

WHAT A WASTE!

Kingston Free School - a shameful waste of public money

On June 19th 2014, Michael Gove announced, on behalf of the 2010-2015 Coalition government, the opening of 38 new primary schools. This included the Kingston Community School, a “free” school to be run by the Christian organisation Chapel Street Trust.

Permission was granted to open in September 2015 as a two-form entry primary school to become a three-form entry secondary school from 2017.

Later, the Education Funding Agency (EFA) bought – for a sum unspecified but thought to be somewhere between £8m and £10m – a site in Norbiton containing a 5-storey office block.

There was considerable doubt as to the suitability of the site as it stood. In a meeting held in September 2014, interested parents were told by the Trust’s Chief Executive that “*The site would not have been taken on if they (the Education Funding Agency) could not add (to) or configure it.*”

Not long after, the EFA announced that the existing block was “not fit for purpose”, and would have to be demolished. A new building was needed and the Chapel Street Trust was asked to submit plans for a new 4-storey school building, together with a

mixed-use 6-storey building featuring 25 flats. The cost was estimated to be £7.6m.

Despite this, parents were encouraged to apply to the school for places in its first cohort of 60 reception children in September 2015.

The initial public consultation took place between 3pm and 6pm on July 16th and 17th 2015, having been announced only on July 9th in the *Kingston Guardian* (a free newspaper not circulated at all widely in the area).

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MORE STORIES LIKE THIS?

Since the Coalition government began to promote “free” schools in 2010, concern has grown about the number of half-baked and failing projects upon which public money has been spent at a time when (we are told) it is in short supply.

We draw the attention of CASE members to one such example in the London Borough of Kingston but, up and down the country, there must be many others.

Members are asked to send in accounts of similar abuses of which they are aware in their own locality. The editor will be glad to print them. Please send as attachments to pykemichael1541@aol.com

CASE believes in a fully comprehensive, locally accountable and democratic education system.

KINGSTON FREE SCHOOL

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At this meeting, Graeme Hodge, the Development Director of the Trust, implied that, having spoken to many "key stakeholders", it was vital to get feedback from the community before any planning submission was made.

Given the lack of adequate notice of the meeting, it would not be surprising if Norbiton residents concluded that this "consultation" was something of a sham.

It was already clear that the 60 reception children could not go to school on the intended site in Norbiton by September 2015 and that the EFA had to find an alternative site.

In April 2015 they had hired from the NHS, and refurbished, a former clinic, situated ¾ mile away. This NHS building will be required again by 2017.

On September 25th, 2015, the plans were submitted to Kingston Council and interested parties were given a period from October 2nd to November 6th in which to respond. The relevant information was only sent out to residents in the very immediate vicinity of the proposed building and did not at all cover the full area that would be affected by the environmental impact of the plans.

As well as the enormous misgivings of the Norbiton residents, there are serious educational reasons for casting doubt on the project as a 21st century school.

Now that the residential block is part of the plans, there is no room at ground level for anything but a small playground for reception children.

Consequently the playgrounds are on the top of a split level 3/4 storey building. The dining room, school hall, sports and kitchen facilities are to be in the basement area with very little or no daylight.

Whatever the outcome of the planning committee's initial decision, it is feared that the go ahead will be given.

The embarrassment to the government, due to the lax and frankly shambolic approach of the EFA, will be exacerbated if planning permission is refused.

Pressure will undoubtedly be put on the planning department by the Government, with a very sympathetic Kingston Council eventually passing the plans.

TEACHER SHORTAGE: OFSTED AND DfE IN CONFLICT

In the last CASENotes we drew attention to the looming crisis in teacher recruitment and retention. In the meantime government ministers have repeatedly denied that there is any problem.

Unfortunately for Nicky Morgan and her ministers, the Chief Inspector does not seem to agree, stating that we are in the midst of a serious recruitment crisis, especially in "isolated, coastal and disadvantaged areas".

Mary Bousted, General Secretary of Association of Teachers and Lecturers, completely concurs.

In a recent article in the "Times Educational Supplement", Dr Bousted points out that, while pay restraint and a rising graduate recruitment market have historically produced difficulties in the recruitment of a well-qualified teaching force, we now have an added ingredient: *"the reality that for too many teachers the job has become impossible to manage if they are to still have personal lives. So, in addition to inadequate pay rewards and the lure of other career options, there is the daily grind under which too many teachers labour. **Teacher retention is now as great a problem as teacher recruitment.**"*

Bad as this is, an incompetent government has made matters even worse by insisting on introducing a market-based model of teacher training which favours already advantaged schools at the expense of the rest.

As the Chief Inspector points out: *"There is huge competition for good teachers. With fewer trainees coming through, it has become a buyers' market. Trainees can take their pick of the schools they want to work at when they qualify. Unsurprisingly, the majority opt for a well-performing school in a nice area. So it is no surprise that challenging schools in deprived or isolated communities find recruitment hardest".*

Dr Bousted points out that 20% of secondary school lessons in Maths and English are now being taught by teachers without an A-level in the relevant subject, a situation which is fair neither to pupils nor teachers and which current policies can only exacerbate.

"Any solution", she concludes, "will require three key elements: an effective, national structure for teacher training which provides clear entry routes and pathways to Qualified Teacher Status; better pay to attract graduates into teaching and to keep them there; and more rewarding and manageable working lives for teachers."

