

Performance Management

The most significant aspect of this process is that there is always positive feedback. Class observations are time tabled but there are also drop-in performance visits as well.

INSET /CPD

There is regular professional development for the whole school, mainly in the form of half-termly sessions with invited specialists.

I have only been in this school for a year and do not hold a PSR, so I am not just focusing on one specialist area.

Year 3 teacher in an Outer London Borough

Notes about RRTA members:

Doris Greenstein has been in hospital. We wish her well. Doris was a primary teacher and NUT member and has been a supporter of the Redbridge Retired NUT members group since its inception. Her late Husband, Eddie, was a former President of Redbridge NUT and Secretary of Redbridge Trades Union Council.

A Better Way to Assess Progress



Testing of young children, however sugar-coated, can never be less than controversial. The introduction of a formal “baseline” test at five and the “rigorous” formal testing now promised by Nicky Morgan for seven-year olds, brings to the fore all the well-rehearsed arguments against. There is the added dimension of linkage to teacher appraisal and pay, league tables and a school’s performance as measured by Ofsted, with the threat of enforced academisation hanging over everyone’s head.

A national scheme of formal tests for young children is unreliable and tendentious, and cannot be considered an accurate assessment of all that has been assimilated, because it inevitably ignores much of the developmental learning that has gone on before compulsory school age and the multiple variables in a child’s life experience. As a marker of progress, it presupposes a common starting point at five (or even four?) and a subsequent rate of regular progression.

Can it ever be in an individual child’s best interest to make these snapshot judgments about achievement or the arbitrary distinctions between that child and his peers that such judgments entail? Is there an alternative way of discovering what children know and can do?

Well of course there is and it is one which is employed by parents and teachers the world over. It’s called observation! And it occurs cumulatively over long periods of time, during which there is close and constant interaction between adult and child. Early years teachers, in particular, have been trained to be observant, to engage in an internal running commentary on their pupils, writing actual notes and logging achievement or difficulty as appropriate, thus creating a diagnostic narrative which can be tapped into as required. Such teachers reflect on their practice and make adjustments according to what works.

Is it too much to suppose that, with an effective framework of training, the above approach could offer an effective way of assessing young pupils? I don’t think so and believe it’s time the Government woke up to the value of harnessing teachers’ precious skills. The present proposals are for a system that is inefficient and not “fit for purpose”.

Liz Dolan

Lemn Sissay at Redbridge’s Black History Month

Yet another year and Redbridge once again joined in this national celebration to promote Black contributions to British Society and to foster an understanding of Black history in general. On October 1st Lemn Sissay launched the Month by reading from some of his writings. Lemn’s poems were interspersed by him detailing his life experiences in care. Some of his revelations were thoroughly disturbing, for example, being forcibly kept away from his unmarried Ethiopian mother, who begged Social Services to have her baby back.

Highly recommended are three books of poetry - ‘REBEL WITHOUT APPLAUSE’ (1992) ‘MORNING BREAKS IN THE ELEVATOR’ (1999) and “LISTENER” (2008). All show Lemn’s reflections on a wide-range of matters, for example love, race, growing up in care and African colonial history.

All credit to this articulate, energetic, hardworking and inspiring individual, who this month was installed as Chancellor of the University of Manchester - a position that must rank among the greatest of his many accolades. What a triumph of the human spirit! You can follow Lemn on Facebook and read his daily blog.

Lydia Kirby

Your New RTA President

Greetings to all retired Redbridge Teachers' Association members – I am happy to say that, as of 31.8.15, I have joined your ranks. It feels as if a ten-ton weight has been lifted. However, I am conscious that the latest recruits and new generations of teachers will be receiving something far, far less generous than I have, and they will be (if they are 'lucky') working to 68 or beyond.

Just in case there was any chance of me sitting at home kicking my heels, my wife, the Governing Body I sit on, and the RTA have all come up with various ways of keeping me occupied. It was at the end of the Summer Term that Bob Archer and our Secretary, Kash Mallick, asked if I would be interested in putting myself forward as the next RTA President. There wasn't much to it really - just 'organising the agenda and chairing the meetings'. I think they were rather downplaying the job to be honest!

In truth, there is quite a lot more to it and puts into perspective the excellent job that my predecessor, Bob Archer, did for so many years. Fortunately for me, Bob is still on the scene and is an invaluable source of advice. Here are some of the things we hope to achieve in the coming year:

- Expand our 'rep density' in Redbridge schools – especially in the Primary sector
- Similarly, look to boost our profile in local Academies and Free Schools
- Increase attendance at RTA Meetings
- Get Supply and younger teachers involved in the Union
- Continue to raise the profile of the RTA
- Continue to work for the best possible pay and conditions locally and opposing unfair or discriminatory treatment whenever it is reported
- Continue to strengthen our international links
- ...and of course we wish to see the Retired Members' section go from strength to strength

I will be in the President's role until the end of this academic year, after which we have some very able people who will take it on.

I look forward to meeting many of you at a future event.

Nigel May

Retired Teachers` Convention '15



Kevin Courtney (NUT Assistant General Secretary), renewed the call for a single union. With the Government's policies of creating only Academies and Free schools that are not obliged to accept national agreements, he said that now, while existing unions are strong, was the right time for a new united teachers union.

It is essential that the Union has members in all Academies and Free schools - a goal which retired teachers can help to achieve. Now the Government is moving to ensure more schools (those adjudged by OFSTED to be coasting) will be forced to become Academies, essentially run by private companies with expertise in education, like the carpet company Harris!!! The views of parents, governors and, of course, teachers, who are described as a 'road block' to change, will be disregarded.

Earlier Alex Kenny, Chair of NUT Education and Equalities Committee, outlined the Government's PREVENT strategy. He explained that it was having a negative impact on young people, particularly those from a Muslim background. Alex questioned the use of the concept of 'British values' set against the idea of human values. and suggested that discussion will be shut down if teachers are expected to 'report' students whose ideas or conduct did not conform to the Government's idea of normal British behaviour. The silliness of this strategy was illustrated by a school in Birmingham with separate playgrounds for boys and girls that was put into special measures .

It was also reported that two thirds of teachers say their morale has declined in the last five years. The future under Nicki Morgan unfortunately looks as bleak as the last five years.

Bill Harrison