FROM SCHOOL TO OFFICE

THE CONTINUING STORY OF KEITH UPSON

I have always found settling into new situations difficult. This is because I always prepare myself very carefully for what I calculate might happen and am then taken somewhat off balance when gaps between expectation and reality begin to emerge. The first jolt of reality at Conyngham School occurred when I returned there for a preliminary visit before taking up post on January 1st 1980. It was the last week of term before the Christmas holidays and the experience was unsettling. The quiet and industrious atmosphere I had observed on the day of my interview had vanished and the place seemed close to riot. Admittedly it was close to breaking up for Christmas, the excitement was palpable and the youngsters did not expect to be made to work, but I had never before sensed such a struggle to maintain order. I remember standing in the Secretary's office watching books and paper being thrown out of a first floor classroom window and, as I again toured the School, I could not believe the noise. I came away confused and not quite sure of what I should expect when I started. It was some time later that I discovered that, on the day of my interview, the Deputy Head had preceded the visiting party of candidates through the corridors of the School to ensure that the atmosphere was invitingly calm and collected. What Deceit!

The Conygham School occupied a prime site on the extreme western edge of Ramsgate and was housed in modern buildings. In terms of facilities it had everything, including a swimming pool. It was also equipped to accommodate physically handicapped children and there was a lift to service a 3-storied tower block of classrooms, ramps and staff dedicated to their every need. Unfortunately, the School was separated from the town by a large Council Estate – the Newington Estate – a warren of high-density housing arranged in a comples layout of cul-de-sacs and by-roads. It was the sort of place you could easily get lost in and there was no straight forward route through it. For some years the Estate was used as a repository for the problem families of Thanet and it had acquired an unsavoury reputation. Unemployment, family breakdowns and crime were all high and there was a pervading atmosphere of hopelessness and disenchantment which the children brought with them into the School. As a result the School developed a very strong system of pastoral support with very tight disciplinary structure which gave the children little latitude to misbehave. Regrettably it took precedence over all else so that, in many instances, the quality of teaching was constrained by the need to maintain order. The result was there was little pleasure in learning and extraordinary low

aspirations for academic success. The attitude of a great many teachers was that you could not expect much from such troubled children and success was measured in their ability to keep them amused and out of mischief. By every measure – free school meals, exam results and juvenile convictions the School was a 'problem' School. In 2003 it had the lowest GCSE performance in the country. Certainly nothing of its reputation had reached the ears of any of my colleagues in Whitstable. Ramsgate was then a world away.

Before my preliminary visit to the School in December I received the dramatic news that the Headmaster had suffered a major heart attack and would be off for the foreseeable future. As a result, the Authority had persuaded the retiring Deputy Head to take over the reins and see me properly installed. Fortunately, as a School with over 1000 pupils I was not the only Deputy Head. There was also a female Deputy who had been promoted up through the ranks of the School and who was, therefore, well-adjusted to the demands of the job. This took some pressure off me and I was not expected to cope with everything. The responsibilities were divided between us. She was responsible for the Pastoral System, Home / School liaison, and girls discipline and worked through the four Heads of Houses and their Form Tutors. I was responsible for all aspects of the School curriculum, the timetable, the day-to-day running of the School and boys discipline. I worked through the Heads of the Subject Departments and Subject teachers. It was a division that worked well and we functioned largely independent of each other.

The first two or three weeks were a peculiar sort of honeymoon period. Nobody seemed to bother me and I remember sitting in my remote office wondering what to do with myself. It was a short-term phase of uncertainty as both staff and pupils weighed me up and tested my approachability whilst I felt my way into my new role and status and assessed whether my management style fitted the culture and regime of the School. I soon discovered that the School was managed with more than a touch of military authoritarianism. Instructions were passed down. This was not my way and I set about showing a different way of dealing with things. My first task each day was to deal with staff absences. This either entailed finding a supply teacher, or, more often than not, taking the free periods of teachers to cover the classes of their absent colleagues. Notifying staff that they were to be robbed of their spare time was not a popular task. Hitherto 'cover slips' detailing the class, period and room were issued by 'runners', - pupils who would just thrust the bad news into the hands of the designated teacher as an order from on high. I was immediately much more circumspect and took to delivering the slips myself so that I could face down the complaints and justify the absolute fairness of the way I administered the system. This up-front approach rapidly earned me a reputation for efficiency and even-handedness. The process also meant that I could listen to people and assess their commitment and amenability, their efficiency and their tolerance to additional pressure. In this way I came to know them quickly and learned the most viable approach to win the co-operation of the few who were never happy to tow the line.

The first major task of my incumbency was to complete Form 11. This is the major annual return which had to be made to the Authority detailing every aspect of the curriculum and every pupil in the School. For me it involved constructing a complex flow-diagram of the

curriculum and its administration for each year-group of the School. It proved to be a valuable introduction into the way in which the timetable was constructed – the task for which I was primarily appointed. By early February I found myself laying the ground for the following year's timetable and of preparing the way for 3rd Year subject options which needed to be complete before Easter. The process brought me into head-on conflict with a small committee of Science teachers who had previously organised the system. They expected to be involved and were somewhat upset at the loss of their power-base when I removed the responsibility from their shoulders and proceeded to make changes to the way it was to be administered. After a series of Assemblies, a parents evening and much consultation with the Heads of Subject Departments about a fair distribution of the rump of troublesome pupils who nobody wanted to teach, I completed options to the satisfaction of all involved. Once again it became clear that the level of consultation I instituted with teacher, parent and pupil was far higher than usual, and, much to my gratification no murmurs of discontent reached my ears. The quietness was a measure of success. For my part, once again, I became increasingly aware of the personality and shortcomings of individual members of the teaching staff, knowledge that became essential for the construction of the full School timetable.

