

## CHAPTER C4 - Birth of a Comprehensive School 1959-60

*Once you believe, or say you believe, that all children are of equal value, whatever their intellectual attainments, you are changing the whole concept of school ...*

*Leila Berg, Risinghill: Death of a Comprehensive School 1968*

Michael Duane's headship of Risinghill began on 2 February 1959 some 14 months in advance of the school opening. This was to give him sufficient time in which to prepare the school for occupation. On taking up his appointment he was surprised to be given an office at Gifford School, which had been without a head for three years, to use as his base, and was asked (or expected) to run Gifford at the same time. The Advisory Committee (AC), which had appointed Duane, and agreed with him the time-frame for getting Risinghill ready, had not discussed with him the idea of a concurrent headship and, more crucially, this did not form any part of the terms and conditions of his appointment. Moreover this request came from officers reporting directly to Houghton, the Chief Education Officer (CEO), who had no jurisdiction over Duane. Therefore Duane was not obliged - morally or contractually - to accept the secondment, which he declined on the basis that he wanted to focus on Risinghill.

During this period Duane worked out of County Hall, not Gifford, sometimes bumping into Houghton's officers, who continued to press him about the Gifford headship. However, Duane refused to be coerced and got on with the job that had been agreed with the AC, which was to ensure that Risinghill was adequately staffed, properly equipped and had all the necessary policies and procedures in place before everyone arrived. Since most of the vacancies were filled by staff from the four contributory schools, this was not something that Duane had much control over. For example a number of teachers were placed in positions of authority that he would never have agreed to, but more about this later.

It goes without saying that, as a new build, Risinghill did not come with all the furniture in situ, nor did it come with all the specialist equipment and machinery (for

the engineering workshops, science laboratories, gymnasium, etc) in place, most of which had to be ordered from scratch and installed professionally. He was also responsible for overseeing all the snagging work with the architects and the builders; meeting all of the staff that had been transferred over; and interviewing new members of staff where there were any gaps to be filled. It would have been extremely difficult (nigh on impossible in our opinion) for him to have managed this aspect of the job remotely as Gifford was not within easy walking distance of Risinghill. Moreover it was a big school with over 500 pupils, making a mockery of the idea that it could be managed effectively on a part-time basis. Duane was not the type of man to do things by half-measures, another reason (we suspect) for him declining the offer, if it could be described as such.

Another mammoth task that fell to Duane was the production of the school's timetable. This, for obvious reasons, had to be completed well in advance of the school opening. According to Margaret Duane, the Deputy Head, Ms A, was tasked to help with this, but it would seem that she was not quite up to the mark:

*One thing, she was supposed to be doing this time table – they had to do it between them – I mean this was an enormous great time table thing for the school – before we had computers – and she was supposed to do one section of it, and she made a complete and utter mess of it and Mike had to do it all again ....*

*You know as a deputy head, you are supposed to rely on them to do lots of things, but she was totally out of her depth.” (Duane, 2006)*

Many of the teachers from the contributory schools were transferred to Risinghill on comparable posts and salaries. This included Ms A, who, at the time, was the head of Ritchie School and was just four years off retirement, explaining perhaps why she was given the job without competition and without Duane even meeting her.

When Duane declined the use of an office at Gifford along with its headship, Houghton's officers were furious; presumably because they believed he was not fully occupied and could easily do both jobs. Either that or it was simply a case of them being unaccustomed to having their requests/orders questioned. Whatever the reason, they did not reveal the full extent of their anger until much later, and when it

came it took Duane completely by surprise. The first outburst was early in 1962 - after a critical inspection of the school, though the LCC preferred to use the word 'visitation' for this exercise:

*For a year before the opening of the school he was based at Gifford and generally responsible for it; he did not perhaps then see the need of nursing the future material of his school. (London County Council, 1962c)*

The above quote is lifted from a 32-page report produced by an Inspector MacGowan, who appears to have been a local HMI attached to the LCC, not the Ministry of Education per se.

For the record, Isabel, who was at Gifford from 1958 through to 1960 when it closed, can state, unequivocally, that she never set eyes on Duane until she saw him at Risinghill. Her recollections of Gifford being run by a female head coincide with the memories of another former Gifford pupil:

*I went to Gifford Street School ... Also I remember Mrs Whitnell the Headteacher – very small and went around the school with her little pouch bag and bunch of keys. (Hammond, 2006)*

In fact Whitnell was, in all probability, the Deputy Head of Gifford as this was a mixed school, and because she was of retirement age, we suspect that she was managing it on a temporary basis pending its imminent amalgamation with Risinghill. She appears to have been doing a reasonable job; there being no major incidences in the school that Isabel or Maria Hammond could recall. This might explain why the AC had chosen not to raise with Duane the idea of a concurrent headship, if indeed it had considered this option at all<sup>1</sup>. After three years without a permanent head, one does, for example, have to question whether, in the overall scheme of things, another year was going to make that much difference.

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<sup>1</sup> A similar arrangement seems to have been in place at Northampton School, as Philip recollects. A year or two before the merger into Risinghill the Head, a Mr Wilkinson, left and the school was run by his deputy Mr Woolhead, who also taught engineering. Mr Woolhead, of fond memories, was one of the teachers who transferred to Risinghill.

The next attack on Duane came in 1964, after another critical visitation of the school. This time the conducting HMI was an Inspector Clark whom Duane had crossed swords with over the Gifford affair. As was the case with MacGowan, Clark appears to have been a local HMI attached to the LCC. He, too, was very anti Duane, and could barely contain his animosity when meeting up with Duane again. Twenty-six years later, when talking to Graham Wade, a journalist for The Guardian, Duane described this encounter with Clark as one of the worst experiences of his teaching career:

*My worst experience was when an HMI asked me whether I thought I was fit to be a teacher. (Wade, 1990)*

These visitations/inspections are important elements of the Risinghill story, and will be dealt with separately, when looking at the events of 1962 and 1964 in later Chapters. What also has to be borne in mind here is the vagaries of the 'national system, locally administered' where these officers seem to have been under the impression that they held the balance of power locally, and not Duane.

