

Blink: life goes faster than you think

Roy Blatchford

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Fifty years ago this term I started teaching.

Following a brief interview in County Hall - that grand civic building opposite the Houses of Parliament and home then to the sprawling Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) - I turned up as an untrained graduate at a Brixton primary school. Teacher shortages in London were acute.

I loved teaching from that moment. And no matter where I have worked in the world, that personal and professional buzz of being in schools excites and motivates me still.

Fifty years is not an insignificant slice of what is about a century and a half of state funded education: the Elementary Education Act in 1880 marked the start of compulsory schooling. Subsequently, the school leaving age was raised to 12 in 1899, to 14 in 1918, to 15 in 1947. And the so-called ROSLA (to age 16) pupils left school in 1973, that year I began.

Reflecting on these fifty years, what has changed and what has remained much the same?

It is often quipped that if hospitals had changed at the same rate as schools, doctors would still be using leeches. That may be a little unfair on education. Yet reading recently the words of HMI in a school log-book from 1907 - set down in the headmistress's immaculate copperplate script - reminded me of the current flurries around pupil attendance.

'Anything that could be done by parents to secure school attendance for their children when, as regularly happens in many cases, they are living elsewhere, would be very beneficial to the children themselves and to the work of the school as a whole.'

So what have been the significant developments in schools since 1973?

- Growth of comprehensive education;
- Introduction of GCSE;
- Birth of the National Curriculum;

- Focus on early years, special educational needs, disadvantage;
- Impact of accountability: league tables, national tests and strategies, inspection and Teachers' Standards;
- Advent of independent state schools (academies);
- Fundamental shift in the relationships between children, parents and teachers, a reflection of wider social change;
- Technological advances: the coming of the internet, social media and latterly AI.

And what has remained the same?

- Schools as vital agents of socialisation, balancing the transmission of values from the past with anticipation of future cultural norms;
- The curriculum as a blend of history, contemporary knowledge, and a skills set for today and tomorrow;
- Classrooms as places of the 'fun and fundamentals' of learning;
- A profession which has still not gained the kudos of other professions;
- An influential independent sector educates a steady 7% of the school population in England;
- [*The forgotten third*](#).

And for the teacher who is beginning their professional journey this month, what will they see by way of the status quo and change by 2073? I'll hazard just three predictions about school teaching:

1. To be a teacher is considered in the same breath as being an accountant, pilot, lawyer, architect, doctor.
2. The teacher is well paid, a reflection of their value in society.
3. Teachers enter the profession at 30, have flexible conditions, funded sabbaticals, and teach until 80.....*

Have a buzzy school year!

*For more on this subject, see [*Must Do Better*](#) by Hudson and Blatchford (2022)