



# THE SUNDAY TIMES

## THE SCHOOLS BLOG



On Wednesday, if the publicity of the trade unions is to be believed, more than a million public sector workers, including many teachers, will go on strike. Whether this will win much sympathy from the millions of workers whose pensions really are negligible or even non-existent, remains to be seen.

At my school, no teacher joined the last day of action, even though teachers in the independent sector have an additional reason to do so. The Hutton report into teachers' pensions raised the idea not that teachers in independent schools should pay more, and work longer, but that they should be removed from the scheme altogether. This would be a profoundly retrograde step.

The teacher pension scheme has long been recognised as a significant motivator for colleagues. When teachers saw their friends from university go off into better remunerated careers, they could draw comfort from the fact that at least in retirement they would be sure of a steady income that would reward them for the efforts they had made during their 30 or 40 years in the classroom. However, with life expectancy so extended, and public finances as parlous as they are, I suspect many, perhaps even most, teachers understand that everyone has to give up a little of what they had once hoped for.

My father was a dedicated school teacher in the maintained sector for all his working life, and he spent his last 12 years as a wonderful and committed headmaster of a school in a challenging part of Birmingham. But he chuckled recently when he was able to tell me he had now, as a healthy man in his

eighties, spent more years in retirement than he had in work. It is understandable that retirement ages and pensions need to be recalibrated.

However, the Hutton proposal flies in the face of all the good work that has occurred over recent years to create a fluidity of career movement and trust between the maintained and the independent sector. Some of the ablest teachers that I have appointed, often at or near the start of their career, have learned their trade in an independent school – but then moved on to promotion in the maintained sector. Without pausing to think I have in mind an outstanding headmaster of one of the best comprehensive schools in south east England, whose early career was as a science teacher, head of department and eventually deputy head at my last school, a head of department in a highly rated comprehensive whom I appointed as an English teacher straight from his PGCE, and a first-rate teacher who came to King's from the maintained sector and has now returned to a key position at a successful comprehensive school. Each sector can learn from the good practice the other provides, often in very different ways.

But just as important as the opportunity for teachers to move from one sector to the other is the way there is so much potential for shared practice and mutual support between independent and maintained schools.

King's College School offers a generous programme of bursary support. However, we are not self-deluded enough to believe for a moment that the only way for a child to excel is for him to attend KCS. Why do some believe that good teaching or good school leadership occurs exclusively in the independent sector? We are proud of the many partnerships we have with local maintained schools because we enjoy working with their staff and pupils, and they with ours.

Every Friday afternoon, over 300 King's pupils are involved in community service and partnership work: some teach younger pupils Latin at a local girls' comprehensive, others help boys with basic sporting skills, others again help at special schools and primary schools. A large consortium of maintained schools all work together with King's to provide a unique and extraordinary "aspirations" programme. This helps boys and girls whose families have no experience of higher education to aim for the very best universities in the UK. The programme begins in Year 9 with boys and girls from at least six local schools and follows each year's cohort through to their university applications nearly five years later.

Such partnerships depend on trust in each other – and faith over time. They are a striking example of how two sectors, once far apart from each other, have something that binds us tightly together – a "common pursuit", to use T. S. Eliot's phrase in a different context: the teaching and inspiration of every child in our charge.

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