The most telling evidence of the officials' anger with Duane over the Gifford headship, however, can be found in an interview that Berg had with the LCC's Assistant Education Officer, Mr Turner, in 1965. This was when Risinghill was about to close and Berg was questioning the Authority's failure to find Duane another headship:

*When I asked at County Hall why Mr Duane had not been given another headship, and happened innocently to say that the amalgamation of four unwilling schools into the new Risinghill had made difficulties from the start, particularly as the toughest and roughest one had been without a head for so long, Mr Turner, the Assistant Education Officer, said furiously, 'Gifford did have a head! You're surprised at that, aren't you! He didn't tell you that did he! Do you know who it was? It was Mr Duane!' He was supported in this statement by Mrs Leila Campbell and the Reverend H.W. Hinds, who were both new to his Department; the three of them made a little play of not being able to agree whether he was headmaster of*

*Gifford for nine months or twelve. In fact he was not head of Gifford at all (I checked on this later) but the L.C.C. had intended he should be; and furthermore, if I had reported what they had told me, at this time when there was a lot of public sympathy for Mr Duane, it would no doubt have served to discredit him (for they believed, incorrectly, when they spoke to me, that I was the regular correspondent of a national newspaper). (Berg, 1968b)*

What is also very odd about this affair is that Mrs Evans, the chair of Gifford's Governing Body (GB), had no problems with Duane whatsoever. She was, as you will have seen, also a member of the AC. According to Margaret Duane, Mrs Evans spent a lot of time with Duane going over his plans for the school which she took a great interest in. Indeed she became one of Duane's greatest allies on Risinghill's GB, of which she later became the chair, though not for long. Therein lays another story, to be told later.

We assumed, initially, that Evans knew of Duane's rejection of the Gifford headship and accepted this gracefully. On reflection, however, we wondered if she was even aware that he had been approached about this, bearing in mind that a concurrent headship had not been mentioned by the AC when offering Duane the Risinghill job. This does raise questions about whose idea this was, and what information was fed to the likes of MacGowan, Clark and Turner who clearly believed that Duane was contractually bound to do as they had asked, and when he refused were prepared to make such venomous (and public) statements after the fact.

The Gifford debacle sets the scene for what happens later between Duane, Houghton, Houghton's officers and others in the LCC hierarchy which is why we have mentioned these events here. This assumption of authority over Duane and, arguably, over the AC, is another, key factor in the story that we are about to tell. The events, when they unfold, must be viewed not just in the context of a delivery system in which heads were supposedly captains of their own ships, but the potential for the abuse of power within said system, noting in particular the power(s) of CEOs.

#### **C4.1 – Birth**

When the school opened on 3 May 1960, there were no proud announcements in the press, and no photographs taken of the children in their new school. The only publicity we could find was a double-page spread in a local parish magazine. (Anon, 1960), with the unconsciously prescient title “History in the Making’. This had passport-size photographs of Duane and his Deputy, which we assume were supplied by the LCC. The article also featured a photograph of the main teaching block, taken when the school was empty. It would seem that, while the LCC was keen to celebrate Risinghill’s birth with the local church, it was somewhat reluctant to share this news with the local or national press. Maybe this was because the children pouring into the school on the first day cut a very different image to that which had been portrayed in the Daily Telegraph two months previously. Here there were very few blazers and ties on show, and nobody was wearing any school caps, hats or berets.

The Risinghill uniform was a very simple one - just a grey skirt or trousers with a white shirt and a royal blue top, which some children wore and others didn’t:

*My first day at the school, uniform was optional, my mum couldn’t afford it. I would have liked it to be like everyone for the first day.*

(Menzies, 2006)

Many families could not afford school uniform then - even one as basic as Risinghill’s - so Menzies was by no means the only child to turn up on the first day dressed in their everyday clothes. What also has to be taken into consideration is that the whole of the 4th Year (Year 10) pupils were at Risinghill for only one term and for the majority, who came from Gifford and Ritchie, where uniform had not been mandatory, it stands to reason that they would not bother with a uniform. Why would they when they were about to start work? We have no recollection of there being a 5<sup>th</sup> Year when Risinghill opened in the first term, but if there was one we suspect it was tiny, catering perhaps for just the Northampton and Bloomsbury pupils who might have been half-way through a GCE course. There certainly was no 5<sup>th</sup> Year at Gifford or Ritchie.

The only pupils to bear any resemblance to the photograph in the Daily Telegraph were the children from Bloomsbury and Northampton; some of whom arrived at the school wearing blazers and ties, much to the astonishment of the Gifford and Ritchie contingent. At the other end of the spectrum were the children who arrived at the school in shabby, worn-out clothes with holes in the heels of their socks (or 'spuds' as we called them) and some were not wearing socks at all. Isabel remembers one child, who kept his coat on at all times: rumour had it that this was because he was not wearing anything underneath. Child abuse was not talked about in those days, and Isabel, along with her friends, just thought this little boy was **very** poor and/or had parents who did not know how to look after him properly. This was an extreme case, or so we all thought. It was quite a shock to discover it was not necessarily so:

*Of the present school population, 307 children are from families on the books of the Care Committee and include N.S.P.C.C. and F.S.U.<sup>2</sup> cases (Duane, 1964c)*

If this figure is true, and we see no reason to see why not, it represents an astonishing 25%-30% of the school roll. The question of the Risinghill children being desperately poor and/or deprived is an interesting one that we examine in more detail in Part E (chapter E2)? where we invite the pupils to comment on this and other aspects of their childhoods. For now, let us just say that, as children, the majority of pupils who participated in our survey did not think they were poor, nor did they consider themselves to be deprived, though most were conscious of living in difficult circumstances.

Isabel, to her surprise, found that she, along with her younger brother, Neil, was on the books of the LCC's Care Committee. It would seem that, in 1961, she and her brother were one of 142 families that were in receipt of free school dinners. Although Isabel could not recall having any school dinners at Risinghill, her brother did remember: (1) standing at the back of the dinner queue, waiting for those who had paid to be served first; and (2) making a contribution every day of about sixpence, which he understood to be half the cost of the meal. Looking back, Isabel remembers her father having a life-threatening operation in the early 1960s, which put him out of work for over a year, and this might account for the family receiving

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<sup>2</sup> National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and Family Service Unit respectively.

some financial support (in the way of subsidised school meals) and being put on the books of the Care Committee as a result. In those days there were no state benefits to speak of - certainly not enough to feed and clothe a family of six children and two adults. However, she did not consider herself to be in need of any care or protection at this or any other time, and recalls spending her dinner money (a shilling, i.e. 5p) in the pie and mash shop or on cigarettes! In her view she was no poorer than the majority of pupils who attended Risinghill, most of whom were dressed tidily and looked clean and well-fed. It is, therefore, difficult to say how many of the 307 children mentioned in the above report were truly 'in trouble' in the sense that they were unloved, ill-fed and/or ill-clothed.

