

# FORUM FOR THE DISCUSSION OF NEW TRENDS IN EDUCATION

Autumn 1978  
Volume 21  
Number 1

85p

## **New Opportunities: the Lower Birth Rate**

**Opportunities brought by the Lower Birth Rate**  
*The Editors*

**16 to 19. Wanted: A New Will**  
*Caroline Benn*

**Shrinking Primary Schools**  
*Eric Davies*

**The Inner-City Village School**  
*Forum Reporter*

**Discussion**  
*J. Kelwyn Richards*

**Vertical Grouping: a Practice or a Principle?**  
*Annabelle Dixon*

**Vertical Grouping in Secondary Schools**  
*Diane Griffin and R. A. Smith*

**Completing the London School Plan**  
*James Rudden*

**The Open Sixth**  
*Harvey Black*

**Reviews**  
*Andrew Finch, Jean Rudduck, Clyde Chitty*

# Editorial Board

**Michael Armstrong**, Sherard Primary School, Leicestershire.

**Clyde Chitty**, Earl Shilton Community College, Leicestershire.

**Michael Clarke**, Little Hill Junior School, Leicestershire.

**Annabelle Dixon**, Chalk Dell Infant School, Hertford.

**Margaret Gracie**, West Moors Middle School, Dorset.

**H Raymond King** Ex-Headmaster, Wandsworth School, London

**Roger Seckington**, Earl Shilton Community College, Leicestershire.

**Byron Thomas**, Broughton Astley Primary School, Leicestershire.

**Peter Thomson**, Judgemeadow Community College, Leicester.

**Roy Waters**, ILEA Inspectorate.

**Harvey Wyatt**, The Woodlands School, Coventry.

*Editors* **Brian Simon**, School of Education, University of Leicester.

**Nanette Whitbread**, School of Education, Leicester Polytechnic.

*Editorial Communications.* MSS and contributions to discussion (800 words maximum) should be addressed to the Editor, 11 Pendene Road, Leicester, LE2 3DQ. Tel: Leicester 705176.

## *Business information*

Correspondence relating to subscriptions etc, should be addressed to The Manager, 11 Beacon Street, Lichfield WS13 7AA. Tel: Lichfield 51159.

Reductions available on bulk orders of current number. (e.g. 10 copies for £6.)

**Forum** is published three times a year, in September, January and May. £2.50 a year or 85p an issue.

# Opportunities brought by the Lower Birth Rate

## The Editors

What are we to make of the discussion about the declining birth-rate and its effect on education? One of the most authoritative analyses of the situation, by Professor Bernard Benjamin<sup>1</sup>, challengingly entitled **The Decline in the Birth-rate: towards a better quality of life**, specifically outlines the advantages for education, in terms of increased opportunities for nursery schooling, smaller class sizes in all schools, an increase in individual tuition, greater stability of staffing. **The Editorial board of this journal strongly supports this view. The lower birth-rate opens new opportunities – these must be seized; and with both hands.**

But first, let's get the facts straight. The birth-rate has shown a long term decline since the late nineteenth century. Everyone should have been aware of this – planners especially. Within this secular decline short term reverse trends have shown themselves; immediately after the two world wars, and (exceptionally) in the period 1955 to 1965. But the main trend has consistently been down. In the inter-war period, for instance, the school population declined by nearly one million. It was this which ameliorated, to some extent, the harsh economy measures which consistently hit education during that bleak period. This has lessons for us now.

Over the last 14 years, annual births have declined from the peak of 876,000 (in 1964) to 569,000 (in 1977). The latest returns for early 1978 indicate a slight turn upwards; but it is too early yet for any firm conclusions to be drawn as to future trends. This means that, using the increasingly obsolete primary/secondary division, the primary school population has already declined from about 5,500,000 in 1972 to just over 5,000,000 in 1977 – and will decline further to 4,300,000 in 1981. The secondary school population, on the other hand, (those below the school leaving age), which was 3,400,000 in 1972, rose to 4,150,000 in 1977, but thereafter declines to just over 4,000,000 in 1981, falling more steeply in the mid-1980's, perhaps to rise again in the 1990's if the birth-rate now turns upwards.

This projected decline in the school population follows a period of massive expansion. In 1946 there were 5,000,000 pupils in schools; thirty years later, in 1976, there were 9,000,000 – almost twice as many. Part of this expansion was, of course, due to deliberate government policy: the school leaving age was raised twice, in 1947 and 1972, bringing two new age-groups into the schools. The rest of this increase was due to the two birth-rate rises experienced during this period. If, in an era of expanding numbers measures to *extend* school life were quite deliberately taken, then in an era of declining numbers similar measures, both to extend educational opportunity and to improve the quality of education can surely also be undertaken. In terms of capital investment such measures, if properly planned, can now be carried through at less cost than is possible in an expanding system.

The first conclusion, then, is that instead of crying 'Woe! Woe!', clear and precise plans should be put forward, discussed and determined on to utilise to the maximum the opportunities which the decline in the birth-rate now makes possible. The objective should be to utilise existing resources, in terms of buildings, equipment, and the teaching force, to the full to implement a carefully thought out programme of educational advance.

There are, of course, those who argue that the opportunity must be taken to move in precisely the opposite direction, and to cut back educational expenditure to the maximum in the new circumstances. But these have always been with us – from at least the time of the Geddes axe and before. In our next issue we will be publishing an article by Professor Maurice Peston on the economics of education over the coming period which will deal precisely with this issue. At this point we can say that, given the will to bring about a decisive improvement both in the quantity and quality of education, the declining birth-rate presents an opportunity greater than at any time in the past, and one that must and can be seized in the coming decades.

If we start from this perspective, is it correct to talk in terms of the threats imposed by a declining school population at all? While pupils of compulsory school age will decrease substantially, as we have seen, what about those both younger and older than these years (5 to 16)? The 'participation rate' of under fives in school in 1977 (that is, three- and four-year-olds, both full-time and – most of them – part-time) now stands at 48% (a total of 478,000 children)<sup>2</sup>. It has increased substantially over the last five years, partly as a result of the nursery programme, and is planned to increase further. But now, and over the next few years, is precisely the time to push this rate up to well beyond the present figure. Such was the Plowden perspective, which proposed that such facilities should be available to *all* who wanted them, as, indeed, they are in France and Belgium where pre-school provision is utilised by over 80% of 3-year-olds and over 90% of four-year-olds. Facilities on these lines could be provided over the next five, or, at most, ten years, bringing approximately another 300,000 children into school. This implies not only an imaginative programme of reconstruction and conversion of existing primary school buildings, ensuring that *appropriate* pre-school provision is made for all, rather than cramming children into reception classes in primary schools – it also requires immediate steps to train (or re-train) teachers with the specific skills required for pre-school education. Ad hoc arrangements, both as regards teachers and buildings, must be avoided if the maximum advantage is to be gained from these measures. The objective should be the provision of effective pre-school arrangements covering the country as a whole – a measure long recognised as desirable on educational grounds.

## The post-16s

Turning now to the post-16s – this is the second area that most urgently needs attention, as current events are making abundantly clear. The perspective here must be to provide at last effective, and compulsory, education and training for these entire two age-groups (16 to 18). This, after all, was actually written into the 1944 Act (and was in the original 1918 Bill), but it has never been implemented. If the leaving age was raised twice in the last 30 years, cannot we plan now to raise it again to 18 in the next 20 years (or less)? Present arrangements and facilities for the 16 to 18 age groups are a national scan-

dal, as Caroline Benn points out in detail in her article in this issue. The present plan to provide maintenance grants (with a means test) for those staying on at school, starting in September 1979, is a beginning; for all its weakness it points the way forward. What is required over the next ten years is the implementation of a radical plan to bring the entire 16 to 18 age group under **educational** guidance with the aim of providing effective systems of combined education and training (with work experience) for all. This would be a major operation and would certainly require some fundamental re-thinking and experiment in course design to ensure that courses are seen as relevant and worthwhile by young people today. While this, of course, does not imply that the whole age group will require full-time schooling, it does imply that school facilities be made available (alongside those in technical colleges) in a big way as a basic resource for this development. If we assume that roughly one-third of the 16 to 18 age-group require school facilities (as full-time equivalents), this would increase the school population by roughly another 450,000 students.

These two measures, taken together, would involve an actual increase in the school population of about 750,000, thus considerably offsetting the projected decline in the number of compulsory school age pupils. To carry through bold measures of this kind requires, of course, the most careful planning, adaptation of buildings, retraining and deployment of teachers, and the development of effective curricula. It requires flexible strategy and tactics. But provided the decisions are made on which such planning could be based, there is nothing impossible here.

This, of course, is not the context in which the 'problem' of declining school rolls is normally discussed. Instead it appears to be assumed that no significant steps will be taken relating either to the 16 to 18 age groups or the pre-school population. So administrators and others are faced with the very real problem of running down the school system with least agony to those directly concerned – teachers, parents and pupils. What is proposed here is that the government, which has responsibility to give *national* leadership, approaches the issue from the standpoint of the new opportunities offered, rather than pursues what appears to be the present policy of drift, of just letting things go, with perhaps a tinkering here and there. Such a policy is in no one's conceivable interest.

## The compulsory system

If we turn now to the compulsory school system as it actually exists, what new opportunities are presented here? First and certainly most important, the long awaited opportunity radically to reduce the size of classes and the pupil-teacher ratio. In spite of increasing school populations in the 1960s, both Sweden and Denmark took the opportunity of the relative affluence of those years to do precisely this – particularly in the primary schools. Class sizes in primary schools in both these countries only rarely exceed 20 – most are of the order of 15 to 20.\*

In Britain it has always been official policy to have larger classes in primary than in secondary schools. In view of the admitted complexity of the primary teacher's job, this is no longer acceptable, and it is surely time to reverse this principle – or at least to equalise class sizes and ratios between primary and secondary education. The pupil-teacher ratio in primary schools has in fact declined over the last ten years or more (from 23.2 in 1966 to 20.3 in 1976). But even today, according to the D.E.S. (Green Paper), 45% of primary classes exceed 30 pupils while some still exceed 40. Now is the time to bring the pupil-teacher ratio down to a figure allowing a maximum of 25 children a class. Such a policy, if officially accepted, would ensure a radical improvement in the quality of education, and allow many primary schools with decreasing rolls to maintain sufficient staff to ensure an effective education for all. This issue is discussed further in Eric Davies's article in this issue, while *Forum Reporter's* graphic article on the resistance to closure of an inner-city 'village school' also bears closely on this topic.

## The secondary field

But the real problems arise in the secondary field on existing assumptions, and, of course, the decline in the compulsory school population has a differential impact in different areas – inner city schools are already suffering the effects, and will do so more in the future unless

countervailing measures, such as those proposed for the 16 to 18 age group, are energetically pursued.

Here, as Dudley Fiske and Peter Newsam among others have made abundantly clear, certain questions of principle need to be determined<sup>1</sup>. These concern two main issues. First, that of asserting the local authority's right to control recruitment to individual schools, as opposed to the anarchic technique of so-called 'parental choice' (and the irresponsible 'voucher' scheme); and second the definition (or determination) of a minimum teaching 'establishment' for each secondary school, ensuring its ability to offer to all its pupils a full, all-round, secondary education.

On recruitment, local authorities must have the right to define the maximum size of a school. Without this, as Peter Newsam has forcibly pointed out, schools will be subject to 'market forces' – some being oversubscribed, others undersubscribed. Present legislation (supported by legal decisions) allows these forces (through 'parental choice') to operate against the local authority's wishes and plans. This means that there can be no effective planning to cope with declining rolls, and that an atmosphere of uncertainty, lowering morale, pervades the whole system. The statutory action now being pressed for by local authorities would allow definition of the maximum size of each school, so providing a firm legal basis for asserting local control. The local authorities have the responsibility of ensuring an effective education for *all* their children and must, therefore have these powers. This is the condition for effective planning.

On school 'establishments', it is evident that, on almost any criterion, small schools need a higher teacher-pupil ratio to be able to offer what is generally accepted as a full secondary education to all their pupils. Precisely how this 'agreed minimum establishment', in Dudley Fiske's words, should vary according to size (and age range) of school needs careful thought and calculation. But that this principle be accepted is essential, and forward planning should be starting *now*. If, as is likely, there is a trend to smaller schools (and we would support this on educational grounds), then a larger proportional teaching force will be required than we have at present. There would be important educational pay-offs in this, since smaller classes allow for closer teacher-pupil relations, for more individual interaction between pupils and teachers, possibly for utilising vertical grouping (as discussed in two articles in this issue), and should allow teachers more easily to move over to unstreamed or mixed ability teaching,

---

\* This is based on personal observation. In Sweden the legal maximum in primary schools is 24; if this is exceeded the class must (by law) be split into two. Hence the smaller average size.

with all the advantages now known to accrue from this approach (see this page).

## A unique opportunity

In sum, the decline in the compulsory school age population which will take place in the next decade (it is expected to rise again in the 1990s) provides an entirely new set of perspectives for advance. This unique opportunity should be seized to provide effectively both for pre-school and post-school education. But in addition the chance must be taken to improve the quality of the educational process by radically reducing the size of classes both in primary and secondary schools. The case for such action is now stronger than ever. The Warnock report, outlining the conditions for implementing the agreed policy of integration of handicapped children, points inescapably to the need for smaller classes if this hard task is to be carried through effectively. Further, proper attention to the needs and character of ethnic minorities points unmistakably in the same direction. This, then, is the most important positive measure now on the agenda.

But, further than this, the new situation will make possible, and necessary, the implementation of in-service and induction plans long on the drawing board – it has been proposed that five per cent of the teaching force should be released for this purpose and there is no doubt that this could be done. And there are other possibilities as well. Margaret Jackson has pointed out that the fact that a million less children will be entering schools in the next five years will provide 'houseroom' for the development of community education – and this ties in with proposals about education as a life-long process. If community education becomes available 'as of right', as proposed<sup>4</sup> this again alters the complexion of the situation.

In short, the new conditions give new opportunities. This is the way to think about it, and to plan. The policy of drift must be reversed. What is wanted is a positive programme along the lines outlined here, to extract the greatest possible value from the new situation.

### References

<sup>1</sup> Professor Benjamin is Visiting Professor of Actuarial Science at the City University, London. He was formerly the Chief Population Statistician at the General Register Office (now the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys) and is a demographer of international repute.

<sup>2</sup> D.E.S., *Report in Education*, 92, June 1978.

<sup>3</sup> P Newsam, 'To Plan or not to Plan', *Times Educ. Supp.*, 20 January 1978. Dudley Fiske, Presidential Address to the Society of Education Officers, *Education*, 27 January 1978.

