

## GROWING UP IN THE 90's

90's children were the guinea pigs of a radical shake-up of the British Educational system. From 1990 the National Curriculum became mandatory for all State Schools in the country. It established a common curriculum across all schools in the pursuit of common aims and goals. For each subject children faced set Programmes of Study punctuated by Attainment Targets across 4 Key Stages from the age of 5 to 16. The expectation was that children would



### The National Curriculum

demonstrate their competence in each Attainment Target, not only by teacher assessment, but by the administration of Standard Assessment Tests / Tasks at the end of each Key Stage at 7, 11 and 14. In this way the progress of each individual pupil could be plotted in some detail across the subjects. Parents would know precisely where their child lay in each subject against expectations for

their chronological age. Furthermore, the Test results, once collated at the end of each Key Stage, would enable the performance of the school to be measured against national norms, creating the necessary incentives for improvement. The theory was faultless. It presented children with clear short-term goals and a sense of achievement as, one by one, they ticked off each Attainment Target. It provided teachers with a clear sense of direction. The practice was, however, somewhat more than a challenge. The workload of Primary School teachers, in particular, went through the roof as they struggled with the bureaucracy of assessment and differentiation of practice to satisfy the need of 30 mixed ability children. It necessitated an influx of Teaching Assistants to alleviate the impossible demands. For many parents and children too, the stress levels rose as they fretted about maintaining achievement and about 'exams' at the age of 7. Tested upon entry into School, Education became increasingly concerned about 'Added Value', just like any other business. The ethos changed. Many established practices fell by the wayside as their worth was weighed against a new threat to the school establishment – The League Tables.

Not surprisingly during the 90's, as the system bedded in, reforms became necessary. There was widespread complaint from teachers condemning the unwieldy nature of SATs. These were subsequently adjusted in 1995. There was also growing concern that teaching was becoming a narrow drilling of children to pass tests; that it was developing into a 'tick-box' exercise which was taking away children's childhood. Overall, however, it was widely recognised that standards of education improved over the decade. There were clear advantages in the provision of high-quality, more standardised teaching materials. The assessment procedures brought about a more individual, pupil centred approach to classroom teaching. This, in turn, brought into sharper focus the special needs of pupils

creating an upsurge of provision for those who require specialised help. It also laid bare the poor performance of pupils nationally in literacy and numeracy necessitating the development of national Strategies for Improvement. It was clear that Government, both Conservative and Labour, took seriously criticisms of poor standards. Education was high on the agenda of both Parties. Regardless, school routines changed little. Throughout the 90's computer access, whilst constantly improving, was limited. In many primary Schools there was often just one Mac in the School Library, and of, course there was no Google or Wikipedia. Calculators were still not fully accepted and access to TV was limited. The use of the blackboard was still standard and copying from textbooks was still common. School reports were still hand-written. School meals were still prescribed. There were few cafeterias, little choice of food and no vegetarian option. School trips also tended to be unadventurous, being squeezed out by the early demands of the National Curriculum. Whilst the lives of children became less carefree, their school experience, therefore, changed little. Perhaps the only saving grace was that corporal punishment had finally been outlawed! However, the Dunblane Massacre of 1996 where Thomas Hamilton shot and killed 16 pupils and a teacher brought new demands for the security of Schools and a trend towards fortification!

There were also significant developments at the 'tip' and 'toe' of the Education System – provision for the Under 5's and Over 16's.

National Curriculum assessment at school entry at 5 brought into sharp focus the advantages of pre-school education for 3 to 5 year-olds. Research suggested that progress and life chances were much enhanced by early year's education and care. Attention therefore turned to the skills and dispositions that young children should ideally have acquired by statutory school age and how they could be achieved. In 1996 Curriculum Guidelines were therefore introduced to help the many Play Schools and Nursery Schools already in existence to include and improve their educational offering in literacy and numeracy with a view to aligning their practice with the National Curriculum. By 1990 State schools were accepting 'Rising 5's' for part-time schooling one or two Terms before their 5<sup>th</sup> birthday in readiness for full-time attendance at 5, but moves were afoot to extend provision by entitling all 4 year olds to free schooling for 2.5 hours a day and in 1996 this became a declared aim of the Conservative Government. In 1999 the Blair Labour Government extended this to include 3 year olds as well, and both the finance and systems were put in place for the developments to take place. Since the majority of Nursery and Play-School provision was in private hands this was a major initiative. It demanded the institution of training schemes for nursery staff and systems to control and monitor finance and standards. This took time. The major developments were therefore in the 2000's. There is no denying, however, that in the 90's, whilst it was more intention than practice, there was, none-the-less, real developments in pre-school education which had impact on the lives of increasing numbers of children. The rising interest and concern filtered into the mass media who supported developments with high quality TV programmes specifically designed to stimulate speech, letter and number recognition and the socialisation needs expressed in Government guidance. Some 84 programmes are listed, some of the better well-known being: Bob the Builder, Out of the Box, Playdays, 10 +2, Here's Humphrey, Rainbow, The Blobs, Jellabies, TicTac, Art Attack, Lamb-Chop, Play Along, Thomas and Friends, Rugrats, Teletubbies, Pingu, to name just a few.

