



Prep School

Conference Edition

IAPS Conference, Wales, 26th September 2007

Pictures by Jonathan Evans



Out going General Secretary John Morris greets past president Alan Mould with conference manager Lorraine Curzon at the Celtic Manor



Inside: Michael Spinney • Details of head's survey • Conference Diary

For those interested in making a book on how long the after-dinner speaker would last at the annual dinner on Tuesday night, the Gyles Brandreth posed something of a dilemma. He holds the world record for the longest continuous after-dinner speech of 18 hours. The former Tory MP and whip in John Major's Government is also a master of the short spoken address as a regular on BBC Radio's *Just a Minute*. In the end, he came well within the world record time but well over the minute. The world record speech raised considerable funds for charity, as did the sale of many of his famous woolly jumpers in 1993, which had been ridiculed by John Prescott.

While at Oxford, Brandreth met his wife Michelle, when she was at St Anne's College, where she shared a dormitory corridor with Mary Archer, Edwina Currie and Anne Widdecombe.

The conference was seriously challenged by a thought-provoking contribution from Christopher Jamison, Abbot of the Benedictine monastery, Worth Abbey, when he spoke to them on spirituality in schools. Father Christopher challenged the modern concept of spirituality, which he described as consumerism, which could really mean whatever people wanted it to mean. He questioned, however, whether all of this was of very much use to pupils. There was, however, something called religion, which was clearly defined and might well be of more use.



Illustration by Linda Ashwell

Father Christopher and Worth Abbey featured in the BBC series, *The Monastery*, which attracted three million views. In the series, the Abbot guided five modern men into a new approach to life. He argued that no matter how hard you work, being too busy is not inevitable. Silence and contemplation are not just for monks and nuns, they are natural parts of life. In the face of many easy assumptions about the irrelevance of relegation to modern society, Father Christopher wants to make religion accessible for those in search of a meaning to life.

It is perhaps no surprise that Lord Lucas, editor of *The Good Schools Guide*, was invited to talk on how good leaders make good schools. In a glowing report on The Beacon School, the guide had some very kind words for the head, Michael Spinney, describing him as "a man of vision and integrity...philosophical and passionate about education".

General Secretary John Morris was in buoyant mood throughout the conference, which might well be his last in the job if all goes to plan and his successor is in place by next September. A serious man, it was once said that a previous holder of the office made him sound like Billy Connolly.

The closest *Insider* has come to seeing John Morris display any emotion was when he told Conference: "It is with a mixture of pleasure and sadness that I say that plans are now well advanced for the appointment of a new General Secretary to succeed me in 2008. I hope that, when the time comes, my successor will find as much happiness and fulfilment in the post as I have."

Those who have read the demanding job and person specifications for the new man – or could it be a woman – in the GS's chair,



might have wondered what would be expected of him or her on the seventh day. One suggestion was "walk on water".

Clearly, it still irritates the powers-that-be in IAPS that a number of heads decided that they could not justify the trip to Lisbon for last year's conference. The opening paragraph in the general secretary's annual review includes the sentence: "For those who attended, the conference was a great success, at a lower cost than the preceding or following conferences." For the record there were 307 delegates in Edinburgh, with ESHA, in 2005; 197 in Lisbon last year; and 290 in Newport, this year.

Major General Mark Mans, Deputy Adjutant General, gave a soldierly but thoughtful address on how the Army has handled the changing circumstances since the end of the Cold War and the start of the fight against international terrorism. He stressed the need to foster rather than manage change. He had sympathetic words for heads based on the stresses of the battlefield: "When you are in the thick of it, standing back to see the wood for the trees can be exceptionally difficult, the urgent takes over from the important and events sweep you on that take you a long way from your original goal."

It seems as if many of the delegates are as hard of hearing as *Insider*, who is certain that he heard Phil Anderson, of the Ashridge Management College, encourage us all to "Grab a Big Audacious Girl." Sadly, it was "a Big Audacious Goal".

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Publishers' Notice

PREP SCHOOL is published three times a year, in January, May and September, by the Independent Association of Preparatory Schools (IAPS) in conjunction with the Society of Assistants Teaching in Preparatory Schools (SATIPS). The two year subscription, open to all readers, is £25.00, including postage.

Opinions expressed in *Prep School* are not necessarily endorsed by either organisation; likewise advertisements and advertising features are printed in good faith. Their inclusion does not imply endorsement by the organisations.

Subscription Details

The Business Managers are John Catt Educational Ltd, Great Glemham, Saxmundham, Suffolk IP17 2DH. Tel: (01728) 663666 Fax: (01728) 663415, to whom communications regarding advertising, subscription order forms and correspondence about subscriptions should be sent.