<sup>4</sup> *Times Higher Educ. Supp.*, 17 February 1978.

---

## Non-streamed Teaching

As we go to press, a lengthy assessment (or probe) by a working party of HMI's entitled *Mixed Ability Teaching in Comprehensive Schools* has been published. This is relevant to the editors' article since we argue there that the decline in the compulsory school age population enhances the possibility of moving to un-streamed grouping 'with all the advantages known to accrue from this approach'.

The HMI's document – an interesting phenomenon from various points of view – has been 'given the treatment' by the educational press and presented as yet another nail in the 'mixed ability' coffin. In fact the report contains no arguments against the principle of this form of grouping, and accepts that, where the transition has been properly thought out and prepared, and where resource support is available, 'work of high quality' is taking place, especially where teachers have a strong commitment and are skilled in their approach. Their general assessment appears to be that 'teachers of average ability' (a difficult concept) have difficulties, and that planning and support is often inadequate.

This document rests on a number of unexamined assumptions, and seems to hark back to the 1920's and 30's in its five-fold classification of children in terms of 'ability' (yet intelligence and IQ's are nowhere referred to). Children are classified as 'most able', 'more able', 'less able', 'least able' – implying presumably a fifth category 'averagely able' (or, perhaps, simply 'able'). Accurate perception as to which children fall into each category in the schools visited seems to come easily to HMI's (an innate ability?). While warning rightly against ineffectively prepared moves to non-streaming, the authors nowhere indicate what form of organisation they prefer (can we expect a report on prismatic streaming? On banding? On setting?). Nor is there one single reference to research on the issue – surely a serious cause for concern.

This report does, of course, raise important issues. We will return to it in our next number.

# 16 to 19. Wanted: A New Will

**Caroline Benn**

Caroline Benn is Information Officer of the Campaign for Comprehensive Education.

In the 16 to 19 sector falling numbers are not causing a crisis so much as revealing one: the long term economic slump in advanced western nations. This is reflected in inflation, unemployment, and cuts in public spending, including education. Until its deeper implications are resolved, society will have fewer jobs for teenagers, and those which exist in any age group, will be for the more highly skilled.

There is now a strong social incentive, even if disguised, to remove teenagers from the labour market. Something else has to take the place of a lifetime's career starting at 16 or 17 for many who formerly could count on it. In future most young people will not be settling into permanent employment until nearly twenty, or even after.

In plainer terms, this means either conscription (complete with the 'threat' to justify it) or education. As educators, if for no other reason, we must opt for education, or more particularly, for education and work combined.

## For all, not just for some

But as educators committed to the comprehensive principle, we have to be clear from the start that unless we look at each age group as a whole – not just at parts of it – we have little chance of getting a successful or lasting solution, or a system which is socially just. In this respect, we have been as limited in our vision as some who oppose comprehensive reform, in that we have tended to concentrate upon sixth form education alone rather than upon the education of all who have reached sixteen and seventeen.

Table I shows why this school concentration is limiting, for it shows the way this age group divides for education. Those in sixth forms in all schools – selective as well as comprehensive – are only 23% of the age group. Even all full-time education, including those in further education, takes only 33%. 40%, the largest group, get no education at all after 16. (See page 6).

From our point of view, however, the most significant figure ought to be the 37% receiving what education they do get, in the further education sector – as against the much smaller figure of 23% for schools. It is the further education sector which has to be brought in from the cold if we are to evolve a meaningful comprehensive education for everyone from 16 to 19 – and, of course, beyond, for there are few who do not now underwrite the idea of educational opportunities continuing for life.

## First things first

Before we consider the age group as a whole, however, it is necessary to understand why there has been such concern with sixth form education. This is because the need to end selection at 16-plus is every bit as necessary as at 11-plus, if equal opportunities are ever to prevail up to eighteen over all. Table II shows how far we still are from our goal. In secondary education as a whole only 69% are as yet in schools named comprehensive (and even some of these are not genuinely so). If this figure seems smaller than the official one, it is because official figures always omit the private and fee-paying schools from the national picture. This table does not. Because it does not, we can see that the effect of selection is even more crucial – in terms of numbers – after sixteen than before. For while 17% of all the secondary age group are in selective (and fee-paying) schools, in all sixth forms this becomes 38%. And for those who take A levels in school, 43% are in the selective and fee-paying schools. This is why creaming off even tiny percentages like 2% or 3% at eleven, can be so damaging to provision of a comprehensive sixth form education at 16-plus.

Thus it isn't only the concentration of better staffing, more courses, and better facilities in selective and fee-paying schools, which gives them their security and deprives comprehensives of their fair share of national resources, it is also the concentration of numbers. Selective and fee-paying schools, because they take only

**TABLE I**  
**16 and 17 year olds in Education, 1975/76**

<i>Type of Education</i>		<i>Percentage of Leavers</i>		
All Sixth Forms	23	}	23% (in schools)	33% (Full time)
Further Education				
Full time	10	}	37% (in F. Ed.)	27% (Part time)
Day Release	12			
Other	1			
Evening Courses	5			
Adult Education Institutes	9	}		
Not Having Education	40		40% (no educ)	40% (no educ)
	<u>100</u>		<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

Source: DES Statistics, Vol 1, 1976, Table 20; Vol III, Table 4, 1975. Leavers' total 1975 and 1976 combined (Vol II, 1976).

pupils whose previous attainment and family circumstances make it more likely they will stay after 16-plus, are protected during a period when population is falling, and comprehensive sixth forms hit all the harder because of it.

But numbers are not just a problem of 'falling' birth-rate or inner city depopulation. Even when population was rising in the 1960s, comprehensives' sixth forms had problems in keeping numbers up. Often it was selection concentrating numbers in selective schools in the area that caused so much concern about whether comprehensives' sixth forms were 'viable'. Sometimes it was a lack of any staying-on tradition.

The criterion for viability has been variable, of course, never laid down for the sixth form (any more than for 11 to 16). No-one has ever defined a comprehensive school in positive terms of the curriculum it should offer, or the range of courses or type of education it should have. It has only been defined negatively: as not selective in intake. From time to time individual authorities make a stab at a definition – the Inner London Education Authority recently said all school pupils should have 'access' to a minimum range of 12 to 16 A levels, for example – but usually this is proposed in the context of local rationalising schemes, not guidelines for the education of the age group as a whole (the ILEA, *Post-16 Education in Schools*, 1977).

National discussion on viability has concentrated upon whether it was best to develop all-through schools

or to go for two-year sixth form schools, the sixth form college schemes. Sometimes it seemed as if governments were listening to those who argued for the latter, but just as quickly a new string of decisions would give sixth forms to schools previously without them. Policy has been a see-saw, in fact.

The average comprehensive school sixth form was recently put at 82, the average grammar school at 130, and the sixth form school at 420 (House of Commons, 28 June, 1977). Obviously sixth form schools do not need to worry about numbers in the same sense the other two might. Their problem is the reverse. Most are conceived for such a small proportion of each age group, that when numbers demanding entrance start going up again – as they well might now that allowances for staying-on are to be given – some will not have room. These will have to become selective, as indeed, a third of them already are. By contrast the sixth forms in most all-through comprehensives are all set for expansion.

Such problems as these are one reason why many are drawn to the 'tertiary college' solution – where schooling stops at 16 and all education, including 'sixth form' work, is provided by further education. There's no doubt this is the most comprehensive of the schemes, and that it provides a working model to end the socially divisive and educationally wasteful situation of sixth forms running in competitive parallel with further education. But so far such arrangements have only been



**TABLE II**  
**Distribution of School Pupils, 1976**

<i>Type of School</i>	<i>Percentages</i>		
	in all Secondary Education*	in 16-19 Courses***	following A level Courses**
Fee-paying	8% } 17%	18% } 38%	21% } 43%
Selective	9% }	20% }	23% }
Comprehensive	69%	59%	55%
Secondary Modern	14%	3%	1%
	<hr/> 100%	<hr/> 100%	<hr/> 100%

Source: DES Statistics, Vol 1, 1976.

\* Table 1.

\*\* Table 20, % of all in such courses.

\*\*\* Table 20, excluding 5th year O level/CSE and 15-year-olds.

possible in only a few areas, mostly in the countryside, and mostly where a good further education centre already exists, as in Nelson. Such arrangements in towns are rarer still, and where they do exist, as in the Abraham Moss Centre in Manchester, they cost a lot – like any other purpose building.

Much as we might like to think of one solution in terms of institutional arrangements, this is not possible. Existing arrangements of all kinds are going to continue for a long time: all through schools, upper schools, sixth form schools, tertiary colleges. The DES and Ministers sometimes imply that because a single 'straight solution' is not possible in institutional terms, no attempt to weld a unity out of the manifest disunity is possible either. This is quite unacceptable, as more and more in the educational world are coming to realise.

Of course it would assist progress if we could create a single comprehensive system out of all the sixth forms before going on to try to build a comprehensive system bringing sixth forms and further education together. It would also help if sixth form curriculum reform could be tackled in the context of the future needs of the age group as a whole, rather than being examined so narrowly in terms of the needs of the tiny minority who get at least one A level: only some 15% of the age group (DES, Statistics, vol II). In other industrial countries – like Scandinavia or Japan or the USA or France – the proportion taking the 'academic course' at this age is far

higher: between 30% and 80%. One reason Britain has failed – twice – to agree upon reform is because its 'academic' group is confined to so small a proportion, while elsewhere it is at least double this size. Inevitably, failure to agree reform in the last ten years has meant pressure from the 'next' 15% of students we have come to refer to somewhat artificially as 'new sixth formers', as if they were an altogether different breed in terms of educability and future prospects. This is not the case, for many have succeeded in A level, while some early high attainers destined for A level have not. What separates these old and new sixth formers is social origins for the most part, and it is quite worrying to find established educational opinion making such hard and fast lines between them, as for example, were drawn in the DES *Annotated Agenda* for the Great Debate on the secondary curriculum (1977, p 10):

'separate consideration needs to be given to those with and without the potential to undertake some form of higher education'.

The whole point is that at entry to the 6th year of education, we do not always know who has this potential.

Failure to agree a new curriculum for the A level 15%, and thus expand this group, has inevitably forced the 'next 15%' to demand a meaningful course for itself. Thus CEE has been created, narrowly confined in its turn to that group which earlier receives grades 2-4 in

the CSE. Thus we plan ahead for the 21st century, locked into the attainment hierarchy of the past.

As well as being backward looking, a double track exam system has negative implications for numbers in comprehensive schools. For should the future force us to develop both CEE and the N and F replacement for A level, some sixth forms would have to nearly double their staffing and courses to run a full range of work in both (inevitably at the expense of larger classes lower down the school) – to say nothing of the increased cost of the exercise, as several chief education officers have already warned will occur. (See, for example, report of speech of Barry Taylor, CEO, Somerset, *Bristol Evening Post*, 9 September, 1976). Many comprehensive sixth forms will cease to be viable on their own, while selective sixth forms (many of whom would not attempt CEE anyway) would continue to be so.

Is it too late to argue for a single 'academic' course for the third of the age group probably now ready for it – which can be expanded to meet future demand – divided not by parallel tracks, but taken end on, as many have urged for so long? For example, Cyril Poster in 1973:

'The answer to the one-year stayer is surely to provide the possibility of interim assessment of what is basically a two-year course.'

(*Secondary Education*, June, 1973)

## Further education next

Even while the problems of the sixth form wait for a solution (and many are left in the invidious position of urging a double track examination system in the 6th year as keenly as they are urging the end to just such a system in the 5th year), we should be getting on with the second task of bringing further education and sixth forms together to form a new unified system. Both should operate under common regulations, offer an education with a common purpose and theme for every sixteen, seventeen and eighteen year old, however diverse their individual career aspirations or attainments. The task cannot wait, for until it is accomplished, there can be no basis upon which to build a fair, comprehensive and adequate educational service for everyone in the age group. Other countries have brought – or are bringing – their school-based and work-based and craft-based education together to provide

a coherent service for the age group. But Britain keeps postponing it.

Meanwhile, an ever more incoherent situation faces us. It isn't only that some students are in selective schools, some in comprehensive, and others in further education – often pursuing identical courses under very different conditions, but that the vast majority are at work and released, or at work and having to find education at night, or getting nothing at all despite an ever proliferating range of courses and qualifications: GCE, CSE, experimental CEE (and new TEC and BEC) and old OND and ONC and RSA and City and Guilds, to say nothing of a host of local courses, or world-wide ones like the International Baccalaureate. New courses are starting up (from the Training Service Agencies or the Manpower Services Commission) which are funded and controlled from outside education altogether – in the Ministry of Employment. Moreover, the same courses can be taught under different conditions and regulations; teachers with the same programmes can be on different pay scales. There are different allowances and award systems for different student groups, or for the same group in different places. Even the building guidelines are different for schools and further education, as a glance at DES Building Bulletins 5 and 25 show. Further education classrooms were planned so that 16- and 17-year-olds would have large classes in big classrooms, while schools were planned so that 16- and 17-year-olds would be in small rooms with small classes.

Small wonder that there have been calls for a new look at education after 16, and that these are getting more frequent. Many individuals have suggested a new look at 16-19, and professional bodies like the ATTI (and the NATFHE) have called for a coherent policy for the 16 to 19 sector on many occasions. **Forum** and The Campaign for Comprehensive Education did the same in a joint conference in 1974, when participants from both further education and the schools aired problems and posed solutions. At Coombe Lodge Further Education Staff College regular conferences have been held to review the progress towards a unified 16 to 19 sector, towards the 'one service' for this age group which the **Crowther report** envisaged (Ministry of Education, Central Advisory Council for Education, **15 to 18**, Vol I, p 422). As long ago as 1968, a Coombe Lodge Report argued that each local authority ought to be asked to integrate its school and college work. Very recently others have joined in the pressure. For example, Gordon Cunningham, Chief Officer of the Association of County Councils, has sug-

gested a National Commission on 16 to 19 Education (**Education**, 30 December, 1977).

The danger is not that nothing will ever be done, for eventually it must, but that it will be too long delayed, and then tackled only superficially: a few regulations unified, but no fundamental restructuring and rethinking. Meanwhile, the danger is that the piecemeal approach postpones the day of reckoning and will make a coherent policy all the harder when the time comes.