The construction of the timetable dominated the Summer term. It was a fascinating task that I came to enjoy above all else. So much had to be weighed and balanced, and so much depended upon it. A poorly constructed timetable which put inadequate teachers with surly and difficult classes at the wrong time of the day could create a havoc which would last a year. Potentially it could damage the health of staff and create a culture amongst pupils that would be difficult to reverse. Thorough consultation with staff was necessary at every level to ensure that problem children were dispersed and that nominated teachers had the ability to cope with the classes allotted to them. It was not easy. Heads of Departments, who were responsible for the distribution of their staff within their subjects, were inclined to use their authority to feather their own nests by ensuring that they had the higher ability classes and the best exam groups whilst passing off the more problematic lower ability groups to their less experienced underlings. It was common practice – part of the perks of status within the School. I would have none of it. I insisted upon absolute fairness for everybody – an even distribution of upper, middle and lower ability classes for every teacher in the School. To enforce these principles I mapped the timetable for each subject with the Head of Department over my shoulder and involved them in the choices and decisions as we went. Where difficulties arose which pressed the boundaries for particular teachers I also made sure that they too were party to any decision which might affect them. In that way there were no surprises when the timetable was finally completed. Such practice was not at all common. My experience to that time was that timetables were constructed by Deputy Heads with no consultation whatsoever, and, that when they were published, often just before the start of Term in September, there was often considerable anger and unhappiness amongst some staff at the way they had been put upon to teach classes and subjects they felt ill-equipped to deal with. My first timetable was published at the beginning of July and invoked no complaint or ill-feeling whatsoever.

Constructing a timetable was one thing, communicating it to over a 1000 pupils and 50+ staff to avoid chaos at the start of Term was quite another. It was a major piece of

organisation which involved copying endless timetables, designating assembly points and writing instructions for teachers. Fortunately, I persuaded the School to invest in a state-of-the-art Xerox photocopier. This proved to be an invaluable resource. For the first time it became possible to give each pupil a copy of their outline timetable and to provide staff with a copy of the full School timetable as well as their own personal one. It actually took longer to organise the timetable than it did to write it. Of course the moment of truth came when it was all implemented at the start of Term. At this point I could only watch and hope. I am happy to say that not once in the six years was there the slightest problem – a testimony to the hours of checking and cross-checking that I did to make sure there was no double-booking or over-utilisation of resources. There was then, of course, no computers to ease the burden!

As far as classroom teaching was concerned my start at Conyngham School was a baptism of fire. As a Deputy Head I was expected to teach a 50% timetable. Since I was appointed half-way through an academic year no allowance could be made for my subject specialisms and I had to take over the teaching commitment of the retiring Deputy. He taught Maths, Technical Drawing, Science and Careers to mostly lower ability classes from Years 2 to 5. Apart from attempting to teach Human Biology to the 5th Year standards were such that I did not find the challenge particularly difficult. It was a question of displaying a confidence that I did not really feel. As far as Science was concerned I had to throw myself on the good auspices of the Head of Department to provide me with worksheets and other aids so that in reality he did more work than I did.

Throughout my six year stay at the School I am ashamed to say that teaching was never a priority. There was an excess of Geography and History teachers so I was never able to exercise my real interests and talents and was forced instead into propping up some of the more problematic areas of the curriculum where there was either teacher shortages or a need to purposefully occupy the lower ability non-examination groups of the 4th and 5th years. Over time my teaching became split between Careers Education and something I called 'Contemporary Studies' which was basically a compulsory non-examination course for all senior pupils designed to open up areas of knowledge overlooked by conventional examination syllabi. I was not the only one involved. A number of staff contributed specialisms to create a 'circus' of themes through which each pupil would travel. They included Computer Science, Religious and Moral Education, Careers and Preparation for Work but year by year there was variation depending upon the available staff. Needless to say it was not particularly satisfying work. Although every effort was made to ensure that the material taught was interesting and relevant to the immediate future needs of the kids, I remember having to use every trick in the book to grab their attention and every ruse to cajole and humour them into work. The non-examination status of the subject diminished its worth. Attempts to generate good, in-depth class discussion, a key aim of the Course, usually faltered because the kids were not capable of handling adult freedoms – they had spent too long being repressed. It was difficult therefore to raise lessons above the ordinary.

The role of Deputy Head involved rather more than just teaching and administration. I was also cast into the roles of Sergeant Major, Policeman, Sleuth, Magistrate, Prison Warder, Social Worker, Mentor, Councillor, Public relations Officer and Salesman. There were certainly

times when I seemed to be rushing around the place plugging leaks in the dam in an effort to prevent it all from collapsing. The difficult times always occurred 3 or 4 weeks into each half-term when tiredness and stress began to take their toll upon the staff and absence rates increased dramatically. This left me scouring the list of available Supply Teachers trying desperately to find help, often with limited success. Many of the teachers listed had either experienced the School or heard of its reputation and simply would not come. The result was that I had no other alternative but to take the free periods of staff in order to run the School which exacerbated the problem by raising tiredness and stress levels still further. In time this aspect of the job made me cynical and bitter. I came to know the staff who would take time off at the drop of a hat and it pained me to have to penalise their colleagues, many of whom struggled in feeling equally under the weather. It did not help that the worst offender was the husband of the other Deputy who was absent for as much as 2 terms out of 3. He taught Drama and was impossible to replace, there being no Drama teachers on the Supply lists. But there were others who sneezed once and then took a week off who tested my principles of even-handedness to the extreme. Needless to say I took to keeping records of the free periods lost by each individual teacher so that, over time, I was able to redress the balance.

