

# 10/65

## and all that!

### 40 years in education

In 1994 I retired from teaching after 40 years in education, spent mainly in the secondary sector, but including six years on the staff of a College of Education. During those four decades, I witnessed the evolution of the concept of comprehensive schools; on both sides of the landmark *Circular 10/65*.

In September 1944 we, the former members of the classes L5A, L5B, L5C and L5D at Worthing High School for Boys, returned to discover that we had not been promoted to U5A, U5B, U5C and U5D, but oddly to 5G, 5R, 5M and 5O! Our left-wing headmaster explained to us that he was following the ethos of the recent Butler Education Act, and was converting our school into a bilateral grammar/secondary modern, each with an appropriate syllabus.



Corner Hall field trip to London (1956)

### Mixed ability

Ten years on, after National Service (when, as an instructor, I learnt all about 'mixed ability' classes) and four years at Southampton University, I joined the staff of a pretty rough secondary modern boys' school in Hertfordshire where, as well as finding myself Head of History, I took my low grade second year class for English, Maths and RE. In reality, only the word 'modern' had been added to the original 1938 title!

In 1957 I moved to Walton-on-Thames in leafy middle class suburban Surrey to teach History and Drama to boys aged 11–15. Instead of brown bomber jackets and jeans, the pupils wore smart black trousers and blazers. Instead of leaving to go into local factories, many went on to Oatlands College in Weybridge, or attended Kingston-upon-Thames Technical College, or worked as apprentices at Vickers at Brooklands (where the VC10s were under construction).

By no stretch of the imagination could either of the above schools be termed 'comprehensive', nor could my third school (1960–1961) in the heart of the Lincolnshire fens, where the town's main open sewer flowed past the 1957 school entrance, and my History syllabus had been drawn up by a Woodwork headmaster! Three years before my arrival, the local boys' and girls' schools had been closed down, as had the classes for 11–15 year-olds at local village schools (some in the Deep Fen).

*The 'bog standard' comprehensive school is dead; long live the 'specialist' comprehensive school*

## Motorcycles and conkers

In 1962 I returned to my native Sussex to join the staff of the remarkable Andrew Cairns Secondary School, led by its equally remarkable head, Ken Hodges. During my four and a half years there, I saw it evolve into a comprehensive with no coercion from either Whitehall or Chichester. A wide variety of 'O' levels (including Greek Civilisation!) was offered, followed in 1965 with 'A' levels in such subjects as Economics and History. Each term the Head would remind assembled staff and pupils: 'Every boy can succeed at something, and our duty is to locate that something.'

One example of a course for the less academically inclined pupil was the Metalwork department's motorcycle construction course! There was even a 50cc motorcycle race included in the sports day programme.

In the 1960s there was nothing 'bog standard' about this school. How many schools have a nine-hole putting course? How many hold an annual staff-student knock-out conker championship?

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## The 'Louth Plan'

It was following the publication of *10/65* that I found myself in the office of Worthing's Exempt District Director of Education, wearing my two hats as:

- President of the local National Association of Schoolmasters (pro-comprehensives)
- Chairman of the Old Boys of Worthing High (anti-comprehensives)!

Surprisingly, although Worthing Municipal Borough had a huge Conservative/Ratepayers majority, they voted in favour of comprehensives, converting their two high schools, two CofE schools and two secular secondary moderns into five 11–16 comprehensives plus a sixth form college (my alma mater).

Likewise, up in the northern (Lindsey) area of Lincolnshire, a town like Louth (Liberal/Conservative) produced the Louth '65 plan, which converted the ancient King Edward VI Grammar School into a 14–18 form school with a 14+ exam for entry, but an open sixth form, whilst the two secondary moderns in the town became 11–16 comprehensives as Cordeaux High School and



Mr Kaye and his class at Corner Hall Secondary School (1955–56)

Monks' Dyke High School. However, elsewhere in Lincolnshire, Holland and Kesteven County Councils were not enamoured by the concept of comprehensive education and resisted change wherever possible. By the time I arrived in the area in 1973 as Head of Humanities and Professional Tutor at Monks' Dyke, the 'Louth Plan' was fully operational and appeared to be successful.

## Big ideas

Tony Crosland (MP for nearby Grimsby) did not live long enough to watch the fruits of his Circular 10/65 ripen. Nor did he see the problems that arose, many of them unforeseen 40 years ago. Some of these are listed below (but *not* in any particular order).

The 1960s was probably *the* decade when the high priests of mixed ability classes were heard loud and clear throughout the land. In theory, the most able pupils would help the least able – but this demanded altruism all round and an exceptionally able teacher who could balance the needs of the 'top' 10% with the needs of the 'bottom' 5%.

In education this was also the era of 'Big is Beautiful' (or, at least, 'more economic'). It was proclaimed that a school needed to have at least 2,000 on roll to create a 'viable' sixth form which could offer as wide a range of 'A' levels as possible. But such large schools often lacked cohesion – even staff felt lost at times! This led to 'shotgun marriages' between schools and/or split-site (or multiple site) campuses, as happened in

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Walton-on-Thames Transport Club on Eastbourne beach (1958) and in London (1959)

Barnstaple, North Devon. Many new big schools were launched without possessing an assembly hall big enough to accommodate the whole school community at one sitting – whether for an act of worship or a production of *The Mikado*.

### Confrontation

Massive school reorganisation led to confrontation between LEAs and teachers. In Sussex, for example, it seemed quite possible that all staff would have to re-apply for their positions because – so it was argued – secondary modern school ‘X’ was not the same legal entity as comprehensive school ‘Y’. I led a 4pm walk-out of NAS members in Littlehampton (with local media coverage). The local MP said that I should be ‘horse-whipped and thrown into a horse trough’ for having the audacity to encourage teachers to withdraw their *voluntary* extra-curricular services! Later, as a result of a countywide rally held in Lewes, plans to force everyone to re-apply for their current job were quietly dropped.

Whilst all this was going on, two long-term problems had yet to be resolved:

- increasing the school leaving age
- reducing class size.

The Butler Act had foreseen the raising of the school leaving age from 14 to 16 in two stages. The first of these to 15 was achieved in 1947. 18 years later, the second step to 16 had still not taken place. In fact, it was not until September 1973 that the first full fifth year (‘Year 11’ in new money), filed somewhat reluctantly back to their schools for these extra three terms of tuition. After six years as a lecturer at a College of Education, I rejoined the chalkface for a bumpy ride!

Class size was also an issue. At the NAS Edinburgh Conference of 1957, I heard one delegate tell the incredible story of a class so large that the teacher had to leave the room and teach outside, through the open window. That same year I discovered at

Walton-on-Thames that when everyone in 2B was present, there were only 40 desks and chairs for 46 pupils; the last half dozen through the door had to sit on the floor.

### Consensus

Nowadays, there is a tendency to forget that, when it came to thinking about education, prior to 10/65 there was a greater degree of consensus between the Labour and Conservative parties than there was afterwards. In part this was because, in terms of the number of MPs, the UK parliament was finely balanced between the two main parties (between 1951 and 1964 the Liberals had just 6 MPs).

Forty years later, have we come full circle? Has political consensus broken out again? Have the Labour and Conservative parties agreed on a single preferred model for school-based 11–19 education: the specialist-but-open-to-all-school? The ‘bog standard’ comprehensive school is dead; long live the ‘specialist’ comprehensive school.

■ David Kaye

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Mr Kaye and his class at Walton-on-Thames Secondary Boys' School (c.1957)