

What Good Timing- Another Inspection!

So I did not lose my job! It then looked as if the storm had been well and truly weathered when this small group of angry and offended parents were unexpectedly presented with what must have looked like a golden opportunity for them to make things difficult for me: we received notice that the school was to be inspected for the second time.

Now part of the inspection process is a “Parents’ Evening” when the lead inspector listens to parents comments about the school, answers questions about the Inspection process and so on. The Head and staff are not allowed into this meeting. Usually very few parents bother with it but, of course, such a meeting can so easily provide an opportunity for anyone with any sort of grievances to come and air them publicly with no-one from the school staff being there to answer them or even defend themselves if that is appropriate. The inspectors then have a duty to check out, and look into, the things said at the meeting during the inspection itself.

When I first met the Lead Inspector it was before the Parents’ Meeting. We got on well and the discussion between us seemed both friendly and professional. He was impressed by our first inspection report and must have thought that this was going to be one of his easier inspections. Then came the Parents’ Meeting! I was not allowed into the meeting, of course, so I sat alone in the staff room *all evening* while the meeting took place: it was my job to unlock and lock the school, check the heating was comfortable and that was about it! At the end of a long evening the Lead Inspector came out of the room visibly shaken! He hardly said a word to me, picked up his coat and suitcase and fled the building! I immediately heard from some of the parents what had happened. Two parents had dominated the whole evening (I did not have to be told who they were!) and they had savaged me and the school! Fortunately there were others there who tried to speak up for the school but the general feeling was that it had been an awful, negative and complaining meeting. People who felt for the school and supported it were almost unanimously depressed and upset by it. One or two looked genuinely perplexed and shocked as they left the school that night. It must have been very bad because I could not get

anyone to tell me **exactly** what was said! I knew from that moment that we would be really up against it in *this* inspection.

When the inspection came, my “Link Adviser” and myself were expecting the worst- and true enough that is what we got! The Inspectors were obviously looking as closely as was humanly possible at what was going on in the school. I think they began the inspection thinking, because of whatever happened at the Parents’ Meeting, that there might well be something seriously wrong in this school. I had the Lead Inspector in all my lessons on the first day and one inspector in every lesson I took during the whole inspection. When I went on the playground for playground duty, the Lead Inspector came with me: in fact, I never got a moment during the whole inspection when I was not shadowed. I was questioned at length about just about everything in the school. Nothing was too petty for comment and I thought a lot reported on was both petty and unfair and so did my Link Adviser and several of the Governors. In fact, my Link Adviser made a formal complaint about the inspection and came close to losing her temper with the inspectors at the end of the inspection meeting. The final report had to be re-written three times! Nonetheless the report, whilst not as good as the first one the school had, was both positive and complimentary, although this time it made sure we were left with a lot to do as just about everything in the school was put up for “review”!! Some of the comments I particularly liked, though were:

“The aims of the school reflect the high focus on personal development and all pupils are encouraged to personal independence, the ability to be reflective and thoughtful and to have an awareness of self and others within a “family school” atmosphere.”

“Pupils of all ages and abilities like coming to school.”

“The governing body has established a good working relationship with the head teacher and staff.”

“The teaching is good...The pupil results are high in comparison with schools nationally.” And one that gave me a special satisfaction:

“The school has a caring ethos, and the head teacher in his own teaching and conduct in the school gives a good lead in ensuring that relationships between teachers and pupils are positive.”

I felt, as one of the Governors did, that “the Inspectors had tried hard to find something wrong in the school and had failed!” So, that was another big challenge successfully over with! Now we could expect to be left alone for another six years and maybe more.

Gradually, after this inspection, things began to get back to something like normal, although I did have in the same year as the Inspection, a formal complaint to deal with from one of my “support staff” and two official parental complaints, all of which had to be officially and formally investigated by the Area Office. I really did not worry about them or see them as at all serious and, sure enough, they soon passed with little or no effect. Compared to what could have happened to me and the school (e.g. in the Inspection) this was “small fry” stuff! Other than these two events the school went from strength to strength over the next couple of years. Why, we even received a “Government Achievement Award” for further improving our “standards”(as judged by the S.A.T.’s results, of course) and, for the first time in our teaching careers, all staff received a financial bonus because of it (!)... Little did I know at that time, however, that, once more, events were to, unexpectedly, take over in my life, so that I was not, in fact, ever going to face another inspection or any such upheaval with the parents again.