Staff absence had a direct effect upon pupil behaviour. As is often the case with under-privileged children they require a stable and predictable environment. Anything that rocks the boat and disturbs their routine excites them and causes a backlash. A proportion of staff and most Supply teachers had difficulty in controlling some lower-ability classes and I was often called to quell the disorder and lower the temperature. At such times I patrolled the corridors and made my presence known to both pupil and teacher to prevent the start of such degeneration – it was easier than picking up the pieces and undermining what little authority the teacher had. On the rare occasion when classes would not tow the line it was necessary to devise strategies to isolate the real trouble makers. One of the biggest mistakes was to punish a whole group for the sins of the few. I usually set targets which involved making a mark in each child's exercise book at where they were so that, both teacher and myself, would have some measure of what they managed to achieve for the remainder of the lesson. I then dealt with the non-achievers by giving them a hefty detention.

A great deal of my time was taken up with investigation, especially in tracking down thieves and stolen property, in reaching the truth behind disputes of one kind or another, or in ferreting out the perpetrators of vandalism, bullying or other anti-social behaviour. Over the years I became quite adept in the art of interrogation. I learned to play one off against the other, to exploit weakness and recognise the attempt to lie, and I would pursue suspects relentlessly until I got the truth. There are too many incidents to relate individually. Investigating minor acts of lost or damaged property, play-ground fights or bullying was routine. There were, however, two investigations which hold fast in my memory which had consequences far beyond the School.

Damage to, or minor theft from bicycles was a recurring problem, particularly amongst the younger boys in the School. In some cases the perpetrators were found and punished and reparations made to the victim, but, more often than not investigations ran into the sand and children had to be reminded of the risks they ran in bringing bicycles to School. There was

one occasion, however, when a boy reported his bike missing at the end of the day and, after a quick search, it was obvious that it had been stolen. Sometimes missing bikes turned up the next morning and all was well. In this instance as we walked the length of the cycle sheds the next morning the boy recognised almost the whole of his bike attached to 5 or 6 others – the saddle on one, the frame on another and so on. This was sufficiently unusual for me to call the Police. Their investigations led them to an adult gang on the Estate who were operating the same scam with motor cycles – stealing them and rebuilding them. A small group of boys in the School were simply mimicking their elders. They were duly given police warnings and there was no recurrence of the problem again.

The most amusing piece of detective work began one morning after School Assembly when one of our more elderly tutors approached me in a corridor brandishing three brand-new shiny keys on a ring. He had taken them from a small boy in his Tutor Group who was touting them amongst his friends and he thought it suspicious. I duly called the boy to my office and asked where the keys had come from. He admitted to being given them by another lad who I also called to interview. Within an hour I saw about 8 to 10 boys and had 85 twinkling keys on my desk. It transpired that they had been stealing them from new VW cars which were being imported into Ramsgate Harbour. The cars were held temporarily in dockside compounds before being driven to a depot at Pegwell Bay. The boys had gained access to the compound and were removing the keys from the ignition. The result was that the cars could not be moved. When I telephoned VW they were ecstatic at the discovery. Their representative who came to collect the keys explained that the situation on the dockside had become so critical that they had a ship laid-to in the Channel unable to dock and off-load its cargo of cars. The problem was costing the Company thousands. I must say that in view of the gravity of the situation I was expecting some tangible recognition of my efforts, but none ever came!

Within a community of over 1000 children there are often volatile situations which have to be dealt with quickly and firmly. Most usually it is playground fights or children blowing fuses and lashing out in uncontrollable rages at anything within reach. Sometimes there is an element of personal risk in intervening but it has to be done. The most threatening situation I ever had to confront occurred in the road outside the School at the end of a day. A gang of 17 and 18 –year-old Londoners appeared at the School gates intent on doing battle with some of our pupils. Apparently there had been some aggravation between the groups at a football match in the town and they had come to settle their differences once and for all. The news of their arrival spread through the School like wild-fire and before we knew it almost the whole School had gathered in the road to egg on the combatants and watch the fireworks. The Police were called but such is the speed with which such situations ignite that I went out to try to keep the peace until they arrived. So it was that I found myself keeping the two groups apart whilst trying to move on the spectators. No other member of staff, including the Headmaster would come to my assistance. Fortunately, the threat that the Police were actually on their way was enough to keep the temperature down and deter the start of battle. When they did arrive the crowd rapidly dissipated into the Estate without a punch being thrown.