Contributions to PREP SCHOOL should be sent to the Editor, David Tytler, at Abbey Cottage, Blythburgh, Suffolk IP19 9LQ. News items for the spring edition should arrive no later than 30th September 2007.

www.prepschoolmag.co.uk



Join in the debate to shape the future

By Michael Spinney

This year's conference was designed to be enjoyable and stimulating, with challenging discussion and plenty of new ideas to take back to school. It looked at our core values and strengths and the skills required for effective leadership. It considered new ways of creating change and achieving greater success and strength for our schools. The attendance indicated that these were matters of immense concern to members.

Perhaps more importantly, conference considered the threats and opportunities that face us as educationists and heads, debating as broadly as possible where we are going with our schools and the education we provide. If you were unable to join us at Celtic Manor, the debate is still wide open and there will be plenty of opportunity for you to join in. We would like you to.

First and foremost, change is all around us and we have to lead our schools to the strongest possible future. Leadership is all embracing and encompasses the business, the people and the processes as well as the teaching and learning. IAPS heads increasingly need to offer multi-dimensional leadership, with business skills as well as educational skills, marketing as well as teaching skills, and strategic as well as management skills. IAPS can help us, but we must also help ourselves.

Our theme of *Quo vadis?* – where now? – is the crucial one for our schools and our sector, at a time of educational, economic, ethical and social re-evaluation. When St Peter uttered these very words to Jesus, they created the turning point from which Christianity began to carry its message to new and greater heights. Yet, whilst the disciples accepted the imperative for change, they retained and strengthened the values they held dear. That is our challenge too: how do we navigate our schools through ever more complex waters while remaining true to our academic and moral compass?

We live in an era where pedagogy and epistemology are sacrificed in favour of fashionable causes. I believe the time is ripe for constructing an independent schools' curriculum that has real knowledge at its core, as well as a strong focus on the key qualities of self confidence, commitment, co-operation and, most importantly self-esteem. These qualities are already at the centre of what our prep schools seek to inculcate and we can create an enormous advantage by building them into a curriculum that is recognised as a gold standard for British education.

IAPS schools have the privilege of engaging children with a love of learning that will last a lifetime. We have the time to discover what excites each child, inspiring them with breadth as well as depth. How much more can and should we be doing? I urge you to discuss these topics at district meetings.

Whatever the curriculum, whether you are large or small, sustainability of your school over-rides everything else:

- *Affordability* has to be addressed and will demand fresh thinking and operational change. Fees and staff costs are still rising well ahead of inflation; can this really continue indefinitely?

- *Manageability* – regulation and compliance is a considerable and growing burden we cannot avoid. It, too, adds to costs.
- *ICT* – apart from the costs, buildings will eventually have to be redesigned to facilitate new ways of teaching and learning.
- *Marketing* will matter more, which means greater expertise, greater effectiveness and greater spending
- Most schools will *have* to offer bursaries, and to fund these you will need to create new income streams.
- *Profit* – many schools will need higher profit margins to pay for continuing investment so they do not stagnate into a cycle of decline.

These issues cannot be ignored, because without a clear acceptance of the need for change, an understanding of what change is required, and the funding for change, you will be overwhelmed by the future. I accept that all too often it is difficult to convince governing boards, but as head that is your task.

So, the question is, what needs to be done now? *Quo vadis?* I am convinced that most schools will need to be bigger in the future or to find ways of ensuring ongoing affordability. This may mean increasing pupil numbers, extending the age range, forming an alliance with another school, becoming co-educational, encouraging boarding, using ICT to deliver the curriculum differently, selling the site and moving, or reducing the cost base, or managing the school with fewer staff.

IAPS will help and it, too, is evolving. I must pay tribute to all the staff and to the leadership of the general secretary, John Morris, as he approaches retirement. Looking ahead, we need an association that not only supports but also promotes all the wonderful successes of our schools. Now is the time to shout about the value of an education in an IAPS school. Selling that message hard and effectively is the challenge that IAPS must embrace next.

It will do that, but it can only succeed if there is a willingness on behalf of schools, and I mean heads, to be more involved with IAPS at all levels and to put in and take out the greater benefits of working more closely together.

Finally, I think it is time to defend more robustly the charitable status which most of our schools enjoy. In recent years we have allowed politicians to assert that the education we offer has no public benefit unless it is offered to a child from a less fortunate family. This is clearly nonsense and we need to take a stronger stand on this failure to recognise our true worth.