The problems of youth unemployment continued to plague Governments during the 90's as:

1. The focus of business moved progressively towards the integration of new technologies to achieve greater efficiency. Retraining of staff and staff cuts took precedence over the employment of School-leavers.
2. Economic volatility and growing employment protection legislation created a hesitancy to employ new staff.
3. The gap between the abilities, attitudes and expectations of school leavers and the needs of employers continued to widen. Over-indulged youngsters were less inclined to accept the disciplines of the workplace or the menial tasks expected of beginners in a great many work situations.

Since unemployment benefit for young school leavers had been withdrawn, a large number of 16-year-olds were forced to remain in School. Whilst for a large proportion the academic route to 'A' Levels and University was appropriate, for many it most certainly was not. They were confronted with something of a curriculum vacuum. Attempts to create vocational courses in schools by initiatives from the City and Guilds Institute, BTEC, TVEI. etc., had never been entirely successful. The qualifications had never attained status against the gold standard of GCSE. In the late 80's and early 90's the development of NVQ's (National Vocational Qualifications), GNVQ's (General NVQ's), and Modern Apprenticeships went some way to solving the problem. NVQ's were, and remain, a work-based way of learning carried out at School, College or workplace. Accreditation is awarded against proof of competence in 7 ascending levels of difficulty and therefore provide a clear ladder for personal development as follows:

Here are the rough equivalents for each NVQ level:

- **NVQ Level 1 equivalent** – 3/4 GCSE grades D-G
- **NVQ Level 2 equivalent** – 4-5 GCSE grades A\*-C
- **NVQ Level 3 equivalent** – 2 A Levels
- **NVQ Level 4 equivalent** – Higher Education Certificate/BTEC
- **NVQ Level 5 equivalent** – Higher Education Diploma/Foundation Degree
- **NVQ Level 6 equivalent** – Undergraduate Degree/Degree Apprenticeship
- **NVQ Level 7 equivalent** – Master's Degree/PGCE

Introduced in 1987, it too took time to bed in, but by the 90's its value was recognised and courses for most occupational categories were offered, especially in Technical Colleges. It provided an immediate route for 16-year-old school leavers. The need to more generally align school curriculum with the needs of employers was addressed by the introduction of GNVQ. This was intended to provide a broad education relevant to a wide range of occupational areas rather than competency in one single element. It was designed to run alongside GCSE's and 'A' Level and to offer parity in levels of difficulty and attainment. 3 Levels were offered:

Level	Occupational Training	General Vocational Education	General Education
3	NVQ 3 (Training for Advanced Craft, Technician, Supervisor Jobs#)	Advanced GNVQs	2+ GCE 'A' levels or equivalent 'AS' levels
2	NVQ 2(Training for Basic Craft Jobs)	Intermediate GNVQs	4 or 5 GCSEs A* to C grades
1	NVQ 1 (Foundation Training)	Foundation GNVQs	4 GCSEs D to G grades

Key: # available through Modern Apprenticeships.

Take up of GNVQ in schools was quite rapid, but relatively small by national standards.

<u>Level</u>	<u>1993 /4</u>	<u>1997/8</u>
Foundation	2921	7662
Intermediate	15,587	32,028
Advanced	1236	41,346

At the same time Apprenticeships, the traditional route to skills training, were revived and updated. 'Modern Apprenticeships', designed mainly for 16 / 17 year-olds began with a contract between the local Training Enterprise Council (TEC), who provided the funding, the Apprentice and the Employer. The goal was to reach NVQ Level 3 within 3 years, with an option to progress to Level 4 or even University entrance for the ambitious. By the end of 1998 almost a quarter of a million people had started an apprenticeship predominantly in small Firms. The most popular sectors were Business Administration, Engineering and Retailing. Pathways into work therefore opened up but the problems of youth unemployment did not go away. By the end of the decade even University Graduates were finding it difficult to find openings.