My status and my responsibility for boy's discipline meant that I was the last stop for problem children. Generally, the 4 Heads of Houses ran tight ships and dealt with the majority of miscreants. They ran House detentions, and, for persistent and serious offenders amongst the boys, they used the slipper. They also notified the parents and invited them in if the situation required it. It was rare for individuals to be referred to me. When they were, the expectation was that they would be given a good caning which I would administer across the bottom. There were, however, offences for which punishment by caning was automatic. Verbal abuse of teachers was not tolerated and neither was smoking. The former was not common, but the latter could be a daily event if you were willing to catch them out. The problem was break times when an equally determined bunch of senior pupils would find inconspicuous places behind buildings to have a quiet smoke, protected by an elaborate network of 'KB' spies who would raise the alarm if duty staff came near. Any attempt to stamp this out on a daily basis had the potential to turn into a game of cat and mouse, so we tended to mount surprise raids every now and then. I must say I enjoyed the sport of outwitting them and often used to brighten my day by hiding near their rendezvous before break and then catching them cigarette in hand before they had chance to stamp them out. On such occasions 3 or 4 boys would find themselves outside my office bracing themselves for the inevitable. Although I had a 'swishy' cane I seldom hit them hard. Most of the punishment was in the fear of pain and the indignity of submission. At the age of 14 – 16 it was a real dent to their self-image, particularly as many of them had acquired men's bodies and were both taller and beefier than I was. Using the cane regularly was not the answer however. There was one boy, who was caught all too frequently, who would simply say "Fair Cop Sir' and bend over automatically before I had a chance to upbraid him. For him caning was no deterrent at all. For most others though the humiliation was effective and not too many returned to take the medicine more than once or twice.

Staff relationships in the School were riddled with factional interest. The geography of the place encouraged the development of tight departmental groups and there was very little inter-mingling between them. The differences rapidly became evident around the meeting table where it was impossible to reach agreement about anything. Under such circumstances it was not surprising that an autocratic style of management had emerged. At Easter 1980, four months after his stroke, the Headmaster resigned and a new Head was appointed for September. He was the Deputy Head of Herne Bay High School who I already knew as a passing acquaintance. He was a man of the people who appeared laid-back and was adept at defusing situations and radiating calm. He was a good man for the job. Like me he preferred the democratic route to management and sought to govern by consent, but even with his influence, we failed to make much headway in Heads of Department meetings. I remember being frustrated to the point of anger at the demolition of ideas by one faction or another as we attempted to modernise some of the routines. It was clear that little would be accomplished in this forum. We soon learned that it was better to form 'working parties' of modernisers across the School and by-pass some of the H.O.Ds altogether. In this way a small group of us revolutionised the reporting system in my first year there. We invested so much time and energy overhauling the system, and sold it so completely to junior staff, that the more negative H.O.Ds could not hold out against the changes. It seemed to be the only way

to make progress. Accordingly, in the following year, 1982-3, a small team of us formed a research group to investigate -language across the curriculum. I established an annual testing programme designed to provide information on reading ages and a number of other measures for each pupil so we could come to grips with their weaknesses and chart their progress year-on-year against national norms (not unlike SATS). We then examined the reading material and textbooks used with each year group and subjected them to readability tests to assess the reading age necessary to understand them. A yawning gap emerged between the two measures for below average children. The books they were provided with were too difficult for them to understand. To ensure the message reached every teacher a report was written and a number of staff meetings were organised to explain the issues and debate what could be done about them. It was all so successful that I was twice invited to Eversley College, Folkestone, the County's In-Service Training Centre, to lecture about it. The project was followed by a less successful attempt to focus upon writing. This showed that the children were doing an enormous amount of copy-writing, but our attempts to change things failed. It became obvious that for many teachers, setting them to copy, which they would do without any fuss, was one of their chief coping strategies. The risks of being more adventurous were too high. Here was the nub of the problem which perpetuated low standards. Expectations were just too low.

Whilst much of the story so far seems grim, life at Conyngham School was not nearly so bad as it sounds. Certainly there was little scope for relaxation and the need for constant vigilance set stress levels fairly high, but, as is always the case, the saving grace was the quality of personal relationships. Despite their professional differences the staff were a fine bunch of people who were very caring and supportive of each other. Their friendly banter kept spirits high, and the atmosphere was sufficiently congenial to allow us to keep on top of things and not be swamped and overwhelmed by the negative. Needless to say, although I engaged in the social banter to the full, I could not but help notice the deference to my status which precluded me from being fully accepted as one of the boys. It seemed that one of the penalties of senior management is that you are never quite allowed into the inner circle of personal relationships. For my part I had to be careful not to be seen to attach myself to any particular group or faction but to share my time and favours equally. There was therefore a certain loneliness and vulnerability to my position which had to be accepted as part of the job. The detachment meant that some teachers often came and poured their hearts out and I found myself fulfilling a very important counselling role, but it also meant that I became the receptacle for an endless drip of complaint and negative feeling. At first it seemed important that staff should have somebody they could drip to, and it was water off a duck's back, but as time went by the novelty wore thin and it became somewhat depressing. I found myself having to work hard to ensure that the negative aspects of the job did not overwhelm the positive.

One of the ways I managed to do this was by carving myself out an area where I could succeed. Since I could not do this through the curriculum I turned instead to producing musical shows, in the absence of the drama teacher who was too busy feigning illness! The first was 'Oliver' staged in March 1983. Using a combination of staff and pupils in the principle parts, including myself as Mr Bumble, it far exceeded my expectations. A large proportion of

the staff rallied round and made a contribution. Some manufactured and painted scenery, others created costumes and set and operated lights, and still others dealt with advertising, ticket sales and other front-of-house matters, including the decoration of the entrance hall and corridor to give a real Dickensian feel. With countless scene changes and quite a difficult musical score it was not the easiest show to stage but the cast rose to the challenge and worked hard to achieve committed and rousing performances. It was a magnificent team effort and hugely successful. In March 1985 I repeated the experience with 'Fiddler on the Roof', another show offering real scope for characterisation. Once more I drew upon pupils and teachers to create a principle line-up and trained a large chorus of pupils, and once again it was a tremendous success. The investment of time in these productions was, however, phenomenal. To ensure success I gave up almost every lunch break and at least two after-school sessions each week for three months and, as the show neared the performance dates considerably more than that. By the end of four or five performances I was drained and exhausted. It was something I could only cope with every other year. By the time the next was due in 1987 I had moved on to the next stage of my career.