Despite the fact that the Labour Party's policy (see *Programmes, 1974/5/6*) is for a 'unification' of schools and further education colleges, and calls for local authorities to prepare 16 to 19 development plans, Labour Governments have not carried it out. Indeed, Labour ministers sometimes take great pains to stress the fact that they are not making a total approach. A Secretary of State, opening a conference actually titled 'Sixteen to Nineteen' in 1976 (23 March), stressed twice that

'It is *not* a conference about the 16 to 19 age group as a whole nor about their diverse educational needs.'

Precisely, that was the trouble. Despite its title. It was about one section of 16 to 19 only, those who leave at sixteen and get no further education. Certainly they have been shamefully neglected in the past, but are they best served now by being considered in total isolation? Moreover, under an approach which is based on logistics rather than educational principles? For on the same occasion the same Secretary of State said of schools:

'We must get maximum use out of resources we have (including human resources) and equipment.'

No-one doubts rationalisation may be required, but rationalisation without reorganisation, without a clear policy for 16 to 19 as a whole, risks increasing the incoherence, polarising the divisions and does not really deal with the problems effectively in the long run. Yet it gives the impression it can – just as the new 16 to 19 Unit, the Further Education Curriculum Review and Development Unit (see Press Release DES, 24 February, 1977) gives the impression it is about 16 to 19, when in fact it is only concerned with 'pilot schemes of vocational preparation at immediate post school level'. The earlier Training and Further Education Consultative Group for 16 to 19 (see DES, 31 December, 1976) gives the impression it is a unification exercise, but in fact it is concerned with that no-man's land between further education and some of the new projects sponsored by the Training

Services Agencies and the Manpower Services Commission. Many of these new projects are welcome, most are constructive, but they are only a drop in the bucket with reference to the needs of the 16 to 19 sector as a whole, and they are being set up in isolation from education policy as a whole.

As Gordon Cunningham wrote, everyone has ideas, but no-one has the authority to plan that 'package for progress'. The Government has not yet asked the local authorities to prepare plans, although Labour's stated policy was that all authorities be asked to

'prepare rational and unified plans for the development of the age group which should specify the role each of their schools and colleges is to play within a comprehensive framework'.

Since this policy has yet to be carried out, what usually happens in Britain is happening now: individual authorities are taking initiatives on their own, as they have for many years, to overcome problems in the 16 to 19 sector.

Many are forced into doing so because of falling numbers, particularly in large depopulating cities. In Inner London, for example, the staying-on boom of the 1960s, fuelled by the accessibility of 5th year examinations for so many who had previously been denied the opportunity, led planners to prepare for 61% entering the sixth form by 1980 (ILEA Paper, **Sixth Form Size and Structures**, RS633/1975). This will not be reached, so Inner London has asked for an

'area by area examination of the full range of education opportunities which can be economically provided'

(**ILEA Discussion Paper on Sixth Forms**, SJAC 31/77).

Schools are asked to co-operate with other schools, and both with local further education colleges. This last could mean a big step for Inner London, and many other local authorities, where the two sectors have been fairly separately operated up to now. But whether it gets taken in any significant way – in the absence of clear directives from an agreed national policy – is another matter.

Moreover, without guidelines each authority can interpret 'co-operation' differently, as they do. In some areas it is very small scale: in the case of schools, merely an exchange of a few pupils each year; in the case of schools and colleges, merely a handful from the schools sent for a typing course. In other areas, how-

ever, co-operation can mean full integration, as in West Oxfordshire, where the further education college and the five local schools operate as one service, pooling their work, and offering a joint, comprehensive programme for the combined students of all the schools and the college.

Co-operation can also mean selection, another danger. Many are the suggestions that selective schools co-operate with 16 to 19 reorganisation by providing the venue for each area's 'academic' work, or for 'specialisation' in certain academic subjects. In 1975 an HMI wrote in the *DES Trends* (1975, June, S Gunn, 'Using Existing Resources') stressing the necessity of 'resource sharing' between schools, and suggesting schemes where some pupils transferred from one school to another at 14. Public schools have from time to time offered to 'share' by suggesting comprehensives send them pupils who want certain language or science courses, while they send comprehensives their own pupils to use the sports or craft facilities, plans which simply overload the comprehensive facilities, already under strain from overuse, while depriving comprehensives of another academic subject; or, where pupils transfer for all their studies, of large pupil numbers. Several of these suggestions are based clearly on a view of comprehensives as poor relations in education, offering little of quality (see article by R Morgan, *The Director*, November, 1976). In other cases the poor relations attitude comes from the comprehensive sector towards further education. Thus in an otherwise excellent booklet on Scottish schools (*Writings on the Wall*, Central Federation of Trades Councils, 1977) the only reference to further education's role was as provider of link courses for the less able to 'relieve pressures in the school created by the non-academic pupils'.

## Principles of a unified system

No co-operation is going to work unless all institutions which are party to it, are treated as equals in the partnership, nor unless all schools and all colleges are involved in it. This is why guidelines are so important, and why they should be on the table for national discussion now.

Real equality among institutions means pooling work on a basis of fair sharing of resources, courses, and

students; equality for students means that regardless of where they are, all should have access to the same range of opportunities.

Locally this means seeing all forms of 16 to 19 education as one service in each area, in the context of 11 to 16 education preceding it, and the education from 18 onwards following it. Nationally this means ending the sterile debate about whether it is better to have all-through or tertiary schemes, when all kinds of schemes and arrangements are going to have to be used, and the job is to weld the various combinations into a new unified service.

But as well as reorganisation, the components of the education offered have to be discussed, and existing 16 to 19 courses re-examined from the point of view of long-term development of an education which meets the needs of the age group as a whole. The publications of the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education already commend a concentration upon the curriculum as the key to success, and suggest, as do others, a curriculum based on a 'common approach for common purposes' for the whole age group – not one centrally laid down, not wholly common, but developing in the direction of greater flexibility, with more common work. (*The Education and Training and Employment of the 16 to 19 Age Group*, NATFHE, 1977). In practice, this means fewer grouped or dead-end courses, offering only single track progress, and more modular course units, which students with a wide diversity of interests, and objectives, can combine in individual programmes.

Eventually, there will have to be another Education Act to provide 16 to 19 education for all. Can it avoid the great mistake of the 1944 Act's implementation when secondary education 'for all' was not 'for all', but instead had the majority offered a separate education in separated institutions, precluding any development in the direction of most towards academic study, while a minority were given a narrow academic course in another set of institutions, precluding development in many practical directions? This is the main question, will Britain make the same mistake twice?

## Education and work

A key to 16 to 19 unity could well be in the 'work' component, and here it is necessary to do some hard questioning of the trade union movement.

The TUC is quite right to criticise governments of the present and past for proceeding on the principle that if 'the education of the elite is adequate, all else will fall into place' (Len Murray, address to the 16 to 19 Conference, 1976, 23 March), but are the trade unions clear, in making their case for education for young workers, about whether this new type of education is to apply to all, or just to some – as in the past?

The CBI is quite clear, no doubt, that the school and work schemes they commend – for example, that schools send fifth-year pupils out to try manual work – are not intended to apply to their own sons at public schools (see CBI papers for the Great Debate, 1977). When selective schools are urged to get closer to industry, this is seen in terms of getting their leavers into top management jobs, not shop floor work. Similarly, few selective schools' careers masters will be advised, as a DES paper asks schools to make clear to their 16-year-old leavers

'to learn to accept how to make the best of jobs which are less than ideal'.

(Contribution of Schools to Preparation for Working Life, 16 to 19 Conference, 23 March, 1976, p 17.)

There are two types of 'school and work' education based largely on the social class of the students rather than on any educational policy. Is this what the trade union movement wants?

It is right for the TUC to call attention to the disgrace of a nation putting so much money into implementing the Robbins Commission's recommendations to expand universities in the 1960s, but to ignore the Henniker-Heaton Commission's recommendations in 1964 for more day release places. Since then, not surprisingly, day release has declined – so much for private industry's willingness to pay for workers' continued education (although they contribute around £25 million a year to public schools). The trade union movement is understandably anxious to press the government now to give adequate maintenance allowances for students over 16, and to get day release made compulsory for all employers. But will compulsory day release – taken in isolation – be enough for the 1980s and 1990s? If it comes without any restructuring of the 16 to 19 system, could it not increase, rather than end, the 16 to 19 polarisation – both academic and social? Compulsory day release has been the rule in Germany since the beginning of this century, and is now being questioned for just this divisiveness in relation to full-time schooling (see Edu-

cation, 27 August, 1976). Recently the German Education Minister referred to the two sectors as 'the tramp's road' and the 'royal road' (Alfred Rohde, Federal Minister of Education).

A key question is whether some combination of work and education isn't the right prescription for all between 16 and 19, not just some? Not everyone would have the same combination, but all would have some of each; and technological, vocational and social service education would enjoy equal status with the traditional academic studies. Other countries have seen the subject of work as a key in making progress for 16 to 19 education. Sweden, for example, set up a Royal Commission on school and work in 1970, and is now busy implementing recommendations. A British headteacher who studied these plans on a recent visit writes:

'It is likely that all courses beyond sixteen will be reorganised into short modules so that students can more easily combine practical experience out of school with their academic studies.'

(*'Work Experience for All'*, Peter Mann, *Comprehensive Education*, Issue 37, 1978.)

Unfortunately, because the discussion about school and work is taking place in Britain in such a limited context for such a limited proportion of each age group, it is sometimes seen as mere pandering to the short-term needs of industry at the cost of the long-term needs for education, leisure and working life of the pupils involved. School and work – as an idea – gets written off by many who might otherwise be enthusiastic, since it is central to their concerns about the division between academic and practical work, theory and practice in individual disciplines, inventiveness in the productive process, as well as to the rethinking of the whole role of work in society.

## Conclusion

When looked at long term, numbers are only a temporary problem. The real problem is restructuring the post school system to meet the needs of the 21st century, creating a unity out of the present chaos, getting a balance between common education and diversity of programmes to meet individual needs – and all on a socially just comprehensive basis. As the Coombe Lodge Report put it in 1968:

'What really is required is a new will, not other ways'

In 1978 the message is still the same.

# Shrinking primary schools: The problems and possibilities

**Eric Davies**

Mr Davies is a member of the staff of the School of Education, University of Leicester. He has had many years' experience as headteacher of primary schools in the South West.

The national birthrate reached a peak of 875,000 in 1965 and since then has been in decline. Evidence of this is clearly to be seen in some infant schools and 5 to 11 primary schools where classrooms now stand empty or brown rectangles mark the former sites of mobile classrooms.

The immediate effect on some serving teachers is, perhaps, one of relief, of space where there was formerly overcrowding and smaller classes using the available space. The immediate effect for the trainee is less happy. Intending primary teachers find it particularly difficult to obtain jobs. With the falling birthrate gradually reducing class sizes and the government placing sharp restrictions on public sector spending there is little incentive for LEAs to employ more teachers than they have to. In terms of promotion prospects the established teacher may not be so well served by the decreasing child population; if the present system of allowances related to numbers of pupils remains unaltered the large number of younger teachers now in service will have to compete for fewer and fewer senior posts as the school population falls. Though some LEA spokesmen have argued that as the number of teachers employed comes down there should be enough promotion opportunities for the smaller number of teachers<sup>1</sup>. This is an issue to which the professional associations will give close attention and not only because of promotion prospects.

## Able applicants

At present there are many able recently qualified primary teachers who cannot get jobs. Already established in post are teachers of some years' experience whose qualifications, although just good enough a few years ago, are now poor in comparison with those of aspiring new entrants to the profession. Where such

teachers of moderate standing are also known to be very mediocre or even poor performers in the classroom, it is very tempting for their colleagues to argue that with a good supply of high quality applicants to the profession and few vacancies available it is unjust to continue to provide employment for these low calibre teachers. The situation seems to suggest that as well as retirement at full term early retirement or redundancy should be the lot of the least successful. If such a move is to be made at all it will have to come from the professional associations; no LEA is likely to initiate such a course of action without the agreement and close co-operation of the teachers' associations.

One less dire, though by no means welcome, outcome of the fall in pupil numbers is the redeployment of teachers as rolls fall more sharply in some schools than in others.

## School closures

School closure will eventually be an issue of general importance but at first it will be felt in very small schools. These occur almost entirely in sparsely populated rural areas where schools of this type have been facing the threat of closure since the turn of the century when the county councils took over the existing church and board schools, but the pace of closure will necessarily quicken as the child population falls if LEAs maintain their existing policies. Hitherto it has not been possible to have as a top priority the closure and replacement of nineteenth century buildings which are ill suited to modern educational practice. LEAs have always had this objective but the need to provide new schools usually in urban areas for an increasing child population has until recently prevented much progress in this direction. If the numbers of pupils fall sufficiently

it may be possible to achieve this aim as a result of economies arising from a smaller child population.

Where in the recent past it has been possible to replace a number of small old primary schools by building a new school near the centre of the area to be served, it has usually been the policy of the LEA to consult all concerned and to obtain wherever possible something like unanimous support for the proposal. However with the continuing fall in the number of children entering school at age five there will be less and less time in which to contemplate future closures which will become more numerous and more pressing.

There have been strong objections to the closure of some village schools<sup>2</sup> and the volume and strength of these objections seems bound to increase. Parents object to the 'bussing' of very small children. This was fully appreciated by the Plowden committee in their recommendations for the introduction of middle schools from age 8 or 9. This scheme has the effect of immediately truncating 5 to 11 primary schools and making small schools very much smaller. Plowden favoured keeping viable village schools open by extending their scope to include a nursery class.<sup>3</sup> What Plowden failed to achieve by recommendation may yet be brought about by the falling birthrate.

## Village schools

In villages where schools are served by capable teachers and supported by articulate parents, opposition to closure can be very strong and very well organised. Parents in this setting do not wish to exchange good teaching in small classes albeit in poor buildings for an unknown standard of teaching in a larger, more modern, but much more distant institution. Opposition centres too in the feeling by the generality of villagers that the school is the heart of the community; without it the village is likely to be less attractive to families and so may further decline in population.

Those who wish to keep our small village schools open can take comfort from the work of the Rural Education Research Unit of the University College of North Wales, Bangor, which has shown that it is not always cheaper to replace small schools and furthermore argues that in some rural areas schools will have to be maintained no matter how small they become. The closure of many one- and two-teacher schools in the remoter areas of North Wales could only be achieved at great social cost.<sup>4</sup>

If it was decided nationally to use the money saved, as a result of the declining child population, to replace or remodel old and unsatisfactory school buildings, LEAs such as Norfolk, Lincolnshire and Devon, where large numbers of old schools are still in use, would have to receive special financial aid.

