



NEU/NUT Redbridge Retired Members` Newsletter Winter 2018

The Dosh Ain't Everything But It Don't 'Alf Help!: From State to Private School



After forty-plus years of service in state education, I finally retired in July 2017 ... or so I thought. Shortly after my retirement I received an offer of temporary maternity cover employment for two days a week at a local 'independent' school, which put me in something of a quandary. Should I or shouldn't I take it? On the one hand, it would be an interesting new experience, an opportunity for me to provide the students with valid alternative ways of looking at the world as well as an additional source of income. But, on the other hand, would it be ideologically unsound to help the already privileged and contribute to the process of inequality in the UK.

Into the Private Sector

Anyway, I decided to give it a go. So, what did I find? Well, unsurprisingly, there were aspects - the pomp and circumstance, the gowns and hoods and the close links with the Church and the armed forces - which most state school teachers would be unlikely to take to. However, against this, there were an abundance of features that they would surely love: ample teaching resources; small class sizes; a lovely physical environment; students who appeared to respect, and thrive in, this environment; free tea, coffee, and lunch for staff; a thoroughly decent headteacher who was empathetic to the needs of staff and who, amongst other laudable goals, stressed the importance of fostering kindness in students; a management culture which, while requiring responsibility from staff, displayed a distinct absence of over-bearing, unproductive interference and silly flavour-of-the-month initiatives; and a wonderfully broad curriculum.

Idealistic Dreams?

"Ok", I hear you say, "we'd all like this! But wouldn't it involve pots of money to implement across state schools which they patently don't have?" Well, obviously the answer is "yes" and, even with an austerity-free, Corbyn-led Labour Government in power, it would almost certainly be unaffordable for state schools to completely go down this road. But surely a movement in the direction of the resource-rich model of the private sector would be possible and desirable. And why shouldn't all kids be able to enjoy the benefits that those in the private sector enjoy? If there's more than £100 billion available to spend on such things as the Trident nuclear missile renewal programme, designed to end life on earth, then why not a few extra bob to invest in our young people, the future of life on earth?

Henry Tiller

The Day Proust Turned Up



‘Rosina, can you get over ‘ere quick? Some more of them posh books ‘ave come’.

This was the voice of my library assistant announcing from the stockroom that another consignment of 50 free, hardback books had arrived for our comprehensive school library in Dagenham. ‘The Millennium Library’ was a gift of 250 copies of specially selected examples of great world literature for each school, intended to inspire and raise the reading aspirations of all secondary pupils across the country in the year 2001.

Out-of-Touch Government Bureaucrats

A worthy project, but had the movers and shakers behind this scheme ever encountered any real teenagers?

My library resembled a smart bookshop with brightly covered paperbacks, which were enticingly displayed with their front covers facing the readers. Students were eager at least to try them out, and more often than not, actually read them. The covers of these Millennium Library books were black, beige and hard with not a visual image in sight. The pages were tightly packed with dense text and would have relentlessly weighed down a teenager’s school bag.

Maybe if the cover of ‘Crime and Punishment’ had pictured a blood-stained axe, or Clausewitz’s ‘On War’ had given us some exciting weaponry, we could have made an attempt to encourage our students even to just pick them off the shelves. But as books like The King James Bible, Machiavelli’s ‘The Prince’, Homer’s ‘The Iliad’ and Dante’s ‘Inferno’ continued to arrive, our hearts sank. The final blow was the arrival of four volumes of Proust’s ‘In Search of Lost Time’ with over 2,500 pages of written text between them.

We decided to display some of the more likely novels that could have possibly attracted easy to motivate students. But there were no takers – ever.

Missed Opportunity

I would be the first in the queue to say that most teenagers would benefit from exposure to the classics and yes, we always wanted to raise levels of aspiration. But the presentation of these examples of great works were first of all visually off-putting, and secondly, inappropriately chosen for the majority of teenage readers. If only teachers had been consulted.

The £3,000 spent on each school could have provided a wealth of stimulating literature, which would have been read and appreciated. The money represented just under half of my book fund capitation at the time and in an area of cultural deprivation, it could have made a real difference to what was available for our Dagenham students.

I have nothing against Proust and may one day tackle him myself, but the thought of those four volumes always reminds me of a unique opportunity which was wasted through blatant disregard for the expertise and opinions of teachers by those in the corridors of power.

Rosina Purnell

Save King George's Hospital Campaign

In November 2017, after years of campaigning to keep open King George A&E, NHS managers gave residents a promise to review the closure of King George A&E.

The promise is contained at the East London & Care Partnership website. The document is the "Revised clinical strategy for King George Hospital".

