



I write this at a time when my brother and I, as Principals, have been engaged in some high level research with and on behalf of the Independent education sector as we face yet more regulation from on high. At first sight, it seems we could do with our lawmakers going into permanent recess (a decade or so would be good) so that those of us who work for real, can do so knowing we can concentrate on the job in hand. But in truth, it turns out that it is the servants of our Parliament, the grand departments of state, that are mostly to blame in education at least! Behind its back, our master is known as the Department for Curtains and Soft Furnishings, (DCSF for short), and its latest *dictats* look as though in due course they'll cut great swathes through nursery provision, whilst making us all victims of a digital database that no-one wants, and requiring that we, not they, manage all the work they insist we do to provide a safer and fairer society.

So Messrs Wilding have been making noises to our Borough, to MPs, Parliament and Government for most of this year. We have made a nuisance of ourselves at the door of pretty well anyone who will listen, as the following key points attest:

- *"In the guise of a caring, child-centred administration, the Government is nationalising the upbringing of children... The nationalisation of childcare is no longer a Marxist dream – it is becoming a British reality"*. These are the prophetic words from 2006 of Kirsty Walker, a MailOnline journalist. As we continue to struggle with the practical absurdities of the Early Years Foundation Stage, we see storm clouds gathering to threaten the delivery of local nursery funding.
- We don't believe that the data of 11 million children will be safe in the hands of a central database, *ContactPoint*, given it will have over 300,000 registered users who have rights of access. Whilst we are completely in favour of rigorous child protection in schools, we don't think the spending of £¼ billion is justified, and rather agree with Ross Anderson, professor of computer security at Cambridge who is equally scathing. *"The databases are a darkness at the heart of state; a belief that if we could just know everything about everybody, everything would work"*.
- We do believe that our pupils should benefit from careers advice, vocational training opportunities, police community liaison, special needs and nursing provision. For the past three governments that advice has been provided with the willing support of local, regional and national bodies. Long before the present banking crisis broke, these vital services required for our pupils were replaced with private provision, whilst all those public sector professionals who got to know us well, have had their freedom to work in partnership with us withdrawn.

The British Government has every reason to be proud of its Independent education sector, producing (as we do) huge swathes of well qualified and talented young adults

for University, for military and public service, for research in natural and applied sciences, and for many and varied positions in which a facility in other languages is required, in number totally disproportionate to the 7% by population we educate. Indeed, Whitehall trades on our success, for without it the nation's educational achievements would slip far lower in the international circles by which UK Plc is judged.

The Principals and Parents have every reason to be proud of the many achievements of our pupils, of whatever age and ability, as recorded in the two editions of the Court Circular just published. Our younger pupils flourish in our care, excelling in Literacy, Numeracy, Science and ICT, in other academic subjects, and in sport, recreation, music and the arts. For those who win entrance to elite selective schools, we give due praise, and for our own secondary and sixth form pupils we nourish those extra skills of character, leadership and teamwork, creativity, for problem solving and public speaking, that will hold them in such good stead when they enter adult life. Underpinned by our values of *Responsibility, Respect, Loyalty and Integrity*, we grow adults proud of their family, friends, school and achievements, yet graceful and rounded too, ready and eager to serve at that next step, wherever that may be.

So have my brother and I re-learnt the same lessons perhaps that our parents did in 1960, when they first moved to Maidenhead and set up Claires Court as an Independent school? Those lessons are to work hard with our pupils and on their behalf, to win as many friends as we can, to build a good reputation and then work some more to raise standards still higher. In our fiftieth year, we know not to rely on government to provide, as our founders noted before us. At least we, as Principals, have done that little bit more in 2009, leading our sector as we face, quite separately, local and central government and show all that we deliver on our promise, to bring the best out of each and every child in our care.

Well done to former pupil and head girl Ali Bastian who has been participating in this series of *'Strictly Come Dancing'*. This week-end saw her as 'last girl standing' and despite our best efforts at raising as many votes as we could, she and Brian Fortuna fell at the semi final stage. She delighted us all with some wonderful twirling and gliding around the dance floor. As for your Principals, our feet have to be firmer on the ground. Bah humbug – no, really though, with goose and mince pies on the way, we will remember who our friends are at this time - namely our Parents, so thank you one and all, have a great Christmas and here's hoping 2010 brings a rather happier cup of cheer for each and everyone.

James Wilding