A special plea needs to be made for the rural education authorities because the pattern of government financial aid currently favours, with justification, the decaying central areas of our cities. Here are concentrated large numbers of old school buildings, all too sturdy monuments to the building zeal of the churches and school boards of the nineteenth century. As in rural areas population is declining generally and the decline in child population, except in areas of immigrant settlement, is likely to be very sharp indeed. As school rolls fall, staff will have to be redeployed and schools closed. The re-allocation of children to new schools may look less formidable a task than in remote rural areas, but it is not without difficulty. At first sight the problem of distance does not seem to arise but, as Martin Lightfoot pointed out in a recent article in *The Times Educational Supplement*, in cities there are other factors which inhibit the easy redirection of children from one school to another.

'Among these are "hazard distance" (main roads, especially carrying heavy traffic, the necessity of passing places perceived as dangerous, the existence of crowds, and so on); the social class distance (which in London is a very complex patchwork); and the strong inner city prejudice in favour of the self-containedness of neighbourhoods. All these factors mean that in the inner city half a mile may be perceived as further than fifteen miles in rural areas.'<sup>5</sup>

## Redeployment

There will be pressures too on staff as school rolls fall and teachers have to be redeployed. Where schools are geographically close and with falling numbers, parents are able to choose between schools, then there will tend to be a flow from 'unpopular' to 'popular' schools. This will exacerbate the fall in numbers in the unpopular schools and accelerate the need for staff redeployment. No school will want to lose its most capable members of staff so those who are 'offered a move' will very likely be the less capable teachers. In many cases these might be the least suitable teachers for employment elsewhere. Where redeployment of this sort becomes a common occurrence there will be a need for mediation between the donor and recipient schools so that some

reasonable compromise may be reached. It may be that the teachers' professional associations could fulfil this role, if not the LEAs would have to provide for this sort of mediation.

Despite all the problems for the educational service inherent in a falling birthrate it is important that this is seen as a great opportunity. Professor Bernard Benjamin sounds the right note in predicting that even if there were no resurgence of the birthrate in the 1980s, with proper government planning, this could give rise to a higher general standard of living and better educational opportunity for all.<sup>6</sup> He feels that a smaller overall population will offer the chance to introduce full nursery education. All schools would benefit from smaller classes and as the annual intake of new teachers is reduced the average age and length of service of the teaching profession would increase with an accompanying reduction in the annual turnover of teaching posts and consequent greater stability in the staffing of schools.

However, the notional saving that is to take place as a result of the fall in the child population cannot be assumed to be equal to the cost of all the educational reforms that may be proposed. Furthermore it may be that the government may wish to spend money saved in education on another and equally deserving part of the public services. Clearly educationists must make a case for whatever money may be available.

A recent Department of Education and Science report has examined the impact of falling school rolls on the future pattern of education with particular reference to buildings.<sup>7</sup> The study covers a wide field and seems to be setting out in some detail an array of alternatives which might be financed by the savings in the education budget resulting from the decline in population. Suggested objectives for future expenditure in the primary sector are: eliminating overcrowding and improving basic services (eg providing sinks and electrical points); remodelling or replacing old buildings; reducing the size of classes; providing for children with special educational needs: the handicapped, ethnic minorities, gifted children; increasing the number of nursery schools and other facilities for the under fives; improving staff accommodation in schools; more provision for community education and a general improvement under the headings of health, safety and general amenity.

The list does not imply that all this can be achieved, rather the reverse. This government publication seems to be saying that local authorities will have to make a choice each according to its local situation. It is hinted

that government recommendations will be made but the message is clearly that all interested parties should make their case for the educational provision that they particularly favour. Each local authority will have the task of taking soundings and deciding upon the course of action and balance of priorities that best fits the locality that it serves. It is incumbent upon every serving teacher both to have a view on these future developments and to express it.

#### References

- 1 K Antcliffe quoted by Stephen Cohen, *Times Education Supplement*, 20 May 1977.
- 2 Anne Garvey, 'Closing Down Village Schools', *Where*, No 119, August 1976, pp 204-207, especially p 207 'Closing Village Schools: How to Fight Back'.
- 3 *Children and their Primary Schools*, 1967, HMSO, para 482.
- 4 R Nash, H Williams and M Evans, 'The One-Teacher School', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol xxiv, No 1, February 1976, pp 12-32.
- 5 Martin Lightfoot, 'Population on the slide - what does it mean?', *The Times Educational Supplement*, 8.7.77, p 8.
- 6 B Benjamin in *The Decline in the Birthrate: Toward a Better Quality of Life*. Birth Control Trust.
- 7 Department of Education and Science and Welsh Office, *A Study of School Building*, 1977.

## The next Forum

In the next issue (January 1979) *Forum* will carry further authoritative articles on the effect of the declining birthrate on education. Maurice Peston explores the economic implications, while Trevor Jagger, of the ILEA, writes on London's plans relating to secondary education. Colin Fulford, head of a 'small' comprehensive in Yorkshire, considers the viability and, indeed, positive advantages, of small schools. We hope, also, to publish an extended article by James Britton, based on his opening lecture to the *Forum* primary school conference in June 1977 (See Vol 20 No 1).

In addition, John Graystone, a member of the evaluation team monitoring the Avon Resources for Learning Project, contributes an important article on the techniques being developed relating to mixed ability teaching; Jim Eggleston writes on contemporary perceptions of the role of assessment; while Clyde Chitty and others open a discussion on the concept of the common curriculum. Finally the HMI's 'report' entitled 'Mixed Ability Work in Comprehensive Schools' will be submitted to a critical analysis.

This will be an important number. Make sure of your copy now.



# The inner-city village school

## Forum reporter

St. Andrew's and St John's Junior and Infant School was built just over 100 years ago in the triangle, not much more than a square mile in area, boarded by Waterloo Road, Blackfriars Road and the Thames, a triangle whose boundaries also enclose the National Theatre, the Old Vic, the London Weekend Television Centre and the headquarters of the International Publishing Company, these last standing in contrast to the surrounding wharves, gaunt warehouses and vacant sites. There are also tenements, pre-war council blocks of flats and small terraced houses. A few of the latter have been taken over by theatre and television people, and there is also a shifting population of families housed with difficulty by Lambeth council. And there are the alcoholics, gossiping and dozing in St John's churchyard and the small open space opposite the Old Vic. But as well as all these there is a nucleus of local residents whose families have lived in the area for as long as they can remember, their parents and grandparents having attended either St Andrew's or St John's in the old days when they were two separate schools.

The amalgamation came about in 1963 and until recently the vicars of the two associated churches held the chairmanship of the managers in alternate years, a situation which would have provided Miss Mitford with rich material for village comedy during the period when one church was very high and the other very low and bitter enmity divided the two. The school survived these rivalries under a wily headmaster who recently retired after 25 years at St John's (broken by the war) and then another 14 as head of the amalgamated schools. He was a warmly humane man, much loved in the district which he had served throughout his working life. Last summer the parents and managers took over the Young Vic for his farewell.

Some five years ago a nearby block of flats which had previously housed police families was reopened by Lambeth council to accommodate a large number of families in acute difficulties. Almost overnight the school became uncomfortably full, with the newcomers presenting serious problems to the teachers. Before long there were deputations of long-term residents angrily demanding that the headmaster do something about it. The ILEA responded with extra resources and staff (the pupil-teacher ratio was 1 to 10 for a while) and as a result of the devotion and skill of the teachers the school

pulled through, though not before some parents had moved their children to more distant schools and others had started their infants off in them. Then, as quickly as they had come, the new families were moved on and the ex-police block was once again closed. It is currently proposed that the GLC should buy and renovate it to house students and single people. Another neighbouring block has also been closed for renovation.

Thus the national decline in inner-urban primary rolls has hit the Waterloo area with particular severity, and there are at present only 55 children on roll at St Andrew's and St John's. The ILEA has been in consultation with the Managers and the Diocesan Board for over a year, and in September, 1977, they formally sought the views of the Managers on a proposal for closure in July, 1978. The Managers arranged a meeting of parents at which ILEA officers put the authority's case to them and to the teachers. Parents, managers and teachers alike rejected the proposal.

## A 'realistic assessment'

The ILEA has acted in accordance with its own long-standing policy and with that set out in DES circular 5/77 on *Falling Numbers and School Closures*. In that circular local authorities are enjoined to undertake a 'realistic assessment' of future school population trends, and decide how best to use premises and sites. 'Proposals to close schools,' the circular acknowledges, 'often evoke a considerable and understandable local reaction. The Secretary of State knows that local authorities are aware both of the difficulties and of possible educational and financial benefits which may sometimes show that a resolute approach to closure is in the best interests of the children.' School closure is no new thing, of course. As a survey published in *Where* (Issue 133) recently showed, at least 500 village schools have been closed over the past ten years. But until recently closure has been relatively unusual in the inner city. *Where* asked at what point in its falling roll a school became too small to be viable. When numbers were down to 12 to 15 replied Durham, while Nottinghamshire put it at 80. These figures reflect the long distance to be travelled to alternative schools in rural areas: in the inner city it could be argued that, with easily accessible alternatives, closure becomes practicable when numbers drop significantly below 200. There are, for example, seven primary schools within a ¾ mile radius

of St Andrew's and St John's, three of them CE and all of them with vacancies.

The DES circular refers to the restrictions on the curriculum in the excessively small school; the difficulty in attracting and retaining good teachers and of obtaining the quantity of material resources necessary to compensate for smallness; and the cost of non-teaching staff. To this list must be added the disadvantage of the lack of peer-group stimulation in both intellectual and physical activities (at St Andrew's and St John's there is an average of eight children in any one year group). If the school were allocated two teachers and a head, this would allow for one vertically-grouped infant class and one junior, with the head also probably teaching a group of the children for much of the time. Teachers in such an organisation need to be highly skilled, yet at the top of the incremental scale the head would earn relatively little more than a similarly-placed Scale 2 teacher and there would inevitably be restricted professional interaction in a staff room of three. Furthermore the range of special expertise available to the children (music, art, PE . . .) would be limited to that possessed by the head and two assistants. All this may be inevitable in a remote rural area, and the rural area itself may be sufficient compensation to attract good teachers, but it is not necessary in the city. Repeated ILEA studies of possible housing developments in the Waterloo area have failed to produce evidence that the school population is likely to increase to a significant extent and there is ample alternative school provision.

## Parental claims

For the parents the answer to all this is simple. They chose to send their children to St Andrew's and St John's; they are very satisfied with the education their children are receiving; their rights as parents to choose their school should be respected. The managers, in their reply to the ILEA proposal, questioned the assumptions on which the projected rolls were based, arguing that there was to be more residential growth in the area than the ILEA supposed and that this would be hastened as the new Department of Environment policy on inner-city renewal got under way. The present population in the area was unusually aged, while the new or renovated accommodation would be offered to young families with young children. The adverse effects of the use of the ex-police flats for difficult families were now

part of history and the school was popular again. Indeed, there were signs of an increase in the infant intake.

On the other hand the closure of the school might of itself put an end to housing development in the district and accelerate movement out. The ILEA would thus be responsible for increasing urban decay in the Waterloo area. Moreover, having transferred their children to other primary schools, what guarantee was there that these might not also be threatened with closure in a year or so, necessitating yet a further transfer during the vital formative years of primary education? Finally, for those living in the 'triangle' at present served by St Andrew's and St John's every one of the alternative schools offered involved crossing at least one very busy main road and the nearest CE schools were beyond particularly difficult traffic junctions.

## Objections

The parents themselves were forthright in their objections. 'It was with great shock and disgust that I heard of the proposal to close St Andrew's and St John's school. After a hundred and three years of service to the community I feel that the ILEA owes it to us to try and keep it open. The value of education is better in a school with small classes rather than have to compete with others in larger classes. Instead of closing the school the ILEA should press the GLC to build family housing in the area.' . . . 'I have two children at the school and I've had four others before. This was the only school that would take my children when I moved into the area – the others just didn't want to know. They've been very happy at this school. They get on well with everything they do. I've never had any problems with any of them.' . . . 'At St Andrew's and St John's there is a very happy atmosphere. The teachers are extremely dedicated and always ready to listen to any problem. We hold quite a lot of functions to raise money for the children. It really is a very family-like school. I've lived in Waterloo all my life, and St Andrew's and St John's is very much part of the community.' . . . 'As the mother of a six-year-old pupil attending the school I believe the school should be kept open owing to the dangerous roads the pupils would have to cross if they were transferred to other schools. Also, schools in the area are packed and our children will not get the individual attention for their education they are accustomed to. We are

# P.R.I.S.E.

trying to keep the area as residential as possible and I feel that by closing down this school the ILEA will not be aiding our cause but destroying it. If we let controlling bodies dictate to us and make it impossible for us to live, work and educate our families in the areas of our choice, they are taking away our rights as Londoners.' . . . 'I have been to other schools in the area and personally I would not have chosen any of them on educational grounds because personally I think a child can benefit from smaller classes.'

## Action committee

An action committee of parents, teachers, ancillary helpers and neighbours has been formed and has circularised the district as well as writing regularly in the community association newsletter. It asked for a meeting with the chairman of the ILEA development sub-committee, and she listened carefully to what was said, clearly understanding the feelings expressed. The proposal to close the school is being given further consideration. But it remains very difficult for an authority to justify retaining such a small school on educational grounds when alternative schools are reasonably near, and it would be virtually impossible to maintain the extremely favourable teacher-pupil ratio which the school currently enjoys, and to which so many parents refer as being its great advantage.

And yet if it is true that the most significant single factor which leads to children's success at school is parental involvement, and if it is true that it is desirable that the school should once again take its place at the centre of the neighbourhood community, can the parents be wrong to want to keep their inner-city village alive by retaining the village school? It is at least possible that this single argument has force enough to counter all the logic, both educational and financial, which points towards the closure of the small urban school in the current situation of falling rolls.

PRISE (Programme for Reform in Secondary Education) started late in 1975, with a conference attended by teachers, parents and administrators from all over the country. It is now working co-operatively with the Campaign for Comprehensive Education and shares a secretary, but its work is separate.

PRISE was founded for those who support a fully comprehensive system of education but want to improve and develop what goes on in comprehensive schools through consolidating the best of existing work and extending the best of new methods and programmes. In other words, where CCE is a campaigning body, PRISE's emphasis is on the examination of existing comprehensive schools and their programmes, with a view to seeing how they might be developed and where appropriate improved. The majority of PRISE members are either teachers or active in other ways in the educational field.