The chorus of Conyngham School's production of the hit Lionel Bart musical, "Oliver." TK445/36

OLIVER IS A JOY!

LIONEL Bart's hit musical, "Oliver" was an ambitious and complex production for pupils at Conyngham School, Ramsgate.

The show is well known to audiences and contains a wealth of memorable songs including "Food, glorious Food" and "Pick a Pocket."

"Oliver" is a difficult production to stage well said the director, deputy headmaster, Mr. Keith Upson.

"The 90 pupils in the cast and behind the scenes found it testing, but very enjoyable. We began rehearsals in October and practised during breaks, the lunch hour and after lessons.

The musical includes a lot of scene changes which posed problems at the beginning, but these were solved by ingenious lighting and net screens.

Mr. Upson, who has produced and directed for Herne Bay Operatic Society, praised the youngsters involved in the production.

"They really threw everything into the show. It is nice to watch the pupils — many of which have never been on a stage before — slowly gather confidence and skill," he said.

The school also put on an exhibtion of paintings and drawings showing life in Victorian London, to coincide with the production

Bill Sykes (Anthony Bottle) threatens Nancy (Elaine Stubbings). TK445/29

Fagin (Michael Criddle) teaches Oliver how to pick a pocket. TK445/7

By 1985 I once again began to feel unsettled. Most Head teachers are appointed in their early 40's and at the age of 43 I began to sense that I could miss the boat. Furthermore, the thought of another 20 years of doing what I was doing filled me with horror. The job was between the devil and the deep blue sea – neither one thing or the other. It was too mundane for me and did not offer me sufficient scope to excel- something that I needed to satisfy my ego. Admittedly the Headmaster respected my autonomy and never interfered with, or criticised, any aspect of my work, but I became increasingly aware of how much more difficult Conyngham was to other schools in the locality. Just how much more difficult emerged during meetings of the Thanet Deputy Head's Association where anecdotes were freely exchanged. One of the many comparisons which seemed to speak volumes was fundraising events. The higher status Schools would regularly raise £2 -3000 at a School bazaar. We worked our socks off to raise £300. The unfairness gnawed and showed that the grass the other side of the fence really was greener. When the Headship of a local Boys School in Ramsgate became

vacant, therefore, I was quick to apply. I confidently expected to be amongst the front-runners and was devastated when told that I had not even been short-listed. In my disappointment I enquired why my application had been rejected only to be told, once again, that it was my lack of a University Degree. Having given up my Dip.Ed. Course at ChristChurch College as soon as I was appointed to Deputy Headship the prospect of getting a degree was as far away as ever. It seemed I had reached the end of the line.

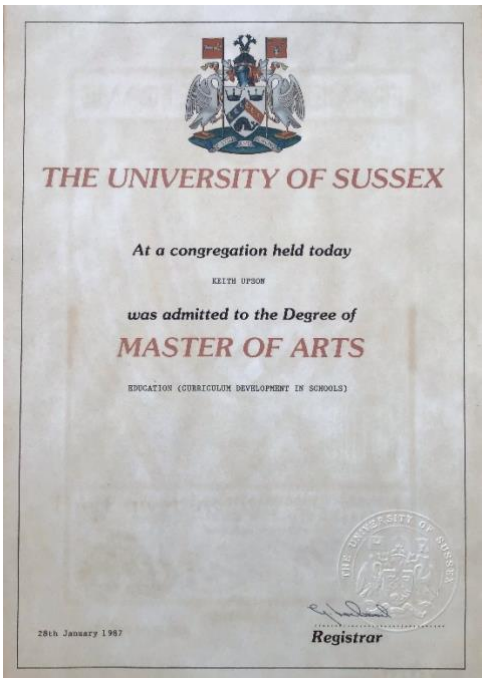
I cannot remember how I stumbled upon a Master's Degree Course at Sussex University. I guess I must have written for prospectuses in an effort to uncover an escape route. Anyway, I discovered a one-year full-time course in 'Curriculum Development in Schools' for which I seemed eligible to apply even though I did not have a first degree. The entrance criteria suggested that they would be prepared to offset experience for qualifications in some circumstances – a sign of the times for University entrance had become easier and easier since my student days. The Course content looked interesting and I was tempted. To make it possible I had to be seconded from school on full pay and I approached the Headmaster about the possibility of release. He was supportive and suggested that I apply. I had a very low expectation of success for, not only had I to be accepted by the University, which I thought most unlikely, but the Education Authority had to agree to pay my salary and tuition fees, a sum well in excess of £25,000. I knew that the chance of this happening was also remote and that a large number of others would be competing for limited funds. Before I could apply for finance I had first to be offered a University place, so I applied and was duly invited for interview. It was a low-key affair, more of a discussion of why I was applying than anything else. Within a few days I was pleased to receive the offer of a place. With even lower expectation I then applied for secondment, waited, and hoped against hope that I would be lucky. I don't know who pulled the strings, but someone somewhere thought I deserved the chance for I was one of only two teachers that Kent seconded for that year. As it turned out we were the last teachers to be offered the opportunity. The authority changed its policy claiming that it was unfair to invest so much money in individual people when it could be used for the advantage of many, so I was extraordinarily lucky!