The 90's were the end of an era. Life for youngsters changed dramatically in the early years of the new century as the 'Smart' invasion took place. By 2020 most children were welded to their Smart Phones giving instant access to almost everything. They would find it hard to imagine what life was like without one. 90's children had no means of communicating with their friends other than by telephone. There was no Facetime, Texting and no Social Media. Contact was by visiting and playing together. Furthermore, unless they owned a 'Walkman' they also had no access to music other than through Radio or CD's at home. Similarly, apart from dated films broadcast on television or a visit to the local Video shop, the Cinema was the only way to access movies, and, for young children, only then if accompanied by an adult. Games were also not so accessible. Not all children were able to afford Atari or Nintendo

Games Consuls or a Game Boy. Browsing the Internet could only be achieved via a computer. It was slow and unreliable and content was only just developing. There was no Wikipedia and Google was in its infancy. With no short-cut Aps there was no easy access to anything. Children in the 90's were, therefore, less bombarded and over-whelmed with information nor pestered by the need for social contact and inclusion. They were also not open to ill will and abuse from untraceable sources. Their lives were, therefore simpler and less stressed.

In the home television continued to excerpt a significant influence upon the lives of young children and there was choice aplenty. The most popular programmes include:

Byker's Grove	Fun House	The Fresh Prince of Bel Air
Get Your Own Back	Art Attack	Sister Sister
The Devon Headmaster	Chucklevision	Knightmore
Children's Ward	Bodger Bodger	The Queens Nose
Grange Hill	Round the Twist	How
Rugrats	Blue Peter	Count Duckula
Live and Kicking	Brum	Round the Twist
Fun House	The Animals of Farthing Wood	Ringu
Bob the Builder	Danger Mouse	The Shoe People

Animated comic strips (Cartoons) had for long been a favourite entertainment for children. The freedom to create fantastic figures, endow them with charismatic personalities, weave compelling adventures and bring them to life in colourful and dynamic imagery captivated the young. Brought to prominence on the big screen by Walt Disney in the 1930's with the iconic production of 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs' the genre was rapidly adapted for the television, soared in popularity and brought to fame unforgettable characters like Top Cat, Dastardly and Muttley, Postman Pat, The Wombles, Bugs Bunny, Tom and Jerry, The Woodentops, Captain Pugwash and many others. During the 90's the development of computer animation techniques dramatically speeded up the production process and there was a rash of high quality animated films and cartoons to the extent that a dedicated TV Channel 'The Cartoon Network' launched in the United States having acquired the Cartoon libraries of MGM and Hanna Barbera. It was soon broadcasting for 24 hours a day! Not long after it was launched on satellite TV in Britain and was followed by 'Boomerang' and other networks from 2000 onwards. During the 90's children made particular favourites of Pingu, Scoobie Doo, Animaniacs, Arthur, Batman, Dexter's Laborary, The Adventure on Tin Tin, Rugrats, Dragon Ball Z, and the Animals of Farthing Wood from amongst the 108 shows listed for the decade.



The genius of Disney in bringing fantasy to life eclipsed all its competitors. During the 90's it continued to lead the field in creating evocative and compelling animated feature films:

Beauty and the Beast

Aladdin

The Lion King

Jungle Book

Pocahontas

Toy Story

The Hunchback of Notre Dame

A Bugs Life

Mulan

Tarzan

Flubber

The Prince of Egypt

Antz

Hook

Cinderella etc.

Such was Disney's renown that the Corporation branched out to build and recreate its fantasy worlds in bricks and mortar. Disney World Theme Parks opened in California, Florida, Tokyo, Paris, Hong Kong and China. They became the ultimate go-to places for young families with the means to travel. Disney World Paris attracted children from across Western Europe but many also flew to Florida.