The work of PRISE is undertaken through working groups. These are made up of PRISE members who volunteer to join them. They meet regularly and get down to some hard thinking. When they are ready – usually in about 12 months – they make their report to the main body of PRISE by holding a conference at which papers are presented, talks given and discussion encouraged. The working party then comes to its own decision as to whether to stop there, or to continue for another year. The groups at the moment include one on the Control and Management of Schools, on School and Work, In-Service Training, and Curriculum Development, and others, not necessarily London based, are being mooted. A number of conferences have already been held, with considerable success.

These conferences, and other news, are reported in a regular publication (edited by Robin Chambers) which is circulated to all members, and to finance this membership costs £2 a year. Back issues of the bulletin can be obtained from the address below.

Anyone interested in PRISE should write to: the Secretary, 17 Granard Avenue, London SW15 6HH, tel 01-788 5831, from where a list of group leaders and their addresses can also be obtained.

# Discussion

## New directions

One of the most enduring misconceptions that is shared by many teachers is the notion that in order to treat children equally, it is necessary to treat them as if they were the same. You can see it in practice in any multi-racial school, in which the black children are treated as if they were all white; or in a poor working-class area, in which the children are regarded as if they were middle-class children; and, of course, in a well-to-do middle-class area, where they are taught as if they were all middle-class and well-to-do.

If you ask teachers about this, they will agree that all children are different, with different needs and aptitudes – but at the same time they will proceed to ignore the facts of diversity and difference, and construct curricula and timetables that deal with children as if they ought to be the same.

Some schools openly recognise that there are differences between groups of children. They divide them into groups of 'clever', 'average', and 'dull'. They defend such a practice on the grounds of the needs of examination preparation, and the demands of the world of work. For example, the clever children must be prepared for 'O' levels and 'A' levels in order that they can progress to Universities and colleges, and thence into the professions. The average children must be prepared for 'O' levels and CSE so that they can take their place amongst the skilled craftsmen and technicians of industry and commerce. Whereas the dull children are given lots of practical things to do so that they are turned into artisans. These schools project an image of the hierarchical structure of society, in which clever people must be professional in status, while the dull must remain the 'hewers of wood and drawers of water'.

Other schools, often regarded as progressive, ignore the facts of diversity and difference, and design a 'common core' curriculum. These schools divide their pupils into mixed-ability groups,

and insist that they study exactly the same things, for exactly the same time. It is worth noting that in such schools strange things start to happen after a while: common treatment is abandoned, and special units begin to appear. It becomes necessary to establish a unit for the delinquent; a unit for the withdrawn; for the remedial; the first stage E2L pupils and even the second stage; another for those very good at Maths, or English, or French. Eventually, the plans for 'common core' and 'mixed ability' become decimated.

The facts of diversity and difference defy all attempts to standardise. The schools that stream pupils have to recognise its artificiality, because there is always as great a diversity within the streams, as between them. And schools that follow 'common core' have to differentiate their courses in the face of such diversity.

Therefore, we must re-assess the ways in which we deal with this diversity in schools; with the ways we deal with individuals in school. In fact, we are currently in a situation which may allow us to re-assess these ways. For example, we are in a situation of high unemployment. Many school leavers and college leavers are unemployed. There are many young people with degrees, 'A' levels, or 'O' levels who have no job, and very little prospect of one. Furthermore, if we listen to the economists, we discover that it is highly likely that over the next 25 years the number of unemployed will reach 5-6 million. We must look forward to a situation in which there will be a large number of 'unemployable' people. Teachers will no longer be able to insist that if their pupils study hard, then they will get a good job. Furthermore, we are in a situation of a declining birth rate. Over the next ten years school rolls will fall by up to 50%. If we continue to teach groups, rather than individuals, as we do now, then there will be many teachers with nothing to do.

How can we respond to this changing situation? In what directions can we go? Here are some possibilities.

First, in a situation of increasing unemployment, it would become as important to prepare people for leisure, as for work. It would be inadequate for schools to concentrate on examinations; it would be more appropriate for them to consider the personal development of individuals. We might begin to develop a 'differentiated' curriculum, in which all the studies and activities are tailored to the needs of individuals. Schools could be open access, with no prescribed leaving age, nor set terms, nor fixed clientele. The timetable, instead of being based upon the activities of groups, could be an amalgam of individual programmes. And by this we should not think of the American model of individual study, where contact with the teacher is minimal. We should think of maximum teacher-pupil contact. We could aim at staff-pupil ratios of 1 to 10.

Second, perhaps schools should become more concerned with values such as self-respect, self-reliance, independence, and such practices as survival, and doing things yourself. In this model, we may be more concerned to teach young people to do without high technology, or office and factory life. The curriculum may be geared to a more 'primitive' mode of existence, according to which adventure activities, agriculture, horticulture, gardening, physical exercise, art, games, playing instruments, writing and reading literature, are regarded as the most important. Perhaps, state schools should finally model themselves upon Gordonstoun or Harrow – the public school.

Third, and this may be regarded as the model of restraint; schools would be allowed to run down, and teachers become redundant. If unemployment is so high, and the pool of unemployables so large, then it would be profitable only to educate those people most likely to get a job. Schools would be designed to educate the 'employment elite'.

**J KELWYN RICHARDS**  
*Director of Careers Education Team*  
*Sidney Stringer School, Coventry*

# Vertical grouping — A practice or a principle?

**Annabelle Dixon**

Annabelle Dixon is Deputy Head of Chalk Dell Infant School, Hertford, and a member of the **Forum** Editorial Board.

To most early users of the wheel the revelation that they were overcoming the scientific problem of friction would probably have left them, in general, unimpressed; to those already involved in working with a vertically grouped class the notion that they might be facilitating sensory contiguity in relation to their children's social development might come as a gratifying surprise, but they would probably admit that they had not cast around for a suitable method to implement this important psychological principle. The evolution and adoption of vertical grouping, in which children of different ages, usually a two- or three-year span, are in the same class (as opposed to horizontal grouping) is interesting in that the practice appears to have preceded theoretical justification. Necessity, while mothering invention, also appears to have given birth to vertical grouping.

Contemporary reports indicate that horizontal grouping (whereby children of the same age are grouped together) was not the rule in the nineteenth century. The Newcastle report (1862) refers to the difficulty of implementing group examinations in schools since the children were not grouped in school according to their age.<sup>1</sup> This situation remained the norm in the mid-twentieth century only in those village schools that were too small to allow exact age grouping which, by this time, had become the norm elsewhere. By the 1950s, however, and even before, it had become apparent that many of these schools seemed untroubled by problems common to larger primary and infant schools, and that such problems – for instance, the time taken by very young children to settle down in their first class – should have been perceived as important, seems to indicate a new emphasis in educational values.

The social and emotional development of the individual child was now beginning to be recognised as important both in its own right and as the necessary prerequisite for effective intellectual learning and development. For a variety of reasons, not the least being their personal experience of trying to teach unhappy, socially immature young children, infant

teachers in particular regarded these values as important. Not being unduly concerned with theoretical considerations, an increasing number of infant schools now deliberately imitated what was necessary practice in the village school, and regrouped their classes so that each class had equal proportions of each age and the children stayed with the same teacher for two or even three years. As Christian Schiller observed, 'It is traditional for infants' teachers quickly to recognise a good thing when they see it and make it their own'.<sup>2</sup>

## Pragmatic justification

The justification for the adoption of this organisational change (even referred to as the 'Quiet Revolution') is usually articulated in pragmatic or qualitative terms. It is an indication of the educational ethos of the late 'seventies that such value-laden phrases as 'emotional climate', 'peculiar quality', 'rewarding experiences' etc, are considered at best imprecise and at worst embarrassing. Where is the research it is asked, the supporting theories, the hard data? As far as I have been able to ascertain, research support is negligible, there are no specific theories and even the evangelical literature, though detailed and comprehensive in itself, is surprisingly sparse. Yet many schools have quietly changed to a system of vertical grouping even if the majority use a two-year span rather than three. Is this irresponsible? And would each practitioner recognise the educational or learning theories that might be applicable, as having any reference to their own interpretation or practice? I believe that it is possible to justify vertical grouping by reference to research but only if it is accepted that emphasis is given to certain underlying values. 'Vertical grouping' can mean many

more things in practice than the simple abandonment of horizontal grouping.

At one extreme it can mean the establishment of two or three distinct 'mini-classes' taught in an arid, formal manner, the youngest only having access to certain materials, with the possibility of further division by explicit or implicit streaming; the content of such work is teacher-directed and the children are not encouraged to work in co-operative groups. It should not be forgotten that such classes replicate, in miniature, a large number of village schools, particularly as they were organised in the first half of the century; it was only the minority that were making something else of their situation.

At the other extreme the form of class organisation is so fluid that it is difficult at first to tell who are the eldest and youngest children in the class, while the extensive classroom provision seems open to use by all. The children work in self-chosen social groups and direct a large part of their own activities including that of organising the care of classroom materials.

## Principles?

Is there a set of principles applying to both such situations? I find the justification of the first example impossible in terms of any theory that also indicates that children are in a learning situation that can maximise intellectual potential, encourage verbal development and inculcate a love of learning, let alone encourage them to work co-operatively and harmoniously. The addition of two or three age groups in a class may very well worsen the situation although there are circumstances, referred to below, in which vertical grouping could act, even unwittingly, as far as the teacher is concerned, towards the children's eventual educational advantage.

The second example can, I believe, be justified by reference to the principles of learning that apply to the various areas of children's development. However, the attempt to develop from such principles a specific educational programme covering a wide age-range in a single class seems an astonishingly daunting task. Fortunately, such a programme has not had to be designed from scratch; it has evolved historically, based on the insights and observations of previous educators whose intuitive grasp of children's needs was recognised by those who succeeded them. The fact that such a prog-

ramme does in fact 'work', ie its aims do seem to be realised, is often evidence enough for the practising teacher. Nonetheless, such basic psychological principles of cognitive development as perceptual learning, selective attention, problem solving, linguistic competence, and so on, are familiarly used to justify the establishment of a more integrated child-centred programme; nor is this to ignore the processes of emotional and social development that are also provided for in such an approach.

What is it then that vertical grouping seems to add and can it equally be justified? I believe it can because vertical grouping recognises, and makes use of, the different kinds of learning that can arise from the interaction between child and child in addition to that which takes place between adult and child. Not all see this as a hitherto untapped source; the pupil-teacher period in English education seems to have bitten hard into the folk memory, and with some parents there is no little resistance to the idea that the child's time might be being wasted in teaching the younger ones, let alone encouragement for a situation in which 'older boys told younger boys those things boys are prone to tell other boys'.

## Social learning

One of the main advantages claimed for vertical grouping is the enhancement of social learning. Those entering school for the first time seem to settle more quickly and happily and the older children in the same class appear more responsible in their attitudes. Imitative learning, as Brian Foss has long argued, has not had the benefit of sustained attention from psychologists but there is a very good case for arguing its presence in such school situations. Teaching for some years in an area that considered school an almost irrelevant if not actually an alien institution, I also can testify that this system of grouping children when they first come to school has a remarkable effect on their attitudes towards both learning and teachers. The increased socialisation effect seemed to derive from the only variable that had been altered – that of vertically grouping the classes. Actually *how* this was achieved is not always possible to define – communication at both verbal and non-verbal levels taking place over a period of time.

From another viewpoint vertical grouping appears to affect children's cognitive growth (including their language development) by increasing their opportunities for hearing other than their own or the teacher's levels of speech (so often a gulf apart). Older children can, for instance, act as interpreters of adult speech (ie 'what she *means* is . . . '). In explaining procedures or processes to younger children, the older ones also reinforce their own understanding and often have to put something into words for the first time which is in itself valuable. The younger ones watch the older children cope with problems, disappointments and challenges – imitation and social identification are hard to disentangle. For infant teachers there is also the considerable advantage of not having 35 children who have hardly begun to read; those older ones who have already started to read can be the greatest asset in encouraging the beginners by their interest and pride of achievement.

## Research studies

It would be valuable at this point to be able to quote from the relevant research but the only available study is one undertaken by Mary Mycock in 1966.<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to note that she found that vertical grouping was, of itself, not enough in itself to warrant investigation. It had to be linked with school programmes that were 'characterised by their progressiveness of outlook, informality of regime, (and) purposefulness of work'. Although open to some methodological criticism, it seems that vertically grouped classes showed a greater range of social interaction and higher levels of aspiration. Stress is laid, as it is in Plowden's remarks on vertical grouping, on the quality of the teacher. Presumably what is meant is that it is necessary to have the kind of teacher who will make the most of the learning situations that such a system of grouping makes possible. Where vertical grouping is combined with a strict formality and inflexible organisation, as in the first example given earlier, it seems likely that the opportunities for the kinds of learning described above are so curtailed that little of value is gained. It has, however, been the practice of some heads to introduce vertical grouping deliberately in order to break down streaming, rigid subject teaching and timetable barriers. Teachers often find they are forced to introduce some

measure of flexibility into their programme as a consequence.

Vertical grouping in the infant school can also mean that materials previously only present in the reception class are available to the whole infant age group – limited access being better than no access at all. For some time the learning may be more on the teacher's side with respect to such situations, but this is another aspect of vertical grouping that is particularly relevant to its use with other and older age groups, in schools where more rigid methods are still very prevalent.

The principles of social and cognitive learning may not be so different with older age groups – from junior school through to secondary – but the content of what is learned will evidently gradually change with the age of the children. Some things will remain constant – the younger children's reliance on the older for a time and the older children's greater responsibility. Each will have their turn at these roles, which cannot always be said of a horizontally grouped class, or the child's own family situation for that matter. There are still opportunities for planned and unplanned learning situations between the ages and the inevitable range of achievement levels helps both the young and able and the slower, older child to find their level more easily.

As children grow older, it is a recognised phenomenon that they learn more from their peers than from the adults around them. A third of the class being slightly older and more mature than the remaining two-thirds could well mean that this characteristic of older juniors and upwards can be turned to greater educational advantage than hitherto. That secondary schools would view vertically grouped classes with some misgiving is understandable in view of the complications of adolescence, and many possibly do more already through house systems to integrate different ages than many junior schools, but there could well be social and intellectual advantages in grouping the first two years of secondary school. The basic problem however – as I was once informed by a disgruntled fifth-columnist of a teacher at a school once renowned for its success at vertical-grouping – is that you have to teach and treat the children as individuals.

### References

- 1 Quoted in John Hurt, *Education in Evolution* 1972.
- 2 Schiller, C (HMI) in Ridgway & Lawton, *Family Grouping in the Infant School*, 1965.
- 3 Mycock, M, 'A Comparison of Vertical Grouping and Horizontal Grouping in the Infant School'. Abstract of thesis, *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 37, Feb 1967.