Wes Streeting MP called it a "watershed" moment for the campaign. However, by July of this year it became clear that the promise had been broken. As a consequence, Redbridge Council put up a statement on their website saying the Council would fight "tooth and nail" for our A&E.

The Save King George Campaign team at savekinggeorgehospital.blogspot.com have booked Ilford Town Hall for a meeting for the 25th November at 3pm to say the NHS need to keep their promise but in an extraordinary development, Redbridge Labour and Conservative parties are refusing to send speakers, instead preferring a "behind the scenes campaign". The Councillors gave their reasoning at a Town Hall meeting – see <https://www.redbridge.gov.uk/about-the-council/public-meetings/full-council-audio-20-september-2018/> when a King George petition was discussed.

Andy Walker

2018 Retired Teachers' Convention



Delegates at the 2018 Convention in London discussed a range of issues, including the role of the NEU in meeting the needs and priorities of retired members and social care. **MP**

We Do Like To Be Besides the Seaside



On a bright day in early October a dozen retired Redbridge teachers set out from Barking for

a day in Southend. There they enjoyed a brisk 1.33mile walk out into the Thames Estuary on the longest pier in the world. After enjoying a coffee and cake (or two!) they returned to the shore to partake of a fish and chip lunch before catching the train back to Barking. A mildly energetic day, mixed with wide ranging, convivial conversation was had by all.

Look out for further social activities with Redbridge Retired Teachers (RRTA)

Bill Harrison

Social at Belgique

One of our regular social meeting locations for the RRTA is the Belgique in Wanstead. Seven of us attended a coffee morning on the 4th of July, where we were treated to tea/coffee and an assortment of delicious pastries to choose from.

The conversation is not always about politics but it was very interesting to hear from one of our members about proposals for a new swimming pool in Wanstead before it appeared in the press.

You never know who you might meet at one of these social gatherings and I was delighted to encounter Barry, who used to teach at Gilbert Colvin Primary just before I started working there.

Retired members are always welcome at our social events and it would be lovely to see more of you.

Our Christmas get-together will be at the same venue - Belgique, 29 Cambridge Park, Wansted E11 2 PU - from 10.30am on Thursday 6 December

Sandra Hardman

**The RRTA Newsletter welcomes all kinds of contributions from readers.
Please send yours to: mikepeters1@ntlworld.com**

To Convert Or Not to Convert: The Catholic Church and Academisation



Below we reproduce an edited version of a posting on Catholic Schools Blog listing objections to proposals to group all Catholic schools in Brentford Catholic Diocese into Catholic Academy Trusts (CATs).

(picture) Around 70 parents at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School agreed at a meeting in Wanstead to ask the Bishop to allow more time to consider plans to take the school into a Catholic Academy Trust.

Local Catholic schools are weighing up whether they should become academies within Catholic Academy Trusts (CATs) sponsored by Brentford Catholic Diocese. However, the National Education Union (NEU) believes this would be an unnecessary and risky move.

The overall cost of this change has been huge: the National Audit Office recently concluded that £745 million has been spent on converting schools into academies since 2010-11 - money spent on administrative costs and legal fees, not on the education of our children.

Costs of Academisation

The cost to the education system has been more than monetary. A recent report by Institute of Education researchers concluded that reforms introduced since 2010 have led to more social stratification in the school system. They also said the academies programme has led to the development of a “more complex and less accountable form of bureaucracy that lacks any local democratic mandate.” The Church has long worked closely with local authorities to provide education for pupils in its 2,000-plus schools.

The arguments the Government has put forward in favour of schools becoming academies and joining multi-academy trusts MATs are now discredited, including the idea that they improve outcomes and performance. The academies programme has also been sold as increasing autonomy for schools while in fact the opposite is true, as a recent report by the London School of Economics concluded. There has also been a major shift in the policy context over the last year which should make schools and Diocese reconsider the idea of forming more CATs.

Shift in Opinion

Until recently, pushing schools down the academy route has been backed up by legislation and a Government policy agenda which aimed to achieve a fully-academised school system in England by 2022. But the Government has now made a significant u-turn. This change in tone from Government now means that schools that were previously committed to converting are re-evaluating the situation. Catholic schools in Camden and Islington in north London also recently decided not to pursue a proposal by the Diocese of Westminster to create a trust made up of the two borough's Catholic schools. These are sensible decisions: a move towards academy status represents a considerable risk to schools and does not offer any benefits. The NEU does not believe there is anything to gain from becoming part of a CAT at the current time. However, both children and young people, and the education system as a whole, has potentially a great deal to lose.