In our survey with the pupils, one pupil, Yvonne Fisher, did describe herself as an abused child. Fisher, you might recall, passed the 11+ examination; however, because she did not have a room of her own in which to study was denied a place at her local grammar school (Dame Alice Owen at the Angel, Islington). But an Owen's girl also needed to look the part, and from what Fisher told us about her childhood this was probably another, perhaps more compelling, reason for Owen's rejecting her:

*My mother spent as little money on me as possible. I had a grey skirt and blue jumper, which was school uniform, which I had to wear at weekends as well. I was seen down the market on Saturdays and Sundays in these clothes, which contributed to the bullying that became part of my life. (Fisher, 2004)*

Bob Jeffries was another Risinghill pupil to have passed the 11+ examination, but failed to get a grammar school place on account of his parents not being able to afford the grammar school uniform:

*I went with my mum to an interview and after I had been with the headmaster for a while I was told to wait outside while he discussed some stuff with my mum. I have no knowledge of what went on, but I always had the feeling she failed her part of the interview. This may be unfair, as it is just as likely that she made it clear she couldn't afford the many uniforms needed at William Ellis, or fund*

*the school trips. Whatever the reason we got a rejection letter a few weeks later. (Jefferies, 2004)*

As can be seen, for bright, under-privileged children to move up the 'social ladder' was not as straightforward as some of the politicians of the day were making out, and this probably still holds true today.

Duane, it must be said, was very relaxed about school uniform. We cannot remember him giving anyone a hard time for not wearing it. His only rule about dress was that stiletto heels should not be worn because of damaging the flooring. This approach did - as you will see later - get him into trouble with some of the local HMIs who saw this as a major weakness, contributing to what they believed to be a lack of discipline in the school. The discipline argument is a curious one that is still being used today when making the case for school uniform; however, we could not find any scientific evidence to support the notion that it made any difference (then or now) to a child's behaviour in or out of school. Nor were we able to establish, categorically, that uniform created an environment in which every child was made to feel equal. What we found interesting was that, at Risinghill, the wearing of uniform served to marginalise some of the school's most vulnerable children and, as will be shown in this chapter, was the root cause of most of the trouble between the Gifford and Northampton boys.

#### ***C4.2 – The Building***

Our first impressions of Risinghill were similar to those of our fellow pupils. Whereas our previous schools had been housed in old Victorian buildings surrounded by high brick walls, here there were open playgrounds with areas that had been laid to grass; some of which had even been planted with trees. There were tennis courts, a gymnasium equipped with trampolines, and so many other facilities that we were not expecting. To say that we were gob-smacked would be putting it mildly.

As the name implies, Risinghill was built on a steep incline, making it quite a challenge for the architects:

*...[The site] had probably been one of the most difficult used in London for school building. In particular the steep fall across the site had complicated planning especially in play areas to a far*

*greater degree than would have applied if a flat site had been available.* (London County Council, 1962b)

There were seven playgrounds, all on different levels. These were reached by either steps or ramps, or a combination of both, depending on the steepness of the fall. Access to some of the specialist areas scattered around the site was reached in a similar manner. The workshops, gymnasium and tennis courts, for example, were at the bottom of the incline, some distance from the main teaching block at the top of the hill. Sitting alongside the main building at the top of the hill was the old Risinghill Street School. This had been refurbished and was known as the conversion block, accommodating the tailoring and needlework departments, also the art rooms. All of the other disciplines (engineering, science, home economics and photography) were housed in separate, single-storey units that were dotted around the site away from the main building.

While most of the pupils in our survey loved the scattered nature of the site, it is fair to say that some found it daunting:

*Both the size of the school and 'order of magnitude' larger than what was the norm or it seemed to me back then. It took, it seemed, 15 minutes to walk from one side of the school to the other.* (Batty, 2008)

Others missed the security of a smaller school and hated having to move from one class to another for different lessons:

*I felt lost in such a big school. In Gifford I had my own desk and teachers came to me, I was secure with my classes and things around me. At Risinghill having to take a mass of books around with you and getting soaking wet while walking to another block for a lesson and having to sit in wet clothes and shoes was a nightmare. Losing your timetable and not knowing what room your to go to still haunts my dreams.* (JS, 2006)

There were three entrances to the site. The main entrance, in Risinghill Street, faced Chapel Street Market, where the pupils spent many a lunchtime — either in Manzies,

the pie and mash shop, or one of the popular cafes. School dinners were relatively cheap, but were not taken up by too many pupils. The majority liked to escape for an hour to do their own thing, especially the smokers. Unbeknown to parents, dinner money was often spent on cigarettes, which could be bought individually without any trouble. A shilling (5p), the price of a school dinner, covered the cost of two or more cigarettes with change left over. Duane was fully aware of this, and tried to do something about it:

*If you wish your child to take school dinner regularly, please write a note to this effect. Some children in the past have used the money for school meals on sweets or other quite unsuitable purchases.*  
(Duane, N.D.)

The second entrance was to the left of the teaching block in Donegal Street. As with the main entrance, pupils could be seen coming and going from here as Duane's office, along with Ms A's office, was on the first floor of the teaching block, overlooking both entrances. The third entrance, however, was tucked away from view at the bottom of the incline. Here there was no chain-fencing to speak of, and because the gate was easy to climb over, this was the favoured escape route. Directly opposite was a new housing estate, which offered lots of places to hide and a quick getaway into the maze of streets leading to Kings Cross, the 'Cally' and many other popular areas including Chapel Street Market.

For the staff, the plan of the building was a disaster, and not just because of the ease in which the children were able to hop over the gates. In the early days pupils were forever getting lost en route to lessons, sometimes accidentally on purpose:

*Open-plan buildings need a high degree of self-discipline. It was going to take these belted children years to get used to their freedom. They had come from small secondary schools that had high prison walls round them, with straightforward no-nonsense playgrounds, and, within the school, classrooms grouped round a central hall for easy supervision.* (Berg, 1968b)

With classes constantly interrupted by stragglers claiming to have lost their way it was very frustrating for the teachers who, because they did not know all of the

children, had no idea who was pulling the wool over their eyes, and who was telling them the truth.

### **C4.3 - The Defects**

Short cuts were taken at the planning stage of the building, and there were a number of defects:

*... like every other new school Risinghill had to be built within Ministry of Education costs limits and it was necessary at tender stage to make economies of about £36,000. (London County Council, 1962b)*

These savings resulted in the tight planning of staircases, corridors, the classrooms and even the main assembly hall, which was designed to take only two-thirds of the school. (Duane, 1962e) We touch on this later in relation to Risinghill's capacity, and suspicions that it was actually planned for fewer pupils than was advertised in the *London School Plan 1947*.