Television and Film created some of the most iconic images of the decade:



Mr. Blobby



Spice Girls Dolls



Teletubbies



Luke Skywalker

As always crazes swept the playgrounds faster than ever before creating a demand for must-have:-



Pokemon Cards



Tamagotchi



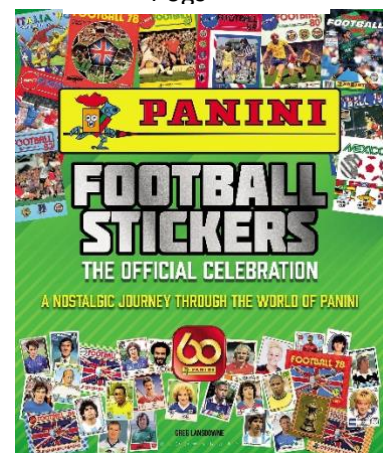
Pogs



Crazy Bones



Slap Bracelets



The very young continued to be spoiled for choice with a wide range of soft toys, dolls and Comic Strip / Cartoon characters. These included Teenage Mutant Heroes; Thunderbirds; Barbie Dolls; Power Rangers; Furby; Beanie Babies; Trolls, Hungry Hungry Hippos.



Furby



Beanie Babies

Some age-old traditions were changing. Birthday Parties escalated and became ever more extravagant as mothers tried to out-compete each other. Sandwiches and trifle were set aside

by the invasion of savouries and crisps and frequently the whole event was delegated to MacDonalds at one of their restaurants. However, the birthday cake and rendition of 'Happy Birthday' remained at the heart of proceedings, now accompanied by the distribution of 'Goody Bags' to take away.

Older children and teenagers were also affected by changes in tradition. Political initiatives to eliminate sexual discrimination began to make real impact. In Schools traditional single sex subjects (Needlework, Domestic Science, Metalwork, Woodwork, Technical Drawing) were subsumed into 'Technology' and made compulsory for all students. The changing attitudes, along with the automation of household chores, changed the age-old tradition of preparing girls for domesticity and motherhood at home. They joined the boys in being largely relieved of duty. Subtle levelling-up differences were also beginning to emerge in play. Dolls were no longer just the domain of girls. Boys took to Action Man. Girls also took more interest in construction toys, especially Lego. By puberty, however, inevitably interests drew apart as the natural instincts of the sexes became more apparent. Girls, by nature, are more socially inclined, more empathetic and caring and more amenable to friendship and mutual support. Boy's natural instincts are inclined towards independence and self-reliance. The differences show in their choice of leisure pursuits. Girls interests and activities tended to circle around Pop Music, Dancing, Fashion and Sleep-overs – motivated and driven by group pressure and the need for inclusiveness. They hung on the music of the 'Spice Girls' and 'All Saints', and often knew the songs by heart. Their adoration was torn between the boy bands of 'Take That' and 'Boyzone' who reigned high amongst their pin-ups. In the privacy of the home they tended to be lured by Soap operas on television and favoured magazines like 'Bliss', 'Sugar', and 'Mizz'. They were also wedded to their 'Walkmans'. They were also much into fashion, especially with peripherals like Ying Yang necklaces, Tattoo Chokers, Mood Rings, Ankle Bracelets and Toe Rings. Ear piercings were also much in vogue. Many were also lured by crazes for keeping their Tamagotchi alive, for Baby G Watches, and for recording their most private thoughts in padlocked diaries. The boy's world was different. They were somewhat more into a growing range of computer games, football, collecting and sport. They were generally more active, less inclined to socialise or flop in front of the television. They were less swayed by fashion, but 'Dready' or 'Spliffy' items of clothing were sought after by some and 'Baggy-arse Jeans were accepted as the trendy fashion of the day. A number of television programmes attracted large teenage audiences of both sexes especially on Saturdays. 'Alive and Kicking' was aired in the morning and 'Gladiator' in the evening. Byker Grove and Grange Hill were also big hits.

Each decade seems to throw up its eccentricities and the 90's were no exception. In the child's world 3 in particular are noteworthy:



Jelly Shoes



Inflatable Chair



Alien Slime Eggs

As the standard of living rose and attitudes to children changed still further during the 90's so their lives continued to improve. They wanted for very little. It was all so different 50 years earlier, and a world away from life in Victorian times not so very long before. Then families were large, life was cheap, and children were put to work at the age of 12 if not earlier. Children were the lowest of creatures and had little voice. Discipline was strict, children were seen and not heard, and a good thrashing was the most common form of punishment. Children were prepared to face a hard and subservient life. There is no doubt we had come a long way in a relatively short time. By the year 2000, however, whilst we were rejoicing in the progress made, some were beginning to suspect that we might have come too far. The evident over-indulgence and over-protection of the young began to raise fears that we were breeding a generation with too little touch to the realities of life and ill prepared to face basic challenges of existence. We have come to know them as 'Snow Flakes'!