Quo vadis? Who knows, but planned change is enjoyable and can be immensely rewarding. Let's plan for the future and make sure it is.

The author is chairman of IAPS

Avoiding the slide into mediocrity

By Simon Goldhill

Independent Schools should assert their independence fully by distancing themselves from the slide towards mediocrity encouraged by the National Curriculum, specifically in the Classics and religious studies. Both areas are important because they provide fundamental links into the Western tradition. It is crucial to have a working knowledge of both the ancient world and the importance of the Bible, if any pupil is to grow to appreciate the long history of Western culture.

History, in this sense, is an integral part of a cultural identity and while the recognition of diversity and respect for other cultures need to be inculcated from an early age, this aim, admirable in itself, should not have the effect of distancing current pupils from what has mattered hugely to generations of citizens of Britain and Europe.

An education, which silences or trivialises religious studies and classics, disempowers pupils, and produces a gap between the present and the past, which has the potential to be culturally damaging. The sight of schoolchildren unable to appreciate the art, literature, music – the passions – of previous generations is dismaying and a sign and symptom of a contemporary cultural alienation.

Arguments about the curriculum really started in earnest in the middle of the nineteenth century, when the Reform Act enfranchised a new class of voters. For many politicians, led by Robert Lowe, minister of education in Gladstone's Liberal government, these new voters of a less privileged class and

background needed a new education, which would enable them to take a more active and critical role in the business of government within the fledgling democracy.

This had many positive sides: increasing state provision for education and encouraging serious debate about the nature of the curriculum. But it was here, in response to a new political system, that it became a given that the state should have a say in a National Curriculum – and the battles have gone on ever since. The battle lines were drawn up in the nineteenth century, and, bizarrely enough, have not changed: should education be designed to produce a trained workforce, or a civilized citizen (which need not be in opposition to each other, but in terms of arguments over the curriculum usually are)?

Yet the arguments are rarely discussed in any depth and in particular the intellectual and social costs of each case are rarely made explicit. While nobody would argue that we should return to the 19th century, where classics took up 80% of the elite curriculum, there is a growing need to re-think the aims of the curriculum at a more general level. The independent school sector has the opportunity of escaping from these old arguments and producing an education that can create both civilized and useful citizens – if it takes the possibilities of topics like classics and religion seriously.

The author is Professor of Greek Literature and Culture, King's College, Cambridge.



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Quo Vadis - Quid Dicavistis?

By Simon Shneerson



The Oxford Dictionary does not, alas, contain a collective noun to describe a group of prep school heads. It would be too easy to call you an association of heads, the term a college of heads is a little unexciting, and a conference of heads is what you have just had, rather than what you are.

In the same vein, to call the *Quo Vadis?* questionnaire a survey of heads does not really do it justice. Rather, it was an unlocking of opinion, a tapping of wisdom, a sharing of anticipation, and *Domesday Book* all in one. The survey asked IAPS heads what they thought mattered; how they thought prep school education and prep schools should evolve; and the resources they currently have at their disposal.

More than 280 heads replied – almost half the membership – and I am profoundly grateful to you for answering 144 questions at the height of the summer term. The discussions at conference used just some of the facts and opinions that emerged, analysed by type, size and location of school. The full report should stimulate debate for many months to come.

Here are the headline results discussed at conference:

First of all, there is solid confidence about the future: 44% of heads were strongly confident about the future of their schools and another 46% were confident. Five per cent were not, which is regrettable but still means that the sector as a whole is generally optimistic. Indeed, 75% said they were excited about the future of prep schools as a whole, although 13% were not, with quite a few 'don't knows'. All the same, 29% of heads still worried, at least a bit, about the long-term survival of their schools.

These figures open up the *Quo Vadis?* debate. Confidence, yes, but some of the spark is being eroded by interference from government, by the burden of red tape and compliance and by the increasing complexity of headship. Eighty per cent agreed that the job of head was becoming more difficult, 56% felt that constraints on independent schools weaken their potential and 21% said that the independence has gone out of independent education.

Perhaps the time has come to re-assert the value of independence and the higher quality that derives from a curriculum that is educationally, not politically driven. How should that curriculum develop? Eighty per cent felt that thinking and problem-solving skills would be particularly important in the future, with 79% saying the same about creativity and imaginative skills.

But *Quo Vadis?* is about much more than the curriculum. The key message of conference is that the world is changing and that prep schools must recognise, plan for and manage their own change. The survey asked about the skills required for effective headship and 79% of respondents agreed that leadership skills are now more important than educational ones.