Apart from a three-day induction course at the University in mid-September I did not start the course proper until the beginning of October 1985. It was strange to sit out September whilst everyone else was back at School. Once again all my fears of inadequacy arising from my background and 11+ failure began to resurface and I wondered whether I would be out of my depth. During the early weeks I was hesitant to engage in group discussion for fear of showing myself up and remember preparing myself very thoroughly indeed for seminar sessions in which I was nominated to take the lead. Slowly though, as relationships developed my confidence rose and I came to appreciate that I was every bit as good as everyone else. I also found that, after 20 years of School experience, the subject matter on 'Organisations and Organisational Development' was meaningful and really fascinating and I immersed myself in it enthusiastically. The result was that I could begin to make more authoritative contributions and my anxiety and fears dropped away. There were, however, anxious moments in January as we awaited the results of the first assignment.

Assessment was based upon three reports / assignments, one to be written for each of the 3 terms. The first two, an Organisational Analysis and a piece of Curriculum Evaluation were each to be of 10,000 words, and the final report – a piece of Curriculum Development was 20,000. They were to be the most important 40,000 words of my life. Most teachers only write a few sentences at a time on the blackboard, not exactly good preparation for writing at such length, and most of us had not written anything substantial since we left College. It seemed a huge challenge. Fortunately, the University were aware of this and provided all the guidance and support that was needed. We were taught about research techniques and were shown exactly what was necessary so that expectations were absolutely clear. Under the tutelage of Professor Colin Lacey, who had made a name in sociological research in schools, I I shaped up my first project. His methods suited me well and I applied them to an investigation into the rise and fall of the Headmaster at the Sir William Nottidge School – the man who had ruined lives. Researching the problems there provided a series of windows into the organisation of the School to show how it functioned and how various facets interacted. It turned out to be a novel way of producing an organisational analysis. I'm not sure I understood that then. I was more concerned with unloading my bitterness, so it was more luck than judgement that it worked. I finished it on Christmas Eve, relaxed over the holiday, presented it for assessment in early January, and waited anxiously for the result. Each research project was marked twice, and for most people it was well over a month before they heard how they had got on. I was luckier. About two weeks before the results were formally declared I found a note in my pigeon-hole from one of the markers explaining that he was so impressed at the quality of my work that he thought I should know about it and he attached his formal written critique. I can hardly explain my relief. Up to that moment I had no idea whether I would make the grade and successfully achieve a Master's Degree or not. From that moment I surged ahead on a wave of confidence. My second and third projects were equally well received and I passed the Course with flying colours. At the final leaving dinner held in a hotel in Lewes, even my fellow students singled out my progress by presenting me with a mounted cut-out caricature on 'Snoopy' as the 'World's Best Student.

Success in the Course had as much to do with personal discipline and single-mindedness of purpose that it did in any show of intelligence. It appeared that if you wanted to achieve badly enough and were prepared to put in the time and work, the accolade would follow. I really did want to achieve. It was my chance to put right the wrongs of the past and open up the possibilities for the future. I gave it a 100% commitment. Attendance at the University was only two mornings per week – Tuesday and Thursday. To limit travelling, and to provide the necessary time to access the University library, I managed to find a room in one of the old Regency terraced houses in the centre of Brighton. The owner of the house, which was being renovated and was in a permanent state of disarray, worked for the BBC and lived in London, so I had the place to myself from Tuesday to Thursday each week. It was a lonely existence. There was nothing else to do but work. At home I fell into a routine of writing late at night and typing and thinking during the day. I remember disappearing into the woods with Ben the

dog and note-book in hand scribbling ideas and planning each night's writing. To provide the necessary typographical back-up I invested in an Amstrad Word Processor – the first on the market, for £450, installed it in my bedroom and taught myself how to use it. This was not a smooth and flawless operation and I remember times after losing things off the screen, when I could gladly have thrown the thing out of the window. Nevertheless, I persevered, committed all my writings to computer disc and found the ability to edit, move and change text an invaluable asset, so I was soon hooked, especially as it would have cost me a fortune to have had it all typed up professionally. As always Jenny and the family supported me to the full and protected my need for privacy when I was at work. All in all, I enjoyed myself enormously, the more so, of course, because it was all so successful.


THE UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

At a congregation held today

KEITH UPSON

was admitted to the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

EDUCATION (CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN SCHOOLS)

28th January 1987

Registrar

They say education can be life-changing. It certainly was in my case. Although it took a while to realise it, the Master's Degree unlocked the doors of opportunity and a whole new world opened up before me. Without a doubt this was a passport into the educational elite. It was almost like gaining acceptance into a new and prestigious club- a society that threw up its own boundaries of mystique and reverence. Never say that paper qualifications don't matter, they do!

It took almost 6 months to get school out of my system. At such a distance I began to realise the futility of my life as a Deputy Head. I was wearing myself out on absolute trivia. My days were dominated by boundary defence, of picking children up for the colour of their socks or for running in the corridor. It all seemed so unimportant. The thought of returning to it was depressing. By the summer term, therefore, I began to check the vacancies in the Times Educational Supplement. With the knowledge that I could hold my own with the best of them, my self-belief had grown steadily throughout the year and I had also acquired a new confidence in my ability to write. I no longer confined my search to school vacancies but also began to scan the columns for Inspector and Advisory posts. It was there that I found an advert for 6 Area INSET Co-ordinators for Kent. The job was entirely new and there was opportunity to develop it to suit individual strengths. I applied, was interviewed, and was offered the post for the East Kent Area with effect from January 1st, 1987. This meant that I had to return to Conyngham School for the Autumn Term.

