

# TELLING TALES OUT OF SCHOOL

Chris Lowe and friends

## Number 15

*This Tale is a tribute to all those Headteachers who can think on their feet, swivel in their chair, and keep a smile on their face.*

### The Moving Finger of Time

I knew a head of a secondary modern school once upon a time, whose school was about to amalgamate with the local selective grammar school to become a comprehensive school. The new all-through school would be opening in brand new premises a mile away. The contest for the headship of this new school was between the two existing town Head Teachers – the sec. mod. Head and the grammar school head.

The chair and vice chair of governors of the new school with two Local Authority school inspectors interviewed the two heads separately in their own schools. Their role was to advise the governing body and the Local Education Authority on which of the two Heads might make the best fist of being the Head of this new creature, a comprehensive school.

The inspectors were keen to draw out the educational philosophy of the two heads and to enable them to explain to the governors their approaches to comprehensive education. They had listened to the grammar school head's erudite and thorough analysis of curriculum reform, current developments in the theory of large school management, and the latest pupil behaviour management theory. All four now sat in front of Ken, the sec. mod. head. Behind Ken on the wall was a large framed Time Table – the week's periods neatly ruled in horizontal and vertical lines, making squares with names of classes, their teachers, and the rooms they occupied for each lesson, beautifully written in felt-tip pen..... and all in glorious technicolour.

Eyeing this large and Picasso-esque work of art behind the Head's desk, the lead inspector, a lady with much experience of running comprehensive schools and a formidable reputation in inspection circles, sought to get the conversation going by pointing to it.

'This looks like a very impressive secondary modern timetable, Headmaster. Tell us how you would transfer this secondary modern time-table to the new comprehensive school?'

She was rather pleased with herself – spotting a good ploy to lead into a discussion about the comprehensive school curriculum. She smiled at Ken and leaned back waiting. This would demonstrate the depth of Ken's knowledge about comprehensive education and his understanding of the major shift that would be required from his secondary modern culture. She would be very interested in his answer, and would make sure the governors appreciated the importance, too.

There was a moment of silence, and then a grin broke out on Ken's face. He swivelled round in his chair and stared up at the timetable.

'Ah, my secondary modern time-table. How would it transfer?.....Easy, really.... You see, it's on four screws and I will just unscrew it and take it over in my car.' He swivelled back and smiled again.

There was another moment of silence. The lady inspector squirmed in her chair.

'Er... er...actually... I did not mean..er... how you would physically move it...I meant...'

'It's all right,' laughed Ken, putting his hand out to stop any further embarrassment. 'I know what you meant. But I thought we were all a bit tense!... Now, let's discuss not *WHAT* we will teach at the new school, because that will largely be dictated by the National Curriculum and the teachers and students we already have. To me the important changes are going to be in *HOW* we teach and how *WELL* we teach. Our concentration should be on creating a powerful teaching force....don't you think?'

And so followed an hour of light-hearted but earnest banter about teaching styles, pupil attitudes, necessary resources, and essential training. All very satisfactory.

Ken got the new job. And the new school became one of the happiest amalgamations and the jolliest of places.....Oh, and the old framed timetable found a home... in the Head's private toilet, as a daily reminder!

Ken would often remark that whenever he felt he had got a bit above himself, or been a smidgen unfair to a colleague, he would slip into the loo 'for a good peer' – at his past.

\*\*\*\*