Economies were also made in the fixtures and fittings, some of which had a disastrous effect on both the staff and pupils. The huge windows, for example, were not fitted with safety catches, and had to be kept shut permanently:

*But the most appalling thing was that the windows were made to slide open, leaving an open space of twenty square feet at waist height from the floor. They terrified the staff and fascinated the children. (Berg, 1968b)*

In the winter the pupils were less inclined to play around with the windows as the wide expanse of glass made the rooms freezing cold, and an icy draught caused by even the smallest of gaps was soon noticed. Come the summer, however, it was a different story. Sliding the windows open (to call out to friends, but mostly to let in some air) was common practice as the rooms were sometimes unbearably hot, making them very uncomfortable to work in. Even the teachers tended to ignore the rules in the summer as they were impossible to enforce. While venetian blinds were fitted to some of the windows to help make the rooms cooler, these were a magnet

to the children, many of whom had never seen venetian blinds before and so did not know how operate them. Once jammed, they remained jammed, and were invariably left hanging, at half-mast, so they were next to useless. As one of our fellow pupils recalls:

*Venetian blinds were always hanging half mast over the windows ... I am still reminded of Risinghill to this day when I see venetian blinds and they have no place in my house. (JS, 2006)*

In the summer of 1964 the inevitable happened:

*When I was in the third year, we were in a class in the teaching block on the third floor. The class had got very disruptive and we weren't taking any notice of the teacher, the windows opened sideways and the window was wide open. I think it was a supply teacher. One boy was dancing on the tables and jumping from table to table, as he did this he jumped out of the window by accident. The class went deathly quiet, the teacher ran to the window and the boy was lying on the grass and his arm was right back. He was lucky because it was grass outside. All of the teachers came running in to look after us, and he was taken to hospital, when he came back to school his arm was in plaster. After that they altered the windows so that that they wouldn't open wide any more. (Menzies, 2006)*

Forty years later, this accident was reported, inaccurately, by the controversial then Chief Inspector of Schools no less, in The Sunday Times Review (Woodhead, 2005) where, apparently, "someone got chucked out of the window" at Risinghill. This is typical of some of the stories that have appeared in the press about the school. We should point out that, in the period 1960-1964, Duane repeatedly asked for safety catches to be fitted to the windows, but his requests were ignored. It would seem there was never any money in the budget:

*It also makes a nonsense of the refusal to make so many important but minor alterations to Risinghill on the grounds that there was no money for this purpose. Such requests as the provision of secure*

*cloakrooms: of toilets accessible from the playground: of an efficient system of securing windows: of adequate fencing ... have not yet been met after nearly five years, and when the need for these things had been amply demonstrated. One child had fallen from a first-floor window and broken his wrist before one such request was met. (Risinghill PTA 1965)*

Despite the shortfalls, the school does appear to have been “good enough, anyway, to earn an architectural award.”(Constable, 1968).

#### **C4.4 – The House System**

To help create smaller and more manageable, intimate environments within the school the pupils were organised into Houses, each with its own Head of House. We assume that this was also to help pupils to integrate, and meet and make friends with pupils from the other schools.

The school's Routine Instructions, at page one, show the Head of House's first responsibility as “knowing every child in the house personally” (Op. cit.) which epitomises Duane's approach to teaching. They were also responsible for: discipline; the appointment of tutors to Tutor Groups; registration and attendance; the supervision of school milk and school meals; accounting of house funds; advice to parents about their children; the preparation of school reports; and the organisation of social and sporting activities in the school. (Op. cit.)

The Houses were all named after influential authors associated with the area: Johnson, Blake, Defoe, Milton, Keats, Fox, and for a short time, Payne. Each house was sub-divided into five Tutor Groups with every House having its own dining room where pupils met and ate together. The tutors were also tasked with “knowing every member of their group” and for the conduct and discipline of their charges. These groups comprised about 30 children from every age group and contributing school; however we have no record of how the pupils were allocated to the different Houses.

Risinghill was overcrowded at the beginning but we pupils did not notice anything out of the ordinary. This might have been because we were accustomed to smaller schools and large classes where the same teacher (in the same classroom) often taught different lessons. As Berg points out in her book, most of the classrooms in

our previous schools were off a main, central hall so we did not have the same freedom to roam as we had at Risinghill. We do, however, remember that morning assemblies were held on a House basis, and the (rare) full school assemblies were very cramped because the accommodation in the main hall was too small.

#### ***C4.5 - Coming Together***

The pupils arrived together to start their first day without any introductions or inductions. Although the Bloomsbury and Ritchie girls, along with their teachers, appear to have adapted quickly to a mixed environment, some Northampton lads found this more difficult:

*It came as a bit of a blow when we learned we were to be moved to Risinghill (from Northampton) and worse when we heard that we were going to have to mix with girls. Don't get me wrong, I like girls, always have done, but they create a bit of a distraction. When we finally arrived at R and met you girls in 3A it was a bit of an eye-opener, to me at least. (Luther, 2006)*

*The first day at RH was, to say the least, a huge culture shock. There were girls everywhere. Am I right in assuming that the ratio of girls to boys was 60:40, it certainly seemed like 80:20. (Hepper, 2006)*

The same could be said for some of their teachers, whose brusque approach was not, on the whole, appreciated by the girls, some of whom, instead of jumping to attention when their surnames were bawled out, ignored the teacher or gave him a cold stare, sometimes back-chatting him if they felt particularly aggrieved. At Northampton, this would not have been tolerated.<sup>3</sup> Here insubordination could have been treated with a few strokes of the cane, but at Risinghill there was no Corporal Punishment (CP) and, in any event, masters were not allowed to physically discipline girls. What these teachers failed to comprehend was that, in their previous schools, the girls had been treated more gently and were unaccustomed to teachers shouting

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<sup>3</sup> Philip notes: Not that the lessons at Northampton were better taught. I remember English lessons in particular being appalling; history was an endless repetition of the Industrial Revolution. In the school's core subjects, metalwork and technical drawing, maths and physics the standard of discipline was however high. In my time other subjects seemed to be taught by an endless number of supply teachers of dubious skill and motivation. These subjects were much better taught at Risinghill.

at them, and generally behaving in a dictatorial manner. This mode of teaching, however, was common-place in an all boys' school so for those who had never taught anywhere else, Risinghill was an eye-opener in every sense. While some of the Northampton teachers adapted to this new way of teaching, others had no understanding of why it was suddenly all going wrong for them.

One Northampton teacher, Mr N, often fell foul of the girls in his Maths Group for all of the above reasons. Isabel and Lynn did not get on with him at all, spending, on occasions, more time in the corridor outside his class room than they did in it. Their grievances, however, were more to do with the fact that he was teaching Maths at an advanced level – far above what they had been taught in their previous schools – and they were not the only ones to be struggling. Bored children switch off easily and can become disruptive, hence the long periods in the corridor outside – not just for Isabel and Lynn, but for many of N's pupils.