Simply being a good teacher may no longer be enough to run a successful school. Opinion was split over the need for business

skills, with 45% saying they were more important than educational skills and 45% saying they weren't. Either way, heads certainly need governors who can help with 90% of heads believing their governors did add value to business decisions.

That is encouraging because the biggest threats to prep schools are to be found in the business arena. Although 48% said their schools are full, 86% said affordability was a key concern and 49% that maintaining pupil numbers was already an issue due to fee levels. Fifty one per cent agreed that schools would face growing competition from the maintained sector and less than half felt that the parents in their schools would continue to accept fee increases of above 5% each year.

So, revenue and costs will be critical in the future, even more so than today. Yet 64% of heads said they would not compromise the education they offered in order to ensure affordability, 61% said staff levels were sacrosanct and 83% that they could not function with fewer qualified teachers. At the same time, 88% felt that individualised learning would become more important, which is even more labour-intensive unless one makes far greater use of ICT.

Only 44% thought ICT would lead to routine teaching and, while 52% thought qualified teachers would concentrate on more challenging teaching, only 21% felt that teaching assistants would be able to supervise entire lessons. This view of the future implies greater demand for skilled, experienced teachers, but 64% of heads thought it would become harder to recruit specialist staff. The laws of supply and demand suggest that this will mean even higher pay and, therefore, higher overall costs.

All of the above could still be possible if revenue increased enough to pay for it. But that will require more income streams, a far greater focus on marketing, and commercial creativity outside core teaching hours. And this is without increasing profitability, which many schools need if they are to keep up an adequate level of re-investment in their buildings and infrastructures. So the reality is going to be that while schools will certainly aim for more revenue and more marketing, most will also have to accept, plan for and eventually implement an imaginative re-definition of how teaching is delivered and how resources are planned, funded and deployed. The debate is now under way.

The good news is that IAPS heads are very motivated and very diligent. Even though 70% said they spent too much of their own time thinking about school and 49% felt the work-life balance was out of kilter, 66% said they would still want to become a head if they weren't one already. However, alongside this, only 26% felt their reward package matched their responsibilities; 55% thought it didn't and a surprisingly high 18% weren't sure. The message for governors is, therefore, that while they must work with heads on some serious strategic thinking and planning, they might also consider how better to recognise the value you already bring to their schools.

The author is a consultant specialising in strategic business, management and marketing development for prep schools. He can be contacted on 01923 283574 or 01923 638526.

Face the facts, fight the fight

I was asked speak on “good leaders make good schools”, but that’s not where I want to start. Last year saw the death of a number of girls’ schools; 2007 has been a bad year for prep schools. A good time, therefore, to take a look at the challenges and opportunities which face prep schools, and what heads, and we, can do about them.

Not perhaps what some heads want to hear. When it comes to facing the future, prep schools seem to me to resemble nothing so much as a herd of wildebeest in one of Attenborough’s epics. Year follows year, and as long as the crocodiles eat somebody else, that is all right with the rest of you.

How could it be otherwise? Most prep schools are small, independent enterprises with limited capital resources, and limited scope to change. It takes a crisis to get things moving. So keep on doing well by the markets that you know so well and hope that when the bell tolls it tolls only for your pupils.

I want, though, to argue for the virtues of co-operation. To me, the future for prep schools does not look too good.

Selective senior schools – the principal reason for your existence – are not expanding, although a few prep schools are starting their own, I doubt that many would find that easy.

Politics are against prep schools. It seems likely that a Cameron government will not favour independent schools in the way previous Conservative governments have and pretty certain that a Brown government will not be sympathetic to them either.

By Ralph Lucas

Given those two factors, the pressure on senior schools to direct more of their charity towards the needy ought to lead to their taking fewer pupils from independent preparatory schools.

And with the extraordinary rise of the tutoring industry, state primary schools are now becoming a much more realistic option for parents who want a shot at an independent senior school.

The squeeze is on too for those old standbys, the armed services and the diplomats. Finance is not keeping up with fees and Gordon Brown has expressed an interest in building up state boarding to cater for these customers. And companies are making less use of expatriate workers, or at least of British expatriate workers.

Like this summer, it all seems cloudy and wet. So where is the sunlight?

Well, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority is a perpetual source of comfort and encouragement for the independent sector. Their devastating attack on the 11 to 14 curriculum, denying that there is any shared knowledge that should underpin education, and their continuing erosion of the quality and breadth of the British examination system, will ensure that there is a strong and continuing demand for education of the sort that you provide.

The prep school experience, at its best an extraordinary opportunity for a child to explore a whole range of challenges and to be informed and inspired beyond their years, remains a great attraction, as does the ability of some of you to look after children who have been defeated by other schools.