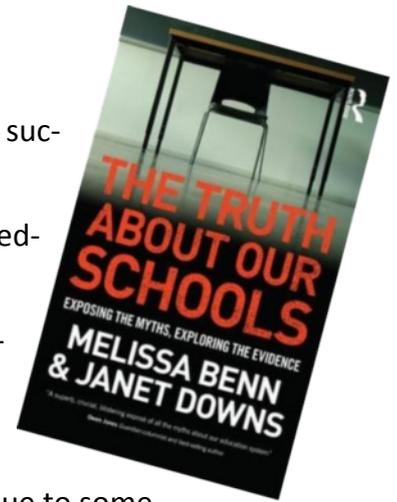
THE TRUTH ABOUT OUR SCHOOLS

BY MELISSA BENN AND JANET DOWNS

This short volume, invaluable to anyone interested in promoting the cause of comprehensive schooling, began life as an e-book, published by the excellent Local Schools Network (www.localschoolsnetwork.org.uk) but is now available in paperback.

The core of the book is an examination of what the authors identify as eight myths that have become current in much of modern educational discourse. These are:

1. That comprehensive education has failed.
2. That Local Authorities control and hold back schools.
3. That choice, competition and markets are the route to educational success.
4. That choice, as embodied in the “free” school model, will improve education in England.
5. That turning schools into “academies” is an effective means of raising standards.
6. That school teachers do not need to be professionally qualified.
7. That the economic and social success of the privately educated is due to some indefinable quality possessed by private schools.
8. That “progressive” education is incompatible with high standards.



That these are beliefs widely held, not only by right wing commentators but also among the metropolitan “chattering classes”, is indisputable and Benn and Downs perform a great service by exposing their essential falseness, simply by producing the evidence.

The book is also enlivened with quotations, some of them from ostensibly unlikely sources. This, for example, from *Daily Mail* columnist Sarah Vine (wife of Michael Gove), whose comprehensive schooling “provided me with a broad education...in life. And in the realisation that you shouldn’t judge people by their clothes, or where they live, but by who they really are regardless of circumstances; that kids studying to be hairdressers deserve as much respect as those wanting to be rocket scientists.”

Or this from Andrew Adonis:- “It is seriously disabling for students going to exclusive fee-paying schools that they see so little of society. They mix in a very narrow social medium. They don’t for the most part meet the most of the rest of society, including those who don’t have parents of substantial means. If what we want is a one nation society, it is not good for them and it is not good for wider society.”

Given the book’s unanswerable case against the current mythology, one is bound to ask why the latter is so persistent and why those politicians who claim to be liberal and progressive are apparently in thrall to the same nonsense.

E-ACT – NO ADVERTISEMENT FOR ACADEMISATION

The academy chain E-Act, formerly known as Edutrust, has announced that it is to replace its governing body with the ludicrously named “academy ambassadorial advisory bodies”.

These will be chaired by appointees of the chain and “*play a central rôle in celebrating the academy’s achievements*”. As the following history shows, they will have to employ an imaginative advertising copywriter to find something to celebrate.

Early problems: Edutrust changed its name to E-Act after financial irregularities were exposed in 2009 and following the resignation of its initial Chairman, Lord Bhatia.

Accusations of financial mismanagement: In 2011 E-Act was criticised for paying its Chairman, Bruce Liddington, an excessive salary. He resigned in 2013 when a financial notice to improve was issued. In 2014 the Trust was reported for breaches of the Charity Commission code and was accused of extravagant expenses.

Poor academic performance: In 2013 the exam results for E-Act academies overall fell below the Government’s floor targets. **In February 2014 the chain was ordered to hand back ten “failing” academies to be given to other academy trusts.**

Current schools: E-Act currently runs 23 academies, of which only two are new schools. Of the remaining 21 which replaced existing schools, only six have improved Ofsted ratings. Of the other schools, six have the same grade as before while eight have worse ratings.

Overall, the average grading is the same. **Only one, Heartlands Academy, is rated as “outstanding”, a status it had achieved before it became an academy.**

Conclusion: The main problem seems to be with the Trust itself, rather than the individual schools, so why take away local and parental involvement? **A better approach would be to increase the local oversight of the schools and give more, not less, power to the parents and governing bodies.**

“CONFUSED, FRAGMENTED, AND LACKING IN TRANSPARENCY”

The Education Select Committee has voiced a number of scathing criticisms of the system of **Regional Schools Commissioners**, introduced by the Coalition government in 2014. The Select Committee Chair, Neil Carmichael, said, “*Regional schools commissioners were introduced as a pragmatic response to a problem – the growing number of academies and the need for oversight of them. They’re doing a necessary job, but the oversight system is now confused, fragmented, and lacking in transparency. It’s hardly surprising that most people have never heard of RSCs, and even those who have are unclear about their rôle. RSCs are a product of the Department’s ‘acting first, thinking later’ approach when it comes to big changes in the schools landscape.*”

And he added: “The DfE needs to take a long hard look at this picture once the number of academies stabilises, and design a more coherent system for the future which ensures proper accountability for schools.”

It will be interesting to see if the DfE’s response to the committee’s **27** (yes, really) recommendations manages to emerge before the Chilcot Report. CASE is not holding its breath!

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