Philip, on the other hand, was full of praise for N. In his questionnaire, N is cited as one of the teachers to have inspired him at Risinghill:

*Mr N, my mathematics teacher at Northampton and Risinghill, for awakening and fostering an interest in mathematics.* (Lord, 2006)

It just goes to show that given the right environment, and the right children to work with, N was more than capable of bringing out the best in his pupils.

In this and the following chapter(s), you will see that many teachers joined Risinghill on the premise that they would be teaching children in the higher-ability groups. But this did not happen. Many children of average and below-average ability were put in the A and B streams to create a wider distribution, explaining, perhaps, why some teachers, like N, struggled. Philip, incidentally, was one of only four pupils in 1961 from the school to pass the GCE in Mathematics. (Duane, 1961b)

#### ***C4.6 – The Teaching Team***

In some of the reports about the school it has been suggested that Duane handpicked his staff; however, as you will have seen, this was not the case. Most of the teachers were transferred over from their previous schools with some being promoted to jobs that Duane would never have sanctioned. What is noteworthy is

that the head of Ritchie - who applied for the Risinghill headship, but did not reach the interview stage - was given the post of deputy head without competition and without Duane even meeting her. The fact that she was just four years off retirement might explain why this happened.

As Leila Berg was to record, Duane had a difficult task ahead of him:

*Of the three heads<sup>4</sup>, two came to the new school, which was unlike anything they had ever known, both philosophically and architecturally, for it offered freedom where they had thought always in terms of 'control', 'discipline', of locks and high walls. They came to positions which were both subservient to another head to whose philosophies they did not subscribe and yet of considerable importance. One of them certainly, both of them probably, came extremely unwillingly and unhappily. The authority appointed them to positions of importance before they appointed Michael Duane. Not only were they teachers whom Mr Duane would never have chosen to carry out his policy; they came to the school with no idea that they would have a head with a policy different from theirs, and who would need them to support such a policy, and even initiate it. (Berg, 1968b)*

Here Berg is probably over-egging the situation somewhat, but of the three acting or full Heads two became Heads of Department in Risinghill and the third Duane's deputy.

The teachers also had to adapt to their new surroundings. You will have seen that those who had been in single-sex schools took longer to adjust than the teachers from Gifford. Some of them, notably Mr N, never quite made the transition, leastways not in Isabel's or Lynn's view. More important, the staff had to adapt to Duane's new school ethos and this would have been difficult, not that the LCC appears to have given this much thought:

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<sup>4</sup> Gifford did not have a head in place at the time of the merger, Northampton had an acting head who did join the school.

*His opposers, perhaps even some of his supporters, must have thought the old heads would act as a brake. That this would mean that the school, right from the start would be locked in an insoluble conflict, practically and psychologically, does not seem to have occurred to them. (Ibid).*

For those who had joined the school with expectations of teaching at grammar school level, life was particularly difficult. In her book, Berg makes the point that it was not just the teachers who suffered, but also the children. Isabel and Lynn could relate to this, having struggled in the A stream for Maths:

*Since the L.C.C. had stated that the ratio of children in each ability group would be the usual twenty per cent, teachers for academic subjects had been engaged. When the position was found to be different, the staff could have been changed, but certain governors insisted on holding on to the academic staff as long as possible – useless, even perhaps unintentionally destructive, to the children. So these teachers found they had children of well below average ability in their A classes; understandably, they were bewildered, resentful, and frustrated. (Ibid)*

While the younger teachers - on discovering that the school was perhaps not for them - were able to escape, those in senior positions with high allowances would not have found it easy to secure comparable posts elsewhere. A move would have been even more awkward for those on the brink of retirement. As Duane reflected later in life:

*Many really deadly dull, boring and inefficient teachers who had managed to get high posts, partly because they had been on the staffs of previous schools and were transferred by the ILEA, went on being inefficient and being a damned nuisance in the school as far as I was concerned.” (Laiken, Undated)*

Staffing levels and the quality of teachers required to meet the pupils' vocational and pastoral needs would prove to be another serious issue. From the start the school was never fully staffed. A third of the teaching vacancies remained unfilled

throughout the school's history; a situation that was so bad that Duane was forced to cover the gaps:

*The Head last term taught 17 periods a week to help out in the shortage of Maths teachers and to take over the most difficult classes in the Fourth Year. In the current term he teaches for 13 periods. (Duane, 1962a)*

The overall effect is clearly demonstrated in Duane's response to the 1962 inspection report produced by MacGowan:

*At no time has the staff been up to the establishment in numbers except for very short periods. It has certainly never been near it in the matter of qualifications, and frequently short of it in competence. This is clearly reflected in the subject reports where, out of 14 subjects considered, no less than 12 contain references to notable difficulties of staffing, including shortage, lack of adequate qualifications, inexperience, unsuitability of personality and sheer incompetence (Ibid)*

While Berg tended to focus on much of the 'bad' from a teaching perspective, there were a number of dedicated — and also very gifted — teachers who were sympathetic to what Duane was trying to achieve with the children. Even those who might not have been so talented were prepared to give his ideas a whirl, as will be demonstrated in the next section on CP where the teachers decided, voluntarily, to do away with it within weeks, not months, of the school opening. If nothing else, this shows that the majority of the staff had a lot of respect for Duane albeit that some took longer than others to come around to his way of thinking.

Bob Dixon (a former teacher of Risinghill to whom we are indebted for providing us with so much information about the school) describes in his last book, *The Wrong* (2007) how Duane persuaded him to think creatively when it came to handling the more difficult children:

*Once, when I had a serious and running dispute with one of the boys in 4BL, Duane asked both of us into his office to talk about it.*

*I felt a bit put out over this at first as it was an unusual procedure (to me, anyway) but I realised it was a sensible thing to do. Otherwise, when children wrecked lessons day after day, I often sent them to stand in the corridor. I think I overdid this but I didn't know what else to do. They weren't being taught in the corridor but the others weren't being taught if the disruptive ones were in the classroom. An extension of this practice takes us into the question of school exclusions. No-one seems to have solved this problem (or symptoms of the problem) yet and it probably can't be solved within society as it stands. (Ibid)*

Michael Duane did not believe in exclusion or expulsion as it was called in the 1960s. In fact one of the reasons for Risinghill having so many difficult pupils was because he took children that had been expelled from other schools or rejected (as in the case of Michael Dudley, described below) because they were known to be difficult. This annoyed some of the LCC officials, who, as you will see in later chapters, wanted him to use expulsion as a deterrent for truancy and/or bad behaviour. But he refused:

*The suggestion of public expulsion is scarcely realistic. The school is formally assembled. The boy is forcibly, if necessary, brought to the attention of the school. His misdeeds are recounted and he is told with due solemnity that he is to be expelled. What is presumed to be the effect on the assembled school (a) if he is brought by force, (b) if he is in fact delighted at the prospect of having a reason for not attending school, (c) makes a rude gesture and expresses his opinion of the Staff and the school in a series of four-letter words? I make these points in all seriousness because the Staff know many boys – and girls – capable of doing just these things. (Duane, 1962a)*

Later we give a more detailed account of the teachers' views of Duane, also the school and what they thought about its closure. Whereas Bob Dixon had a good working relationship with Duane, and learned a lot from him, Terence Constable, another teacher, had a completely different view:

*It seems odd that Duane, who went to such lengths to “break through” with children, apparently gave up so early any attempts to communicate with his teachers. (Constable, 1968)*

Constable joined Risinghill in 1965, just before Risinghill closed. His paper, ‘*The Risinghill Myth*’ is an account of what he claimed to be the truth about the Risinghill affair, and we will be looking at some of his assertions later. For now let us just say that his claims have been taken at face value by people like David Limond and Margaret Cole who, interestingly, have also written with authority about Duane and the school, but without any actual experience of either.

#### **C4.7 – Corporal Punishment**

Duane approached the issue of CP with the staff in much the same way that he had at Howe Dell and Alderman Woodrow. This was to call a meeting to explain his views about CP and why he wanted to remove it. Past experience had taught him that it would take time for the teachers to come around to his way of thinking so he was both surprised and delighted when, within weeks of this meeting, they informed him that they were ready to give up the practice. (Duane, 1960b)

Unbeknown to Duane, the teachers had been discussing a caning incident in the school which some of the staff had found distressing. This was because the victim, a disturbed boy from a troubled background, could not be held responsible for his actions. In this sense the use of CP was considered to be indefensible. A staff meeting was called to discuss the incident during which the whole question of discipline and punishment was debated at length. The meeting ended with the teachers deciding to take a vote on whether or not CP should be removed. Not everyone was in favour of a total ban but the majority vote prevailed, and the news was passed on to Duane, who was both surprised and delighted as he had not envisaged winning the teachers round so soon.

The next day, at a full school assembly, Duane informed the children of the teachers’ decision, much to the astonishment of everyone present. While the teachers had agreed to give up CP, they had not envisaged Duane making this public. In fact some of them were so angry that they sent a deputation to him to express their concerns about the announcement. His response was simple:

*But you are not doing away with corporal punishment unless you tell the children. (Berg, 1968b)*

Without full disclosure it was, of course, impossible to do away with CP and this was the point that Duane was making. The teachers, however, did not see it this way. They had taken what they believed to be a massive leap of faith, and Duane had betrayed them, making them look foolish in the process. What they were asking for, without saying it outright, was to have a covert policy on CP as this allowed them to at least keep the threat of the cane in reserve; something they felt they needed. This approach was not dissimilar to that taken by the LCC where, to remind you, there were two *Punishment in Schools* booklets in use then, one advocating the removal of CP and the other providing guidance on how to administer it.

Looking at this from the perspective of the teachers, we do have a level of sympathy for them. First and foremost they were entering uncharted territory at a chaotic time in the school's history. Indeed the school was *making* history by becoming the first school in London to declare that it had given up the practice. Second, many of the teachers were probably still struggling with Duane's whole school ethos never mind all the other changes that had been forced upon them. Change, at the best of times, is difficult and perhaps they simply wanted to wait until the school had settled down before making the ban public. This, of course, is all supposition on our part. As time went on the teachers might well have changed their minds, and maybe this is why Duane decided to grab the moment. The first 12-18 months of the ban were certainly very challenging:

*Over the whole range of activities for which the children had previously been caned in their previous schools, we found they were testing out the staff to see whether we meant what we said. Gradually, of course, this died down – mind you it took about 18 months to do so. We did not have an effect on the older children – they were too heavily conditioned really to change their point of view and they left before any alteration in their behaviour could be observed. (Laiken, Undated)*

#### **C4.8 – When Two Tribes go to War**

When new schools are opened they will often have a gradual intake over several years; the idea being to give the pupils time to settle and familiarise themselves with their new surroundings. Had this philosophy been adopted for Risinghill, and had the LCC opened the school in September as opposed to May, we believe that many of the early teething problems, for which it was so heavily criticised, could have been avoided. The broad thrust of these criticisms (from within and without) was the perceived delinquency and disorder throughout the school's history, when in truth many of these problems disappeared within the first year.

Of the 1,200-plus pupils who started at Risinghill in May 1960, the youngest had only just completed part of their first year (currently called year 7), and the majority of the older pupils were in their fourth and final year of education. The latter were due to leave in July, barely two months after joining the school. It was from this cohort that much of the violence and disruption stemmed. Although it is fair to say that the Gifford boys caused most of the fights, the Northampton pupils were not entirely blameless. Fighting rival schools and gangs from other districts was all part of the Islington youth culture then, and still is today:

*The first year was the year of the gang fights. The boys of Risinghill came from Northampton, a boys' small technical school, and Gifford a large mixed. Because the Northampton boys were older – they tended to stay on at school a year or two past the school-leaving age – they were chosen as prefects at Risinghill. Furthermore, they were well-spoken, and had always worn uniform, which meant they were different from the Gifford boys, readily identifiable, and an easy focus for anger. (Berg, 1968b)*

While the Northampton boys will probably disagree with Berg's description of them, the Gifford and Ritchie children did have this perception of them being a bit posh. In their blazers and ties they looked very different to everyone else albeit that most of them came from the same neighbourhood and the same, working-class backgrounds. Some of the boys were brighter in Maths and Physics but from what we can remember were roughly of the same ability in every other subject. From our research with the pupils, we know that quite a few boys travelled long distances to

attend Northampton, and it is possible that, because they came from the outskirts of London, they were, as Berg suggests, well spoken. However, we would say that these boys were in the minority<sup>5</sup>. We would also question Berg's view that the Northampton lads were older. When Risinghill opened there was no Sixth Form and, as stated earlier the 5<sup>th</sup> Form would have been small. The boys were, therefore, roughly all of the same age range, though Berg is correct when she says that there were more boy prefects chosen from Northampton than Gifford. This was the root cause of most of the fights, of this there is no doubt.