# Vertical grouping in Secondary schools

**Diane Griffin and R A Smith**

Diane Griffin was Vice-Principal of Countesthorpe College, Leicestershire, before being appointed Principal of Thomas Estley Community College, both a Community College and a High School, in Leicestershire. This is a new High School founded two years ago. Mr. R A Smith taught at Settle School, Yorkshire, before being appointed Mathematics Coordinator at Thomas Estley, where maths is taught throughout in vertical mixed ability groups.

Thomas Estley College is now nearing the end of its second year. It is a High School and Community College and opened with 150 first year pupils and 12 teachers. This meant, of course, that we needed to devise strategies to cover all the subject areas between a relatively small number of staff and to offer as quickly as possible a sense of identity and belonging to the pupils.

The children were grouped into mixed ability groups with all teachers in the school acting as tutors and each responsible for the total wellbeing of a group of children. Each teacher taught their own specialism and at least one other to their own group. The learning was individualised and almost entirely resource based. Most materials were written and developed by staff as the school evolved.

When we began planning for our second year, it seemed important that the staff should continue to maintain as close a link as possible with the children they had come to know so well and with those whose work they had participated in not only in their own specialism but across the whole curriculum and beyond it.

We began to think of going 'vertical'. There were certainly some concerns about what could and could not be taught vertically. Worries that the children already in school would feel put out through not having the undivided attention of their teachers; that the new children would feel threatened, and so on. It became obvious that it would only be possible to work a partial vertical system, that is all tutor groups to be vertical groups but subjects only vertical where the staff concerned felt able to commit themselves to the experiment. This meant that Mathematics, Humanities and Design, often taught by specialist teachers or by non-specialist teachers using the specialist as the expert, would be taught vertically and the other subjects horizontally. There was some anxiety amongst staff that this would cause con-

fusion among the children and perhaps make the vertical subjects vulnerable to parental or external criticism. This applied particularly to mathematics so frequently used as a whipping boy by trendy politicians and others. It is, therefore, perhaps particularly useful to look at how this subject has fared. In mathematics we had worked successfully with our first year pupils in mixed-ability groups and just did not anticipate any real problems in going vertical. After all, it would only mean a wider range of ability – we would just carry on as before. No difference at all! Now after nearly a full year of vertical groups we *have* found differences – but they are all excitingly for the better – so much so that we are extending the grouping next year to include the whole 11-14 year range.

This extension to cover the third year was certainly not considered at the beginning. There were fears that we were asking too much of the Maths teachers, particularly the non-specialists. Wouldn't they have difficulty enough with the content and very little time to keep in touch with the third year? There was a danger that pupils of high ability would not be stretched or that teachers would be so concerned with the extremes of ability that the 'middle' would go unnoticed.

Do not older pupils need specialised knowledge given by specialist teachers? Do not third years need more teacher-centred teaching separately given? Anyway wouldn't we be continually extracting year groups – why bother?

There was also the suspicion that third years would resent having first years alongside – their pride was at stake and they might be too open to derision from young, more competent mathematicians.

Nine months on and these worries have never materialised. We know that we are going much further in fulfilling the mathematical potential of every pupil.

The merging of the group in the eyes of the teacher



has been particularly striking for such a short period of time. You tend not to think of children being first or second year. To begin with you found yourself saying, 'Of course, some numbers can't be placed in a number line. Now . . .'. Then you would pause as 'first year' registered in your mind and you wondered whether it was appropriate to discuss irrational numbers – for the moment unaware of who it was you were talking to. The expectations of what a 'first year' can do are frighteningly insidious. Now we feel we are assessing each pupil moment by moment, unfettered by years. We have taken the lid off this containerised system. There are no limits to our pupils' mathematical growth.

There has been a tremendous release for all our teachers of mathematics when one considers the usual uncertainty about what mathematical content is suitable for what years. Should they do negative integers? Can they interpret data or explain a pattern algebraically? Should their investigations be structured or open ended? Thinking about what they will do leads to limits being applied across the board, and inbuilt expectations are not easily set aside. Vertical grouping has enabled a natural progression to take place and gives teachers the opportunity to plan a programme of work for each pupil which stems from an overall picture of where the child starts from and where he can go.

There has also been a dramatic change in the mathematical awareness of the teachers. Now that they have escaped from the age 'block' they have an opportunity really to see the whole *patchwork of mathematical ideas*. They have a perspective in which to view the aims for each child. They can view the development of a concept, they can see the natural links and extensions, they can better understand the stages in problem-solving ability. In addition, the non-specialist teachers have gained through being equal partners. They are not second-raters filling a first year gap. There are no closed doors about what happens next year or what has gone before. The 'in-service' gains of vertical grouping have been marked and the mathematics team itself is altogether stronger.

Pupils, too, have been given this wider perspective, gaining not only from the increasing awareness of their teachers but from the grouping itself. It was apparent very early on that the '1st Year' approach to investigations was being influenced by '2nd Years' searching for patterns, general rules and algebraic statements. There was an interchange of ideas and many opportunities for teachers to establish links. It helped pupils to see where

they were headed and where they had been. It also went some of the way to help them understand why they were doing it.

There are opportunities for all abilities to benefit from these links. A weakness in the positioning of decimal names on a number line – initially seen with '1st Years' – led to many pupils of all ages working on the same resource material. The expected social problems (if there at all) never surfaced. A '1st Year' was heard to remark, 'Is he still on that?' But it was entirely without malice and there has been no resentment at working together. The project which followed – to design a number line with a particular application – was the first real example of co-operation and group work between the ages. One group, Mark and Robert (1st Years) and Stephen and Vincent (2nd Years) worked on a car speedometer, the scale of which gradually magnified to reveal the exact (?) speed.

The idea was Mark's and aided by Robert they designed the display and did the first few enlargements. Their enthusiasm waned and it was left to Stephen and Vincent – not noted for their mathematical ability – to finish the job. The next day I was astonished to see Stephen marking off the points between 65.01 and 65.02 – 65.011, 65.012, 65.013.

In mathematics there are very necessary lower order concepts which must be present before the next stage of abstraction is possible. These contributory concepts must be available at each new stage. Vertical teaching ensures that the resources necessary for this are available all the time.

We believe that you cannot overestimate the value of having these pupils side by side so that they can soak in the experience of others and come to grips with real mathematical experiences. We believe, too, that teachers and pupils alike can experience a greater awareness and a wider perspective of mathematics by being in vertical groups and that mathematics must break this age barrier if it is really to explore the full potential of our pupils.

It will not be possible to make a fair judgment until the end of next year when all three years will have been involved, but at present we are undoubtedly optimistic.

Although the system here could not be prescriptive in any way, it does offer the basis for an alternative system of organisation in all types of schools. It might be particularly useful at the present time in schools with falling rolls or in larger schools where there is an opportunity to create small or mini-schools within schools.

# Completing the London School Plan

**James Rudden**

The first number of **Forum** carried an article by Raymond King, then head of Wandsworth School, on the progress of the London School Plan to 1958. Here James Rudden brings the story up to date. Mr Rudden was President of the London Head Teachers' Association in 1969, and of the National Association of Head Teachers in 1971. He has been Head of three schools, the last being Bishop Thomas Grant Secondary School in Streatham. In 1976 and 1977 he acted as Advisory Head Teacher to the ILEA on secondary reorganisation.

'When we made our final report I think we envisaged that it would take thirty years to implement.' Sir Graham Savage, London's Education Officer in the early post-war years, speaking of the LCC London Plan of 1947, made this prophetic forecast when interviewed by a **Times** correspondent in 1965. He was exactly right. It did take the thirty years. In September, 1977, secondary selection in what was by then the Inner London Education Authority was finally ended, the London Plan (with modifications) was implemented, and Sir Graham's view, that 'only slow evolution with co-operation from teachers would produce a satisfactory comprehensive system' was vindicated.

## Difficulties emerge

Although, since 1947, there had been very considerable, albeit somewhat too 'slow evolution', towards a fully comprehensive secondary school system in Inner London, by 1974 the process was coming to a halt. The presence of so many voluntary grammar schools, mainly small in size compared with the county comprehensives, presented formidable difficulties. Each voluntary school has its own individual board of governors with an instrument and articles of government sealed directly with the DES, unlike county schools whose government comes under the control of the LEA. Although the diocesan boards of denominational schools have considerable influence over the policies and decisions of their governors, any proposal to change the character of the school under Section 13 of the Education Act has to be made in each case by the school's governing body. Long and involved consultations with school staffs, parents as well as the governors, are usually necessary before Section 13 notices can be posted and there must then follow a period during which objec-

tions can be made and dealt with at the DES. Experience had shown that many people affected by the change to go comprehensive would be reluctant, even strongly hostile, to its acceptance. There was already in London, as elsewhere, since 1959, a growing number of denominational comprehensive schools – Anglican, Roman Catholic and Jewish – so that there was no opposition from the churches on grounds of principle. Indeed, in June, 1973, there was rejoicing at London County Hall when it was reported that the Church of England's London Diocesan Board had promised full co-operation with the ILEA in abolishing selection and had put forward new proposals for the future of some of their schools. The Board had, however, made a proviso that their comprehensive schools must not be too big – no more than 900 to 1100 pupils. As the Roman Catholic diocesan school authorities had already assured the authority of their support for the campaign to end selection in the secondary schools, the way was clearer for the next step.

## Large schools

The greatest obstacle to further progress was to do with size of school. The fundamental policy, virtually unchallenged in London since 1947, was that comprehensive meant large. The authority was adamant in refusing to recognise as comprehensive any school of less than five-form entry (900 pupils) and had established several very big schools with over 2000 pupils. 'The big school was a flexible economic unit', had been Sir Graham Savage's dictum faithfully followed by his successors. The problem was that the remaining voluntary grammar schools were small in size (two- and three-form entry) as also were a few county grammar schools. Accordingly, to complete the London Plan

either these small schools, voluntary and county, must combine with others to form acceptable larger units, or the authority must reverse its dearly cherished policy on size and accept the small comprehensive. In the event, both these possibilities occurred although a few schools (6) opted out of the maintained sector.

Several factors producing new thinking on the matter of size of comprehensive schools combined to provide a possible way out of this impasse. Firstly, that the schools need be so large was being increasingly questioned. The authority itself had come to the conclusion in the 1960s that the optimum size might be six- to eight-form entry (1100-1500 pupils). Secondly, with the dramatic fall in the birth rate the numbers of pupils likely to stay on into the sixth forms would decline. Even in 1969 the viability of sixth form teaching groups in all types of secondary schools was being closely scrutinised and challenged. Surveys illustrated the bad economics existing in many schools, where small teaching groups for 'A' level subjects (some with as few as 2 or 3 pupils) were being heavily subsidised in precious staffing resources by the rest of the school. As the idea of sixth-form colleges was not acceptable to the authority or its teachers, and the ideal of the 11-18 school maintained, the 'order of the day' was collaboration of schools for sixth-form work. This became official policy, but, apart from a few noteworthy schemes, very little progress was, in fact, achieved. A third factor also arose from this fall in the birth rate. If, in the future, the selective schools continued to accept the same numbers of pupils of above average ability there would be fewer pupils of that category available for transfer to the non-selective schools than hitherto. Many of these schools were already so greatly undersubscribed with top ability candidates that, in the opinion of many, it was a nonsense to call them 'comprehensive'.

## The break-through

The break-through came in an unexpected way. Highbury Hill Girls' County Grammar School was faced with closure under new proposals made in 1974. The school was small, admitting annually a three-form entry giving a total roll of less than 600 and so considered to be expendable. The Headmistress and staff came up with proposals for the school's survival.

Their plan was that the school be allowed to continue as a three-form entry school but accepting pupils from across the whole ability range and with full co-operation with their neighbouring boys' comprehensive, Highbury Grove, at sixth-form level. This linking at sixth form, combined with the strong wish of the Highbury Hill staff to operate the scheme and the experience many of them had of teaching children of less ability, convinced the London Inspectorate that it could be made to work. There was bitter controversy. If the authority accepted these proposals, it would be a denial of its basic doctrine that a comprehensive school must have at least 900 pupils to be viable. On the other hand, if a county grammar school was to be allowed to maintain its selective status, a precedent would be set for the rest of London's grammar schools (most of them voluntary) and thus seriously impede or prevent the completion of a fully comprehensive system. In the end, the Highbury Hill scheme was accepted. In September, 1976, the school took its first all-ability intake and a sixth-form timetable was introduced which matched that at Highbury Grove School.

## New proposals

Proposals on similar lines were then invited by the authority with regard to the other selective schools, some fifty in number. It should be remembered that at this time there was little money available for school building and that, with the numbers falling, it would not be economic to build new schools.

After much discussion, strident publicity, and procrastinations, proposals were formulated and presented to the DES which eventually approved them. Forty-four schools were involved of which thirty-seven emerged from these reorganisation schemes. Eight of them accepted modified intakes in 1976 and from the whole range in 1977, three delayed taking the full range until 1978 as the building operations were not finished, and the remaining twenty-six schools took all-ability intakes in 1977.

These thirty-seven may be divided into (1) nine formed by amalgamation of two (sometimes three) schools, and (2) twenty-eight schools which may be called small comprehensives, all of which had formerly been grammar schools. All the amalgamations are on split sites whereas all the small comprehensives con-

tinue on one site. Nine of the schools are county. The other twenty-eight voluntary schools are:

Church of England	11	all voluntary aided*
Roman Catholic	8	all voluntary aided
Non-denominational	9	of which 3 are voluntary controlled and 6 voluntary aided

Thus, at least, all the one hundred and eighty-one ILEA secondary schools have become non-selective.

## A large task

The magnitude of the task now confronting the authority and its schools is probably insufficiently appreciated even by many in London. Piece-meal reorganisation had been proceeding steadily for years, but that so many schools should now be involved simultaneously was quite unprecedented. Not only were the reorganising schools affected but the changes would result in different kinds of intakes for all the secondary schools, as, while the previously selective schools would receive pupils of all abilities, the existing non-selectives would gain more of the above-average ability pupils than before. It was important to prepare for this, particularly by in-service training which was of great importance. Resources to re-train the teachers, provide new books and equipment, enlarge some school buildings and modify others (eg a single sex school becoming mixed), appoint ancillary staff where needed, provide extra teachers, were all required at a time of severe financial constraints.