My final Term was not fun. I slotted back into the job precisely where I left it and it was as if my year away had never been. My heart and soul were now elsewhere. My timetable was predominantly with the most problematic classes and it was hard to readjust to low standards after the rarefied atmosphere of academia. The Term dragged on interminably and I could not wait to get stuck into my new challenge.

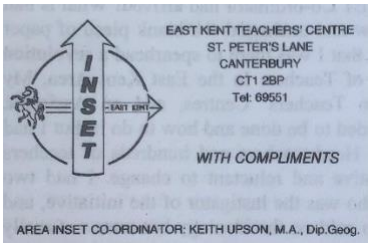
On January 2nd 1987 I took occupation of an office at the Teachers' Centre in St. Peter's Lane, Canterbury. The Area INSET Coordinator had arrived! What is that you ask? Most people

did. The job was new and uncharted – a blank piece of paper waiting to be filled. The only firm fact was that I was there to spearhead a revolution in the In-Service Education and Training of teachers in the East Kent Area. My responsibility embraced 126 schools, two Teachers' Centres and an Assistant. Fortunately, I had a clear vision of what needed to be done and how to do it, but I had no idea whether I could influence 126 Head-teachers and hundreds of teachers most of whom were notoriously conservative and reluctant to change. I had two bosses, the County Inspector for INSET who was the instigator of the initiative, and the Area Education Officer. They were both sold on the ideology but were not really interested in the nuts and bolts of how it could be achieved. I was just left to get on with it. It all seemed very strange. I was the boss. There was nothing to regulate my days – no timetable, no bells and nobody telling me what to do. I now worked office hours and no longer enjoyed school holidays. My office was isolated and detached from all the other Area Education staff so I did not feel part of anything and nobody took any particular interest in my day-to-day activities. In the early days I felt as though I had been shunted into a siding and forgotten.

In simple terms, the job was about changing the thinking and practice of In-Service training. It was about selling ideas to Head-teachers and convincing them that they should act on them. Then it was a question of adding encouragement, enthusiasm and money, stirring them about a bit, and hoping that something positive would emerge. The ideas were about improving the standards of education by bringing about real improvements in classroom teaching. It was about getting teachers to examine their strengths and weaknesses, offering exciting ideas for improvement, and cornering them into a commitment to change. We all knew that just sending them on a Course, which had been the traditional way, was just not good enough. They took days off work at great expense, were entertained, and then returned to school and did nothing. We were looking to create a culture where self-improvement was the goal of everyone in school. We were looking for a more formalised system of School Self- Evaluation and appraisal where targets would be set to ensure improvement. Given that the goal of many teachers was just 'survival' the task of trying to change them was huge. It was not going to happen over-night. It would take years to accomplish.

My first task was to establish some means of reaching the hearts and minds of Head-teachers. With 126 of them it was quite impossible to meet with them individually. The secondary Schools had already organised themselves into Consortium groups and were used to meeting together and co-operating to stimulate development, but the 91 Primary Schools had no such tradition. They were more remote and isolated. I set out to persuade them to join together in groups of between 8 to 12 schools. This was done in an Area Meeting in early February 1987. This was my first public outing in my new role and it was a nerve racking experience. I held a healthy respect, even reverence, for the position of head-teachers and here I was trying to organise them like children. It required a major change in attitude. I was lucky to have the help of my Assistant INSET Co-ordinator in this. She was a displaced Head-teacher, a 61 year-old veteran with awesome energy and organising ability. She bullied the few head-teachers who were reluctant to join in and within days had created 12 Consortium groups which were to become the backbone of our operations. In March we held a round of inaugural meetings to launch the ideas. It was the soap box I needed. I told them what we were about, explained the inevitability of the changes and sent them away to consult their

staff to identify the weaknesses that needed to be addressed. At a second meeting in May we discussed the outcomes of their researches and what could be done about them. As a result, we set up courses and training activities for each Consortium and got the Heads to organise inter-school collaboration so that good practice could be shared. For subject areas where there was little or no consensus we either organised courses at the Teachers' Centre or we arranged for somebody to go into the School. By July everything was arranged for the Autumn and Spring Terms. In six months we had made phenomenal progress. I had followed every meeting with booklets explaining our hopes and aspirations and the rationale supporting them. I had put in place a management structure to oversee developments. I had sorted out the finances and delivered a training programme fashioned by the schools themselves and settled on a logo to give us a corporate identity. Throughout I fired off regular new letters to keep the schools aware of our presence and progress.



For Primary Schools face to face contact with anyone from the Local Authority was rare. They felt isolated, forgotten and under-valued. When we appeared on the scene and showed a genuine interest in their progress and welfare we were greeted with open arms. When we went on to follow through meetings with tangible action it was seen to be so unusual that we were elevated to the ranks of V.I.P's and given the red carpet treatment. The fact that my Assistant was the regional secretary of the National Association of Head-teachers also helped us develop a more personal, pastoral relationship with them. It helped convey that we were squarely on their side and that we were prepared to fight their corner. The result was that the usual suspicions of the Authority did not rear their ugly heads and they were not so reticent to co-operate. The head-teachers also appreciated the chance of coming together with colleagues. Headship can be a very lonely occupation. The consortium group had the potential of becoming a valuable support group where problems and difficulties could be shared and talked out in confidence – a critical release at times of stress. For all these reasons the Consortium idea was instantly valued and really took off. From the first we agreed one, sometimes two, meetings per term and head-teacher attendance was always virtually 100%. As time went by the groups began to take on a life of their own. In some cases, the head-teachers became so close to their consortium colleagues that they socialised together. There was one group where meetings were turned into banquets. They would meet in each- others homes and vie with each other to produce the most lavish meals complete with more than a little wine. I was always treated as guest of honour and found it all a little bit embarrassing. I certainly ensured that business was concluded before lunch! Other Consortium Groups remained more formal and business-like but even they came to treat me with something like messianic reverence although it was the word of the Local Authority I had to impart. Nevertheless. They hung on my every word and seemed to respect my professionalism and advice. Over the years I made many friends and the majority eventually became loyal customers. There were six areas in Kent and six Area INSET Co-ordinators. I was the only one to take the Consortium route in the reorganisation of Teacher Training. It turned out to be a major strength of our operations in East Kent and the envy of them all.