Integrating pupils from four very different schools was a difficult task in itself without adding this extra dimension of gang warfare to the mix. We were surprised that the LCC did not take this into account when bringing the older boys together. As Michael Dudley, who joined Risinghill at the age of 11, puts it:

*Kids went around in gangs. We were the younger ones. Older brothers were in the gangs and that's how it went on, was part of the scene. This spilled over into the schools, not just Risinghill, but all of the schools in the area. There was the Angel gang, Highbury gang and so on, always having fights, (Dudley, 2005)*

Not all of the pupils who completed our questionnaire were so philosophical, however: in the early days many were daunted by the school's atmosphere:

*It was a scary place compared to Northampton, the school I had come from. (Maher, 2006)*

*Risinghill was a jungle. Many students were unruly thugs. One of the first incidents that I witnessed was a teacher being pushed to the ground and kicked by a group of students. Admittedly, the hat<sup>6</sup> was grim, I can picture it still, but the unprovoked attack, the*

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<sup>5</sup> Philip, who attended Northampton School, certainly does think Berg has over-simplified the Gifford-Northampton divide. He was also one of that minority who travelled a long way (from Redhill in Surrey) to attend the school. Outside of school he simply went back home, detached from the neighbourhood, as did others who did not live locally. Incidentally, because of the distances travelled by these pupils (and maybe other factors) this very small handful was not made prefects. Philip remembers his mother telling him Duane told her he was not made a prefect because of the travel. Regarding posh accents, these boys might well have sounded different – Philip's was probably a working class south-east London accent.

<sup>6</sup> The students to exception to the teacher's hat.

*gratuitous violence, directed at a rather timid woman, was appalling and I was petrified and shocked.* (Fisher, 2006)

Although we did not see any violence of this kind, we did remember the rumours about the gang fights. However, we cannot recall hearing anything about the teachers getting attacked. Philip does recall once some boys let out early to forestall a gang fight that was rumoured for when school ended – whether it came to anything he has no recollection. So Risinghill was not perfect by any means, and we have tried to keep an open mind on this, using, where possible, our research with the pupils and teachers to verify the facts. Interestingly one of the teachers, who participated in our study, did witness an assault of the type described by Fisher, also a fracas with a male teacher who, apparently, was ambushed by a group of pupils and beaten with a ruler – to give him a taste of his own medicine (the teacher's words, not ours). These events are covered in Part D.

While, the school's abandonment of CP was thought by many, including some of the pupils, to be the reason for all the fighting and misbehaviour, we do not believe this to be the case. It had not been a deterrent at Gifford where boys were caned on a regular basis, often in front of their class mates. These public beatings did not have any effect on their behaviour; in fact the reverse was true. A boy that could take his 'six of the best' without flinching – and there were many at Gifford who did – won not only a victory for himself, but also the admiration of his peers.

#### ***C4.9 – Assessing Pupils' Academic Levels***

In Houghton's 1958 report (to be discussed in the next chapter) a balanced intake was promised to ensure that the school became fully comprehensive; however, as has been shown, less than one-percent of the pupils were in the top ability group, and about half were in the two lower groups, explaining, perhaps, why the LCC did not make provision for a Sixth Form. This had a massive impact on some of the brighter, more academic, pupils. James Maher, for example, joined the school from Northampton and left in 1961 with five GCE O Levels when he would have liked to continue his education:

*There was no 6th form and we were encouraged to leave and get a job which I did.* ((Maher, 2006)

Philip, with four GCE O Levels, went on to study for GCE A Levels at Croydon Technical College, which was also much closer to his home. Here again we come to the point of there being no grammar school-level intake into the school, as none of the four merged schools had a Sixth Form, and no provision was made for those pupils who would have benefitted from further study. At a time when the government was encouraging children to stay on at school for another year, and was talking about making this compulsory, it is odd that Risinghill was set up in a way that militated against this. We could not help but wonder if Risinghill had, from the outset, been set up to fail (something alluded to by Berg in her book) as we believe other London comprehensives of that era, such as Kidbrooke and Holland Park, did have Sixth Forms when they were built.

What is not clear is how the pupils were assessed for their new classes on joining Risinghill. We do not remember being tested, and some teachers that we asked didn't know either. However, one senior teacher said "there were various ability tests but I can't be specific about them now" (Margot Coates). In our questionnaires we asked the pupils what class level they were in when they joined the school, and whether they remained in the same set each year or went up/down.

At Gifford and Ritchie, classes were not graded by ability so some pupils were pleased to be placed in the top streams at Risinghill while others were annoyed at being separated from friends, and put in classes with children they did not know from other schools. But being in the 'A' stream did not, as we have indicated, mean that you were clever. Many children were upgraded to create a wider distribution:

*This has meant that our A forms have always had a number of Group III children and our present 1A has several Group IV children. ((Duane, 1964c)*

It was probably for this reason that the Maths teacher, Mr N, and others like him, struggled<sup>7</sup>. What it was like for the staff teaching the lower streams we dread to think as many of the children could not even speak English. Despite this, it would seem certain Governors were determined to recruit academic staff to teach at

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<sup>7</sup>

Philip recalls this as being his experience when he later started teaching.

grammar school level, despite Duane's insistence that teachers with more generalist skills were needed:

*When within the first year I realised what the pattern would be I began to urge on the Governors the desirability of appointing more teachers of general subjects with an emphasis on their qualities as stable personalities. This was bitterly opposed by Mrs Chaplin, Mrs McGregor and Miss Murray who have, quite obsessively, insisted on high academic qualifications in newly appointed Staff, and have, too often, swayed the balance of the Governors, especially when Mr Harper was Chairman ((Ibid.)*

The name 'Murray' was of interest to us as we had come across it when searching the Education Committee (EC) minutes for evidence of: (1) what appeared to be the scaling back of the school in 1958 (or thereabouts) from a 13-form entry to 8-form entry school; and (2) the official scaling back (to an eight-form entry) in 1962. Murray was the chair of the LCC's Schools Planning Sub-Committee in 1962 and was aware of the latter change, but interestingly not Duane. The Schools Planning Sub-Committee was also one of three sub-committees involved with the initial proposal to close Risinghill. Ms Murray is someone we will come back to when discussing these issues – in chapters C6 and C11 respectively.

#### **C4.10 – Governing Body**

Mrs Joan Evans was made chair of Risinghill's GB soon after it opened. Her chairmanship, however, was brief, less than a year in fact, due to what was claimed to be an election technicality. Two other Governors, who were also very supportive of Duane's policies, disappeared at around the same time. The new chair, Mr Harper, was a former HMI and was rumoured to have been put in the post to bring Duane into line; however, Duane got on well with Harper and there were no major problems as far we could discover.

#### **C4.11 – Giving the Children a Voice**

Towards the end of the first year, a School Council was set up to give the children a say on issues which affected them directly. This was unheard of in the 1960s though

one or two independent schools, notably Summerhill, had been running School Councils for some years before, and very successfully by all accounts.