One of the arrangements made by the authority affected me personally. I had been Head of the Bishop Thomas Grant Roman Catholic Comprehensive Mixed School (eight-form entry – 1500 pupils) since its foundation in 1959 and, as a member of the London Comprehensive Head Teachers' Conference (its Chairman in 1974), I had been closely involved in the comprehensive debate for many years. I was invited by the authority to take on the post of Advisory Head Teacher for Secondary Re-organisation for the final two years of my career, 1976 and 1977. I accepted the challenge, left the

\* The difference between voluntary aided and voluntary controlled is that the local education authority has control of the government of a voluntary controlled school with its two-thirds majority of authority appointees on the school governing board.

school and spent two very busy years on this new appointment.

I began by attempting, during the spring term of 1976, to assess the needs of the schools which were facing reorganisation, by interviewing privately, in small groups, some hundreds of teachers – head teachers, deputies, heads of department and junior members of school staffs. In several schools I saw every member of staff including media resources officers and librarians. In addition, I attended staff meetings, departmental meetings, senior staff meetings and informal group meetings at which reorganisation was discussed. From all these meetings and discussions I was able to list the topics on which teachers wanted information and guidance.

These included: provision for less able pupils; grouping of pupils – relative merits of mixed ability teaching, streaming and banding; pastoral care systems (especially in small schools where allowance structures made separate appointments difficult); links with primary schools; foundation courses for first year pupils; how a proper balance of ability intake could be achieved; pupils' records; reports on pupils; testing in order to obtain data for grouping of pupils; testing and teaching of reading; transfer documents; form teaching versus specialisation; the first year curriculum; roles of various staff members; size of teaching groups; movement of pupils about the school; problems of split-sites; problems of the transitional stage when the small comprehensive schools would have to cope with all ability intakes entering and 'grammar' intakes of earlier years moving up through the school.

## Expertise available

These were matters on which, in most cases, much London expertise and experience were readily available and which could be covered by individual school staff conferences and courses, courses at the local and specialist Teachers' Centres, by visiting and by reading. Equally important was the question of how a school was to decide its policy on any given topic. Obviously, the teachers who were to operate the new arrangements were more likely to be enthusiastic and successful if they had been involved in the discussions and decisions leading up to their adoption. School conferences were invaluable and in my view were most profitable when

small' working parties, having decided what areas needed investigation, invited members of staff to form working groups to prepare reports and recommendations for distribution to all the staff prior to a full staff conference to be held some months later.

For senior staffs three conferences were organised for heads and deputies in 1976, 1977 and early in January, 1978. These conferences were very well attended and, after the first, operated mainly in two sections – 'amalgamators' and 'small comprehensives'. In addition, a day conference was held for heads to deal with the setting up of departments to provide for the least able pupils. There were area conferences covering all parts of London, and specialist conferences run by the staff inspectors in the various subjects. The great majority of these in-service courses took place in out-of-school time and made great demands on teaching staffs, most of whom gave unsparingly of their time.

## An action survey

In the final term of my work, autumn 1977, I carried out a simple survey of what the thirty-seven schools, after all their preparations, had, in fact, decided to do in several key aspects of reorganisation such as (1) the composition of the new first-year intakes, ie numbers of contributing primary schools and balance of ability achieved, (2) grouping of pupils for teaching purposes, (3) links with primary schools, (4) provision for least able pupils, (5) first year curriculum, and (6) plans made to keep the arrangements under review.

The main problems arising from my survey which I feel are still to be solved include:

(1) Providing effective links with primary schools. All the thirty-seven schools took pupils from more than twenty-two primary schools, the average number was from forty different primaries and one school accepted pupils from as many as ninety-five schools. All the secondary head teachers admitted that it was really impossible to maintain, or even attempt, effective liaison with so many schools. In this situation it was very difficult to assess the new pupils' abilities from primary records which were so diverse in their methods of recording and testing. This led to a great amount of re-testing of pupils at interviews held at secondary schools immediately before they actually went there or on arrival in September. Not, I think, the best introduction to his new school for an eleven-year-old.

(2) I fear, too, that there are many teachers who do not yet appreciate the problems of teaching children of lower ability or of those pupils who learn in ways which are different from former grammar school entrants. 'I have taught boys history for twenty years now and will continue to do so in the same way', declared a senior grammar school teacher in my presence at a staff meeting. 'Poor boys!' I murmured. There are, I believe, not a few teachers with this attitude.

(3) There is apparently well-founded criticism that most of the ex-grammar voluntary schools are not accepting the prescribed numbers of pupils in the low ability band from which the head teachers say they receive very few applicants. On the other hand, they are vastly over-subscribed in the above-average band. This is a problem which needs urgent attention as other voluntary schools are affected in the reverse way and so neither recruits a truly comprehensive intake.

The success of the small comprehensives will be judged, I think, on how they cope with two groups of pupils – the least able and the sixth formers. Most of the schools have established good 'remedial' departments and are dealing very well with this essential work but these departments will need gradual expansion with successive intakes. Co-operation at sixth form level is not yet so urgent a question as it will take five more years for the new comprehensive intakes to reach sixth form age, but it is imperative that the schools make provision for this now. Failure to do this could well cost a school its existence in the situation of very reduced rolls in the 1980s.

---

## Towards the Comprehensive University

Robin Pedley, one of the three original founders of this journal 20 years ago, and for many years co-editor, has written a book with this title which is bound to interest **Forum** readers. 'The comprehensive reorganisation of compulsory schooling is now entering its final stages', he writes, 'but ought the comprehensive principle to stop there?'. The book deals with the extension of this principle 'to the whole educational system of England and Wales beyond the age of 16'.

Published by The Macmillan Press in paperback at only £1.95, this is clearly a good buy. We will carry a full review in our next number.

# The Open Sixth

**Harvey Black**

Harvey Black is Deputy Headmaster of Filton High School, Bristol – an 11 to 18 mixed comprehensive. Earlier he was Head of Sixth Form in Churchill School, South Avon, and before that, Head of Humanities at Gordano School, Portishead. He here discusses the educational implications of the Open Sixth.

## The quiet revolution

Current proposals for upper secondary education in the light of population change and economic constraint should not cloud the issue of the quiet revolution that has been taking place in Comprehensive Sixth Forms throughout the country over the last few years.

Traditionally the idea of a Comprehensive 'Open Sixth Form' has been considered a contradiction in terms. The English Sixth Form, in this context, is seen as a place where able students prepare their advanced work before undertaking university honours degree courses. Recent evidence,<sup>1</sup> however, from, for example, Schools Council reports, suggests that even in 'selective' Sixth Forms there has been a considerable growth in the number of students for whom preparation for university is not the main purpose of their course. Some, following advanced work, do not wish to extend it into higher education and a growing number of others, often termed the 'New Sixth Formers', do not follow advanced work at all.

Such a changing situation demands, therefore, a thorough reappraisal of the objectives and curricula of the Sixth Form, indeed for the whole 16-19 age group. These new objectives must promote appropriate educational experiences for a much more diverse range of abilities, interests and talents than were ever accommodated in traditional selective Sixth Forms.

The pressures which have generated this 'quiet revolution' in our Sixth Forms are wide-ranging and

have, indeed, been experienced in all the advanced industrial economies of the Western World. A comparison of the numbers staying on beyond 16 does, in fact, suggest that our traditional selective policy has meant that the proportion in England and Wales is trailing somewhat.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, the rationale for providing the opportunity for an extended education into the Sixth Form does not just simply rely on a wish to end selection at 16 plus. It derives as much from a considered appraisal of the response of the education service to the needs of a democratic, industrialised and socially mature society.

A far greater proportion of the population than in former years now sees extended education as a valuable commodity.<sup>3</sup> Since the rapid development of an industrialised society, the economy has provided an insatiable demand for skilled men and women to fill the technical, service, managerial and professional levels of employment. This need has been reflected in the extension of compulsory schooling and in the use of the education system to provide the necessary skilled personnel.

At the same time, industrial technology and the ensuing prosperity has enabled the population to become liberated from a subsistence economy. This, combined with an eightfold increase in the population and a doubling of life expectancy, has led to profound political changes, including the evolution of more democratic forms of representation. This, in turn, has promoted the political demand for more equitable and, indeed, more secondary education as an inalienable human right.

Furthermore, industrialisation is now so complete and its scale so immense that rapid change is all-pervasive. There has, of course, always been change: what is new is the degree of change. The sheer scale of this demands an appropriate response from the education service. What is required is a high level of trained and flexible intelligence to cope with change. This, in turn, suggests the postponement of specialisation and selection and a concentration instead on developing, through a broad general education, the trained intelligence of all, most certainly to 16 and perhaps, with adjustments, to 18.

Already in the quiet revolution, our students are arriving with these intentions and a change of emphasis in our upper secondary education is beginning to become urgent. Instead of differentiating for special favour (in the scholarship tradition) only those few who possess excellence in a narrow specialist way, and, as a corollary, exclude the others, we need to broaden our concept of excellence. Then we would approach each student on the basis of a doctrine of equal worth whereby each can be led as far as he or she can go on as wide an educational basis as human and economic resources will allow. In this way, the potential reserves we now miss, and we so need, can be tapped and nurtured, not only for the benefit of the individual students themselves but also for society as a whole.

## The curricular problem

The pupils of this 'explosion scolaire' want a curriculum which will enable them to cope with a rapidly changing, sophisticated, technological society. It needs to be 'broad' and 'general'. As the Harvard Report<sup>4</sup> emphasised.

'General education is the sole means by which communities can protect themselves from the ill-effects of over-rapid change.'

Phenix<sup>5</sup> sharpens the definition of what we mean by 'general' education when he suggests that it contains those provisions for learning that are necessary for the development of a person in his essential humanity. Specialist education, on the other hand, includes provision for the development of particular competences for other purposes than the becoming of a person as a person. This distinction is a good one and suggests that

knowledge does in fact serve two main purposes. The first is its use for the development of a person, initiating him or her into a culture and its inheritance. Education there is a process. The second involves the use of knowledge as technology, as a tool for other purposes than personal growth and maturity.

In these terms, our specialist Sixth Form curriculum, particularly in the sciences and languages, has shifted towards a 'technology' emphasis, in many ways too early to have enabled many of the general 'process' aspects to have become suitably embedded.

Bearing this in mind, an appropriate contribution on the curriculum problem is the outline for a balanced curriculum suggested in Schools Council Working Paper 45.<sup>6</sup> This carefully speaks of elements, rather than subjects, and talks of a five unit curriculum involving, say, English (including literature), mathematics or a science, a social science, humanity or an aesthetic subject and two others, with the whole making up a balance. Once again, it would be the 'process' elements, the general, rather than the 'technology', the specialist, which would provide the emphasis.

The curriculum-builder would have to ensure that the options he provided were open-ended, widely-based and flexible and, of course, the educational, vocational and personal guidance of each student towards selecting appropriate curricular experiences would be at a premium.

## The reform proposals

Even the most cursory glance at the present Sixth Form curriculum reveals some difficulty in describing it as flexible, widely based and geared to the 'process' elements of a general education. The criticism is not new. For over twenty years, various groups with an interest in the Sixth Form curriculum have come up with reform proposals. With equal frequency these have run into the sand, usually for failing in some way or other to cope with one or other of the major vested interests. In trying to square these varying interests, the Schools Council has applied much of its energy to the question and it is from their latest proposals that some hope can be gleaned. Research studies for their 18 plus 'N' and 'F' level proposals (and for CEE) have now been published<sup>7</sup> and the case studies suggest that the resource implications of a five subject curriculum are quite

manageable even in fairly small Sixth Forms. Certain subjects, particularly mathematics, would flourish and a broader, more general, if not totally balanced, curriculum would be achieved.

Taylor, Reid and Holley,<sup>8</sup> who have also conducted researches into the Sixth Form curriculum, suggest an interesting idea which they claim found high favour among heads. This was that the

'Sixth Form curriculum be based on a "credit" system with freedom to follow a smaller number of subjects to a high level, or a larger number to a lower level'.

This credit system would help introduce flexibility, for one of the biggest drawbacks of present certification procedures is the narrowness of their base and the positive rejection of any student not in the topmost bracket of 18-year-olds who does not gain a pass in his 'A' levels (30% of the entry, approximately, fail in any given year, in large subject entries).<sup>9</sup> For this young person, two years' work is unrewarded. It is all, or nothing. Broadening the base, particularly with credits for units of work achieved, if necessary, at varying levels, would mean that far more students than at present would be served by the system.

## The Sixth Form Diploma

It is this shift of emphasis from using the selective 'A' level examination towards developing a flexible credit based system which is needed. Whilst such a new system will still have a built-in standard for selection purposes, it will now reward a student's preparation and study on a broad credit earning basis. This in turn will provide the opportunity (which some might not wish to take up) to liberate our traditional specialised curriculum from its Victorian scholarship-style origins.

Hearnden,<sup>10</sup> in his comparative study of upper secondary education, advocates a flexible approach in providing a student's course which comprises a series of units and modules with each earning credit towards a final certificate (rather as some degree courses are already planned). In this way, when assessing these courses, a much fuller school-leaving profile than the current GCE 'A' (or 'O') level pass certificate would be needed. This would record a more extensive range of the student's achievements and examination credits. It could be termed a Sixth Form Diploma and would, at once, serve both masters. It would be a meaningful school leaving award for all students who make something of their

Sixth Form careers as well as provide an appropriate matriculation requirement for higher education and employers. The various units or modules would earn a certain number of credits, validated by the examination boards as at present, and a certain total (rather in the same way as the informal 'A' level grade-points system works) would be needed for qualification for higher education and a mandatory grant. If necessary, linkages could be made between the credit value of an 'F', an 'N', a CEE and the 16 plus examinations.

Perhaps the most well-known example of units or modules of courses building up credits for a qualification is the Open University degree. Certainly, to apply this to the schools there would need to be some adjustments by the examination and certification bodies and perhaps a validation body, on the CNAA model, would be required. The Schools Council is the obvious choice here. It already has a role of this nature.

Such an approach would provide the opportunity for the Sixth Form curriculum and its assessment procedures to broaden effectively and to respond appropriately to the overwhelming economic, social, political and technological pressures for a flexible general education. Nor is the suggestion so revolutionary. American higher education has been using the credit and course unit approach as the basis of their qualifications system for many years. Indeed their attempts to develop an effective universal higher education system can show us the scope available, for their 'open door' policy implies the same assumptions as our policy of an 'open sixth'. Clark<sup>11</sup> made a study of the effects of such an 'Open Door College' and showed that student demand for a general education put pressure on staff to move away from specialisation. It also highlighted the crucial importance of student counselling to guide students to appropriate courses. He pointed out that there was a need for open and flexible courses able to permit varied differential and individualised approaches. Yet further evidence for the modular, credit based, system.