Within 8 months my staff had tripled. In early February I appointed a full-time secretary – a young, very intelligent young lady. Like all good secretaries she became a real treasure. The Authority also appointed and endowed me with three 'Staff Development Co-ordinators' – two to work with Primary schools and one for Secondary's. At first their appointment caused a furore amongst the six INSET Co-ordinators across the County since their job descriptions seemed to cream off the best aspects of ours, potentially leaving us with purely administrative work whilst they took over working with schools. It was a gross piece of mismanagement by my boss. There was no consultation. The three of them just dropped into my team out of the blue. There was the additional anomaly that, as a secondee, one of them was earning more than I was, even though I was his line manager. A conference was called to solve the issues and lines of demarcation were drawn up, but it took two or three months to develop an amicable and productive relationship. We resolved that the Staff Development Co-ordinators should concentrate purely upon getting schools to write and implement their own staff development policies. This too was a hearts and minds exercise for it involved convincing schools that they should adopt appraisal schemes to examine the strengths and weaknesses of both individual teachers and the curriculum as a whole. This could be very threatening and needed to be handled sensitively. With so many schools this turned out to be a valuable addition to our services and progress accelerated. The idea of working alongside teachers to bring about change caught my attention. I felt that if really successful, expert teachers could be freed to spend time working with weaker teachers we might bring about lasting improvements. I approached the Area Education Officer and came away with funding for four full-time secondments. Four lucky Consortium groups agreed to take part in the trials. They selected a subject area and they joined me to interview and appoint suitable expert teachers. So in September 1988 my staff increased yet again. The experiment proved very successful and left schools wanting more.

In the latter part of 1987 Education Secretary Kenneth Baker declared that all schools should have 5 training days each year. This instantly shifted the focus and responsibility for In-Service Training more firmly towards the schools and underlined the importance of what we were trying to do. In effect the schools now became the consumers who would identify their training needs and shop around for their own trainers. The consequences were profound. In the first instance if they were to buy in their own training they would need money. This money was to come from Central Government via a Training Grant Scheme called G.R.I.S.T (Grants for In-Service Training). This was typically a bureaucratic nightmare. The Government would not trust the schools with just a batch of money. It had to be tied down to ensure that they used it for training in certain priority subjects nominated by the Government. At first the amount of money was so small that, by the time it had trickled down to small Primary Schools it was a worthless amount, but year-on-year it grew dramatically. The figures speak for themselves:

1986 – 7……£4000	1988-9……£180,000	1990-1……£916,000
1987 – 8……£80,000	1989 -90 ……£597,000	1991 -2……£1.5 million

I was responsible for managing this money and, in my turn, had to draw up a whole new bureaucratic system to allow schools to access their money whilst satisfying stringent

accountancy regulations of the Government. One of the chief trends of Margaret Thatcher's monetarist policies was to cut out the Local Authority middle man and devolve as much money as possible to schools. Traditionally the Education Authority kept back the majority of its INSET budget to pay for the running of Eversely College, Folkestone – a residential College for In-Service Training., Teachers' Centres, County Courses, Seconding Teachers to University (Including Me!) and the salaries of a good many Inspectors and Advisors involved in helping teachers. Now, as the screw turned and the money was diverted to schools, the whole edifice began to collapse. More seriously, it was not only money for training that had to be devolved. The L.E.A's were also ordered to increase the percentage share of the Education budget which was allocated to schools. The only way they could do this was by making savings within by cutting staff and reducing services. Once more year-on-year the percentage increased squeezing the Education Authorities almost to the point of collapse. Where once they were the masters of the schools, within five years they were reduced to being the servants of schools. Both money and power had been transferred from one to the other. By 1992 virtually all the money was in the hands of the schools and the Education Authorities were having to sell their services in order to stay alive. For those of us on the pay-roll we were forced to live through very worrying times knowing the axe hovered over all our jobs.

The first indication of the turmoil began one day in January 1989 when all the Education staff were ordered to attend a meeting at Springfield – the County Headquarters. There we were told that, as at that moment, we were all redundant. You can imagine the shocked silence. They proceeded to describe the structure of a new Education Department and showed us the jobs that would be available. There were, of course, far fewer. We were all invited to apply for the posts on offer. It was a bit like musical chairs. We all scanned the pages to find an equivalent job. I was pleased to see that my job was to continue but it had been up-graded and renamed. They went to great pains to emphasise the competitive nature of re-appointment and seemed to suggest that nobody should take anything for granted. Naturally we were all anxious, but I felt that on the basis of the last two years I stood a good chance. Fortunately, I was successful in my application and, after interview, was resurrected as the Senior Advisor for Staff Development and INSET. However, the remainder of my team was decimated. The future had lost its gloss!