The Council had two representatives from each House (a boy and girl): four co-opted members in the event of a particular group or section of the school not being fully represented; four representatives from the teaching staff (two male, two female); and four non-teaching staff i.e. the Librarian, School Secretary, School keeper and School Meals Supervisor.(Duane, 1960a)

The children took their responsibilities seriously — too seriously, it would seem, for the teachers if Berg is to be believed, and we have no reason to doubt her:

*One day, at a Council meeting, the head boy said that some members of the staff were not turning up for their playground duty, as arranged, and the prefects were having to do it for them, in addition to their own. (Berg, 1968b)*

Although the culprits were not mentioned by name, this caused quite a stir in the staff room. MacGowan was not too pleased about this either:

*There is moreover some suggestion that members of staff feel that the Council discusses matters which properly are the affair of the Staff. It is clear that the fledgling democracy of the school is in need of firm and discreet guidance by responsible adults. (London County Council, 1962c)*

For a school that was beginning to look like it had been rejected at birth, it is a miracle that Risinghill made any progress in its first year of life. By the end of 1960, however, it had abolished CP and was the only state school in London to have done so publicly. It was also the only state school, we believe, to be listening to children through the medium of a School Council. When one considers that many schools are still struggling with the concept of a School Council today, this was a remarkable achievement. In the next chapter evidence of the Council working for the good of the school will be demonstrated, as will be the teachers' reaction to it.

#### **C4.12 - Parent Teacher Association**

An indicator of the high esteem in which Risinghill was held by parents can be found in the fact that the school established a thriving Parent Teacher Association (PTA) at a time when this was not so common, though the PTA movement started in the late nineteenth century.

That the school had a thriving PTA was a miracle in itself, and not just because PTAs were rare. Back in the 1960s parents did not, on the whole, get too involved with their children's education. This was especially true of working-class parents who, because they were working long hours in manual jobs, sometimes with mother going out the door (to a part-time job) as father arrived home in the evening (to take over the child-care) it was difficult for them to attend after-school meetings. The main draw-back, however, was that many parents were poorly educated and because of this tended to avoid contact with people in authority, especially teachers who made them feel inferior. Adding to the problem was a general reluctance on behalf of the government to give parents more of a say in the running of schools:

*... I am certain that the intention of the 1944 Education Act assumed bringing in parents, but this was worked on very intensively by a group of sub committees, who rigorously eliminated, gradually, the concept that the parent has a right to be on the governing body of a school. Technically we could have parents on governing bodies today without changing a single word of the Act. I think that the sooner this is brought about the better.*

(Laiken, Undated)

Today, of course, it is very different, though since the introduction of free schools and academies (to be discussed in later chapters) the law on parental representation on GBs has changed somewhat. Previously, all state schools were required by law to hold 'Parent Governor' elections, and at the time of drafting this chapter (2007) parents represented a third of a GB's membership. But in many schools, particularly in the inner-cities, there remained a problem, largely because ordinary working-class parents continued to display a reluctance to sit shoulder to shoulder with people whom they perceived to be more knowledgeable and/or intelligent.

In Risinghill's day, on the odd occasion that a parent did visit a school voluntarily, it was usually to make a complaint about the excessive use of CP or bullying. Relationships were, therefore, strained on both sides and Duane worked hard to remove these prejudices. He understood the value of getting the parents involved and unlike the government (then and now in 2016) took steps to make this happen. He was immensely proud of Risinghill's PTA and rightly so.

#### **C4.13 - Settling Down**

During that first school year, all of the children were busy testing out their relationships - with each other and with the teachers. There were inter-schools rivalries, plus rivalries relating to ethnicity, colour, class, ability and age. To make things more difficult, the adolescent girls and boys, who had been at the single-sex schools, were also mixing together for the first time. Many of the fights between the Gifford and Northampton boys were over the girls, and there were fights between the girls (often over boys) too.

By November 1960 the fighting had died down as most of the older boys had left in the summer to start work. Those remaining were now joining together to form school sports teams, resulting in the previous grievances being set aside. A 'corporate' identity was slowly beginning to emerge with the children taking great pride in their school and their achievements, sporting and otherwise. The School Council was also beginning to take effect:

*After a particularly vicious attack on a prefect and at the suggestion of Mr Osborne, one of the Staff representatives on the Council, four of the 'gang' and four of the prefects were invited to appear before the Council to state their grievances. After a discussion lasting over an hour it became clear that there was a certain resentment based on Gifford-Northampton rivalry; that the prefects had allowed their friends privileges not accorded to Gifford boys or to the 'gang' in particular; that the situation was exacerbated by the personal rivalry between the Head Boy and the leader of the 'gang' over the former's girl-friend. From that day there has not been a single act of violence of this kind in the school (Duane, 1962a)*

Even MacGowan was forced to admit that there had been a significant improvement insofar as the fighting was concerned:

*Some achievements must be placed to the school's credit. The nasty violence of its early days has largely disappeared. .(London County Council, 1962c)*

The Council, however, was not fully supported by the staff and it folded towards the back end of 1961/early 1962 on account of the teachers boycotting meetings. This included some of the Heads of House, notably the Head of Johnson, as reported by a pupil:

*... I do remember going over to Johnson and asking for time to go to one of the meetings and or something like that and the Head of Johnson, at the time, saying "why do you want to waste your time going to that rubbish!" Or words to that effect. (Batty, 2008)*

Judging from a fairly recent research study conducted by the NSPCC into School Councils, it looks like the same apathy exists today:

*Staff identified two main issues as standing in the way of the development of some councils and these were time constraints and staff resistance. (Baginsky and Hannam, 1999)*

Many schools are still struggling with the concept of giving young people a say on issues that affect them directly, and we doubt that this has anything to do with teachers not having the time to attend meetings. When their presence is required at, say, a staff meeting or GB meeting which normally takes place after school hours 'time' does not appear to be a constraint. The same criticism (of not engaging with the pupils) can be said of the GBs where, to our knowledge, pupil participation is rare. Yet the pupils are the main stakeholders are they not? We are not suggesting that they be given a seat on the GB, merely that they be given the opportunity to attend meetings (or parts of meetings) where they might have a valuable contribution to make.

#### **C4.14 – The New Intake**

Of the 286 pupils admitted in September 1960, (London County Council, 1965b) just five were in the top ability group and 99 were in the lowest group of all (Duane, 1962a). Nineteen children appear not to have been graded: we assume this is because they were new to the country and did not speak the language. This pattern remained pretty much the same throughout the life of the school, as will be shown later.

The September intake brought the total number of pupils in 1960 up to 1,323:

*A promising start was made; there were 403 first-choice and 51 second-choice applications for admission to the school at 11+ (286 pupils being admitted), and the roll then totalled 1,323(London County Council, 1965b)*