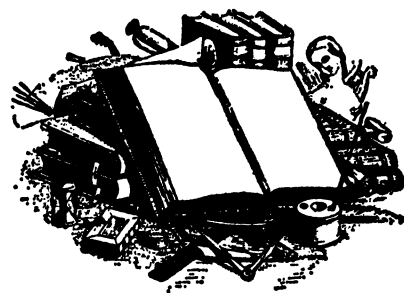
## Conclusion

However, we must beware of just simply changing the labels on the Sixth Form gate and on the examination papers taken inside whilst not carrying through the implications. This new flexibility demands a fundamental shift of emphasis. It is an emphasis which implies assumptions about objectives in the open Sixth Form, and about curriculum, with the need for a broad general



education emphasising the 'process' aspects of knowledge.

Hence, in our upper secondary institutions of the future, which are quietly moving from being a series of gift shops to becoming large department stores, we must not try and provide a mass produced version of yesterday's exclusive design. Instead, we must ensure that we provide a diverse, flexible curricular framework which not only responds to the needs of the students who arrive there, but is also able to generate the sort of men and women who will be equipped to construct a culture and a society that can cope with the inexorable process of change. The change, the 'quiet revolution', is already with us. The educational implications request our urgent attention.



#### Notes

- 1 Schools Council, *Examinations at 18+*, Examinations Bulletin 38. Evans/Methuen Educational, London, 1978. This estimates, from DES statistics, that in 1975, 28% of those in their first year in the Sixth Form were on courses leading entirely to examinations other than 'A' level, p. 5. This reference also estimates that of the 63% of Sixth Form boys in the 1968 survey, who planned to go to university, in fact only approximately 40% did go. If polytechnic degree courses are included, the figure rises to 46%.
- 2 A D C Petersen, *The Future of the Sixth Form*, RKP, London 1973.  

<i>Pupils aged 17 at school 1960-1965</i>			
USA (1960)	75.6%	Italy (1964)	19.0%
Netherlands (1961)	44.7%	W. Germany (1965)	16.9%
Belgium (1964)	42.2%	Portugal (1963)	15.6%
France (1964)	36.7%	England and Wales (1965)	13.8%
- 3 See, for example, an article in *Where*, March 1973, in which A Westoby and G Williams suggest that at 1967 values an 'A' level student would be earning twice as much as his unqualified brother by the time they were 45.
- 4 Harvard Report, *General Education in a Free Society*, Harvard UP, Cambridge, Mass, 1946, p 266.
- 5 P H Phenix, *Realms of Meaning*, McGraw Hill, New York, 1964, p 271.
- 6 Schools Council, *16-19 Growth and Response 1, Curricular Bases*, Working Paper 45. Evans/Methuen Educational, London, 1972, p 57-66, Appendix Vc, p 124-7.
- 7 *Op cit*, eg p 233.
- 8 P H Taylor, W A Reid, and B J Holley, *The English Sixth Form: A case study in curriculum research*, RKP, London, 1974, p 139.
- 9 See Schools Council, *Examinations at 18+*, *op cit*, p 6.
- 10 A Hearnden, *Paths to University: Preparation, Assessment, Selection*, Schools Council/Macmillan, London, 1973.
- 11 B R Clark, *The Open Door College: a case study*, McGraw Hill, New York, 1960.

## New Journal

### The Leicestershire Plan today

This welcome new journal is produced by an editorial committee representative of Leicestershire High and Upper schools (and community colleges). The editorial argues (rightly) that, contrary to myth, 'the Leicestershire Plan was not and is not monolithic'. It contains 'progressive' schools and others less so – what the schools have in common is 'a particular system of secondary organisation', and it is the teachers' job 'to make it work'.

The journal's aim is 'to discuss, illustrate and argue' the particular issues that arise, not only in Leicestershire, but in all schools. It invites contributions from Leicestershire and elsewhere. It will try 'not to record the past, but to analyse experience critically'. Its first number is lively, exceptionally well produced, controversial and consistently interesting.

It is proposed to issue the journal termly. Copies, price a mere 25p (but add postage), may be obtained from: Diane Griffin, Thomas Estley Community College, Station Road, Broughton Astley, Leicester LE9 6PT.  
 B.S.

# Reviews

## New Institutions

**Sixth-Form Colleges**, by Eric Macfarlane. Heinemann Educational Books (1978), pp 245, £5.95.

The severest critic of Sixth-Form Colleges can hardly deny that they seem to have come to stay. With five times as many young people continuing in full-time education between the ages of 16 and 19 as were doing so a quarter of a century ago, more and more of them are attending LEA Sixth-Form Colleges, of which there were 79 by 1977, the vast majority being 'open-access'. Eric Macfarlane is the shrewd and enthusiastic Principal of one such College (Queen Mary's College, Basingstoke), and his survey of such establishments makes very interesting reading.

On the positive side, the author makes many apt comments on the nature of comprehensive education, particularly as it affects adolescents. He contrasts the pupil's passive role in the traditional grammar school with the trend now for him to be 'an active partner in his own education'. He emphasises the desirability of up-dating traditional subject divisions: 'Human knowledge increases and its component parts alter in their relative importance'. There is a wise insistence on the need to teach for flexibility and adaptability. Mr. Macfarlane cleverly exposes the question-begging assumptions underlying the 'N' and 'F' proposals, reminding us how the study of three A-level science syllabuses or even of three languages can (could?) constitute a genuinely broad, liberal and relevant educational experience. Impressive examples of good practice are given, and indeed a feature of the whole book is its evident basis of detailed practical experience.

So far, so good. Unfortunately, in spite of its excellent qualities, this book does also invite the criticism that it is argued from an excessively partisan viewpoint. Again and again we find the

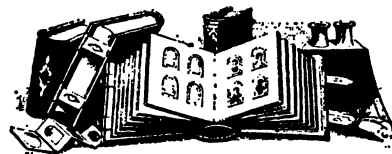
case for Sixth-Form Colleges resting on certain sweeping assumptions about the schools in which younger secondary pupils are taught, assumptions which are certainly not universally justified. These assumptions, implied in many passages and explicit in some, may be reduced to the allegation that secondary education for the 11-16 age range is necessarily characterised by a remote, irrelevant academicism and a strongly directive, authoritarian attitude on the part of the teaching staff, even where Fourth and Fifth Year pupils are concerned. Small wonder that sixteen-year-olds from such schools are glad to transfer to the more liberal atmosphere of a Sixth-Form College. But the obvious point, which Mr. Macfarlane nevertheless gives no hint of appreciating, is that such out-of-date conditions are by no means essential in any secondary school and that, in the many schools where no doubt they are still found, it would be better to strive to eradicate them.

They have indeed been largely eradicated in a number of the 14-18 Upper Schools which exist in Leicestershire and elsewhere. Innumerable passages in this book might indeed equally well have been written to describe the attitudes, procedures and atmosphere of such a fully comprehensive 14-18 school: for example, the student's gradual assumption of increased responsibility for his own studies and life style; policies concerning the students' dress, appearance and behaviour; the place of assemblies; the capacity of the institution to offer an almost infinitely wide range of individual time-tables; the necessity for a fundamental re-definition of the teacher's role, and the ex-students' appreciative comments about the special staff/student relationship; and a great many other features besides. Indeed, the educational reforms described in this book are so persuasively argued that, even without the example of Leicestershire, the thoughtful reader would probably have been led to reflect that the age for such 'preparation for adulthood' to begin

should be not 16, but 14 or 15 at the latest, so that if 14-18 Upper Schools did not already exist this book would have demonstrated the necessity of inventing them! It is all the more amazing that the existence of 14-18 comprehensives is totally ignored here.

With this fundamental caveat, the book can be recommended, not truly as a convincing proof of the overriding advantages of the Sixth-Form College, but as an absorbing and thought-provoking essay on the true principles of comprehensive secondary education in general, particularly in the upper forms of secondary schools.

ANDREW FINCH  
*Principal, Longslade School  
Leicestershire*



## A sophisticated review

**The Politics of Curriculum Change**, by Tony Becher and Stuart Maclure. Hutchinson (1978) pp. 192, Paperback, £2.95.

It is perhaps more difficult to pursue an argument in a book written by two people than it is in a book written by one. This appears to be so in **The Politics of Curriculum Change**, by Tony Becher and Stuart Maclure. It is a collection of very good chapters. The impression that the reader takes away is not of the grand overall design but of the satisfactoriness of the pieces, and I imagine that readers

will differ as to which ones most engage their interest.

There is a strong comparative element in the early, foundations-laying pages. The rest of the book focuses on content which is sensibly parcelled out into chapters with straight-forward titles and the reader can be confident that he will find what the title leads him to expect: 'Agents of change'; 'Subject-based development'; 'System-based development'; 'Fragmentation and integration'; 'Responsiveness to change'; 'Evaluating curriculum innovation'. The only exception is the title of the book itself which I find somewhat misleading. Political issues are not always the most prominent issues in the discussion and a more appropriate, if duller, title might be 'Aspects of Curriculum Change'.

The framework of comparative reference (mainly European) that is established in the early chapters allows the authors, in later chapters, to move easily across into the experience of other countries for points of comparison or contrast with British experience. For instance (to focus on one country only) there is a sketch of the carefully planned change to comprehensive education in Sweden, an account of Sweden's concern to articulate a set of goals for education that goes some way towards ensuring that what happens in schools is consistent with the broad aims of society, and there is a discussion of the evaluation of the Swedish IMU mathematics project where the reactions of trial teachers and the political context of the trials were, by design, not taken into account.

There is also a good set of miniatures of British experience. For instance, the Resources for Learning Project and the Sixth Form General Studies Project, which are presented, interestingly enough, as examples of the problem-solving approach to innovation; the Nuffield Junior Mathematics Project and its initiative in setting up Teachers' Centres to support innovating teachers; and the Stantonbury Campus and the opportunities it gave to an imaginative

Head to shape an innovative policy and an innovative curriculum in a brand new setting. (The rather instructional sketch of Bernstein's theory of classification and framing is the one vignette that seems out of place.)

The stylistic trick of taking a sudden plunge into actual events and enterprises is a feature of the book. But the book's great strength is its power to assist the reader towards *understanding*. It does not set out to make an original contribution to knowledge. It is a sophisticated review, and it has the solid eighteenth-century virtue of aspiring to familiar thoughts, well expressed. And well expressed they are. The book is rich in formulations which short-cut the reader's struggle with meaning and effect a swift sharing of insight. Two images, for example, which I found both striking and true to experience were these: the comparison of an induction course for a new curriculum project with a Baptist immersion: 'a quick one-week dip into the new ideology from which the converts emerged fortified to carry the gospel to all the folks back home' (p.120); the comparison of the school as a setting for evaluation with the Mad Hatter's tea-party: evaluation is as unmanageable as the tea-party, for the schools occupy 'a world in which samples are never fully representative, variables can never be held constant, and changes in behaviour even if, as seldom happens, they can be accurately measured—do not adequately reflect the intellectual processes to which they are intended to equate.' (p.138).

Another strength, as these two quotations suggest, is the book's humour. The authors have a quick eye for the absurd and, apparently, no shortage of evidence. So, it is readable, up-to-date, dependable and confident—the B.Ed. student's *vade mecum*. It will provide excellent background for courses in curriculum studies.

JEAN RUDDUCK  
Centre for Applied  
Research in Education,  
University of East Anglia

## Sound Advice

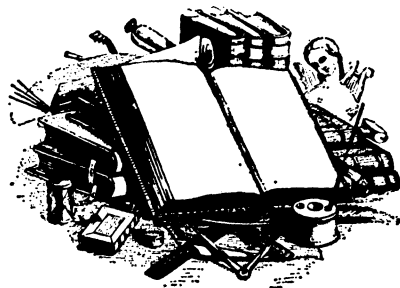
**The Tutor**, by Keith Blackburn,  
Heinemann Educational Books (1978),  
pp 262, £2.50.

This book was well received when it first appeared in 1975, and it is good to have it in a paperback edition.

In my more cynical moments, I sometimes wonder how we all coped before we had the benefit of all the volumes which comprise the ever-growing literature of school organisation and management. But, to be fair, this book doesn't claim to say anything startlingly original; rather it seeks to provide the young teacher or student with sound practical advice for tackling that most daunting of roles: tutor (or form teacher) to between twenty and thirty pupils in a large comprehensive school.

At the time the book was first published, the author was himself a Head of House at Crown Woods, a large comprehensive in south-east London. No one can doubt that he really does understand what pastoral care is all about, and he writes with compassion, sensitivity and an obvious awareness of the needs of the adolescent.

CLYDE CHITTY  
Vice-Principal  
Earl Shilton Community College,  
Leicestershire



## **The following BACK NUMBERS of FORUM are still available price 85p each.**

- Vol 8 No 2 Special number on the Probationary Year.**
- Vol 9 No 3 Plowden symposium.**
- Vol 10 No 1 The Sixth Form in the Comprehensive School; Curriculum planning in a large school.**
- Vol 10 No 3 Focus on Groups — teaching in groups.**
- Vol 11 No 2 Two Years after Plowden; Self-directed learning.**
- Vol 11 No 3 Freedom of Choice — for whom? A new Education Act**
- Vol 12 No 2 From secondary to primary.**
- Vol 12 No 3 Teaching Unstreamed Classes.**
- Vol 13 No 1 Teachers for Comprehensives; Mixed ability science.**
- Vol 13 No 2 Assessment — for Whom? Recent trends in examining.**
- Vol 14 No 2 Innovation in Education.**
- Vol 15 No 1 Democracy and Innovation in Education.**
- Vol 15 No 2 16 to 19.**
- Vol 16 No 1 Resource-based learning.**
- Vol 16 No 3 Going Comprehensive in England, Wales and Scotland.**
- Vol 17 No 2 New Directions: reconstruction of knowledge.**
- Vol 17 No 3 The Question of Size for primary and secondary schools.**
- Vol 18 No 1 Mixed Ability Teaching: French, Maths, Science.**
- Vol 18 No 2 Flexibility and Mixed Ability.**
- Vol 18 No 3 Examination or Assessment in primary and secondary phases.**
- Vol 19 No 1 In Defence of Education.**
- Vol 19 No 2 Comprehensive Remedial Provision for primary and secondary.**
- Vol 19 No 3 The Primary School.**
- Vol 20 No 1 Multiracial Education.**
- Vol 20 No 2 Non-Streaming — Why and how.**
- Vol 20 No 3 Testing and Teaching.**

**Order from: Forum, 11 Beacon Street, Lichfield WS13 7AA.**