

LONDON
NEWSLETTER

BY DON YEO

At the end of the decade euphemistically called the 'swing sixties', a change was heralded in the teaching needs and practices of many schools in the UK.

Several mid-African countries believed they could emulate Germany of the 1930's and place the blame for poor economic growth and performance on a small but affluent section of their citizens. They could go one stage further than Germany in as much as many of these citizens held joint citizenship with both their country of abode and Britain, the latter given to them when the countries in question gained their independence from colonial control to full independent status.

The fact that it caused unrest and led to the introduction of curbs on the numbers of immigrants allowed into the UK at anyone time was and still is immaterial to the original thought behind the moves.

But of all the unrest, of all the upheavals, of all the confusion and of all the inability to cope none was more greatly shown than that of the schools system.

Suddenly the schools, able and prepared to cope with the problems of British children (WASC-

White: Anglo-Saxon: Christian) were faced by large numbers of non-English speaking: none indigenous none Christian children.

And the system was found wanting.

There had been a steady trickle — in some places almost a downpour — of non-white immigrants, but these were English-speaking, and, mostly, Christian: these being from the West Indies and some from Africa. But the upheavals in Uganda and Kenya caused the floodgates to open and the school system in certain parts of the country to be almost swamped by the inability to cope with the needs and demands of these children.

As a 'Remedial' teacher in Inner Ring Birmingham I was in the front line of dealing with these children. I was taken from my normal duties — helping those children who had learning difficulties due to retardation/low intelligence/medical problems/loss of schooling/or specific reading problems, and faced with the awesome task of teaching six non-WASC children, with no English at all, a basis of survival. English (the lowest level of English in which they could survive in the classrooms) to be able to understand and communicate in a totally alien climate, conditions and language.

All without aid or assistance for none existed at that time.

And I was not alone; through out the country teachers were facing the same problems at the same time and trying various methods and techniques to see if they would work with these children. We were teaching blind; but with the aid of communal correspondence, of the exchange and interaction of various groups, and with the determination of the teachers involved, methods were slowly solidifying and becoming more

obvious, so that, in time, teachers all over the country would be able to tap into the fund of knowledge built up by the early groups and see where to start — and how to teach — as the flow of non-WASC children increased from Pakistan India and, eventually, Bangladesh.

Over the past twenty years, obviously, the teaching methods teacher numbers and problems non-WASC present to the education system as a whole have been considered, faced-up to and conquered. Where essential help is necessary it is provided, and where the problems of separate assemblies, separate teaching of religious tracts and the presentation of special foods at mealtimes has been needed, it has been available.

No longer is there any questioning of whether or not a person should not be eating — the dates of Ramadan are clearly marked in all Educational diaries and the needs of Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, as well as Jews and others are well-known and taught in the Training Colleges of our education system.

In areas where there are large concentrations of non-WASC children or children of West Indian extraction special units have been developed with the single purpose of helping children and teachers alike overcome the problems that present themselves in the classroom. As well as taking the children out of the classroom situation for specialised tuition in aspects of English that 'ordinary' teachers may not find time to teach whilst dealing with the other thirty or so children in their care.

All of this is the result of years of development and trial and error in seeing the best methods of utilising the additional skills that some teachers have and the abilities they possess.

All of this may be for naught, if the present Department of

in education system

Education and Science (DES) Circular 7/88 is adopted in its proposed form — as it appears it may well be done so — by April of next year.

DES Circular 7/88 is concerned with the Local Management of Schools (LMS) under the Education Reform Act. The principle being, that each school is made responsible for the management of its own finances from the employment of cleaning staff, to the ordering and supplying of school materials, although much of the latter may be possible through a central control — the Local Education Authority (LEA). The flaw in the scheme is that the headteachers are also responsible for the payment of staff without the ability to make local salary settlements. They will have national salary settlements with local assessment of teacher requirements payable at school levels.

The LEAs are to assess the schools' needs by taking the Authority's financial requirements as a whole and dividing the LEA's total teacher requirements by the number of teachers in a school thereby arriving at a figure the school will be given by the LEA for the year's needs. Teacher salaries, books, stationery, cleaning requirements, everything a school will need for a year to be covered by the amount allocated to the school by the LEA on an averaged basis. Two schools, in the same LEA have both been involved in trials for the scheme. School A faced a £12,000 deficit over the year whereas school B was able to bank a £12,000 'profit'; the latter due to the fact that the school did not have the educational 'problems' of the former, and had a team of younger, less-experienced teachers. The older, experienced teachers, on higher grades because of ability, knowledge and skill were in fact a liability to

the school, financially, whereas they were an asset to the school in terms of experience.

Headteachers are now going to be placed in unenviable positions; should they try to balance the books by cutting back on their experienced staff, and relying on un-experienced teachers' to muddle through and hope standards do not deteriorate; or do they stay with the experienced staff and try to save money on other parts of the schools' needs — cleaning books, stationery, computers etc.

As Mr John Wootton, President of the National Association of Headteachers — and with whom I had the honour of teaching at Lyng Junior School, West Bromwich, many years ago — said recently, "A head might well choose to hire a probationary teacher — but then must gamble that a couple of senior staff will resign fairly soon, for the probationer will get yearly increments that will eat into the Head's allocation". It has also been reported that several head teachers have calculated that under the present scheme for payments, their salary bill for teachers alone — excluding cleaners, caretakers etc. — would take up 105 per cent of the allocation in any one year. A far-fical situation!

If the headteacher decides that the obvious answer to a financial crisis is to ask a member of staff to resign, or force a resignation from a colleague, unfortunately one of the obvious candidates to go are the specialist teachers. Those who are capable of teaching all subjects and all levels will be the teachers who will be retained. The specialist will go.

And the specialist who deals with children with special educational needs, be they linguistic, psychological or cognitive, be they WASC or non-WASC is the most likely candidate to go.

After all these teachers may only deal with ten or fifteen per cent of the school population, and maybe thought of as superfluous to the real needs of the school.

Far from the truth these are the very teachers who should be retained, for they are the teachers who have benefited from twenty years of experience in dealing with all types of educational problems, and are well versed, theoretically and practically, in the art of adjusting one's attitude towards a problem child. No matter where that child comes from.

The only solution to the problem that many schools and head teachers will face in twelve months' time, is to get the parents to pay towards their children's education.

A process that was started in 1870 with the Forster's Education Act, and — many feel — culminated in the Education (Special Needs) Act of 1981 whereby education upto the age of 16 years for boys and girls, is not only free but also applicable to the special needs of the individual child is now to revert to the situation of those schools which have a majority of non-WASC children, and who will need additional help, or those children who need additional help under the Special

Needs Act will be obliged to contribute towards their children's education. Everything that we have fought for as teachers and parents, through the ballot box and through professionalism over the past few years, will have been swept away by one fell swoop.

And the teachers who have specialised in the teaching of non-WASC children will be the first to feel the cut of this new method of financing the system that was once the envy of the world.