But for this sunshine to dry up all the rain will require great leaders and, in my view, concerted action. We need to turn the tide of opinion, to have increasing numbers of parents wanting a prep school education for their children, to create the pressure from these parents for whatever it is – independent senior schools, perhaps more probably some form of co-existence with the state as has been achieved elsewhere – that additional prep school children will go on to.

We need some climate change. *The Good Schools Guide* would like to do what it can to help bring that about. We think that there is great scope for improving people’s understanding of what prep schools have to offer, and we think that you all, in the long term, have a lot to gain from co-operative self promotion. As with flood defence, a determination to look after everybody has advantages over sink-or-swim.

I have asked Richard Field to bring a group of heads together to discuss how *The Good Schools Guide* might, as part of the great plans that we have for our presence on the web, present a wide range of information on prep schools in a way that attracts and informs parents. All prep schools of course – not just those that we write up – and free of charge to heads and parents.

So I end on a note of commitment and optimism which is a great surprise to me, given the horrible years I spent at my own prep school, and so is a great credit to those heads that I have met since. Good leaders not only make good schools, they can change opinions too.

The author is editor of The Good Schools Guide



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Onward and forever upward

As Douglas Adams, the author of *The Hitchhikers' Guide to the Galaxy*, said: "The best way to predict the future is to build it". IAPS is starting to do that now. Last term IAPS, GSA and HMC came together with ISEB and other associations to take a long, hard look at Common Entrance. This is not a short-term measure but a matter that the associations can work on together to raise the standard, for a good independent school education. There is a desire and a willingness to work together and move forward. The standards and values inherent in today's Common Entrance will not be compromised.

IAPS is also working with ISEB to produce a range of assessment material in mathematics, English and science, which will be accessible to a range of abilities, well illustrated and available on CD later in the year.

We are coming up to the half-way point in the second cycle inspection and I am working with the inspections committee to develop the IAPS view on the shape of inspections for 2011, pressing for the principle of peer review to be held high and for costs to be kept low.

The professional development programme has a record 60 or so courses. It is lively, innovative and offers something for everyone in your school. Of special note are:

The Recently Qualified Teachers course, a new course for teachers who have completed their induction within the last few years, the first such course in the country, The Teacher's Development Agency are very interested in this development.

Preparation for Headship, which complements the biannual aspiring heads course and is for those senior staff who are already actively seeking headship.

Every Child Matters, which is steering the thinking and practice of education throughout the country. This two-day course will be held at Eton College and will outline good practice, present case studies from pre-prep through to senior school and offer an online audit tool.

Schools have for some time wanted a leadership development programme for the independent sector. It is with this in mind

By Barbara Ingram

that I have been building up relationships with some providers who can offer what we want, what we need and who are prepared to offer bespoke opportunities for us.

HTI offer leadership training through partnerships between educators and industry as well as being providers of NCSL programmes. Teachers will come together through HTI to work together as an independent sector group on NCSL programmes, using the material in ways relevant to our schools and yet gaining all the breadth of experience of working alongside maintained school colleagues. Their Go4it programme encourages endeavour and entrepreneurship in children, who can also take the lead.

The Leadership Trust's IAPS Leadership Development Course has its own folklore and mythology throughout the membership. Love it or hate it, like Marmite, you have to try it. Apart from this bespoke course, the Leadership Trust offers a number of other leadership development programmes at their centre in Ross-on-Wye.

Ashridge Management College is a high quality provider of leadership development voted the UK's number one provider of executive education programmes by the *Financial Times*. Their IAPS course will help heads develop leadership skills beyond the world of education.

Recently a cross-association leadership group has been formed. In this Leadership Portfolio, IAPS already has a coherent approach to leadership development opportunities. It is a very good starting point and IAPS again is leading the way.

For the last two years I have sent out a letter asking heads if they would like undertake some research and I am very pleased to say that each year a group has chosen to look into aspects of leadership in prep schools. The first group will be publishing their work later this term. The second plan to publish their work next year. Again IAPS is setting the trend for other associations.

The author is IAPS Director of Education

How to improve performance in a world of chaos

We live in a fast changing, ever-evolving environment where yesterday's strategy no longer works and we constantly have to adapt to achieve success. Having the right mental attitude is crucial to the success of all sportsmen and women.

Encouraging positivity, self-belief and the will to win amongst those competing at international level has increasingly become the role of the sports psychologist. To help me in my role as a performance coach I have developed XLR8.

At conferences I look for contributions from delegates and challenge their current thinking so that they leave the session with ideas for action – their own ideas, their own actions. Drawing on my experience in the sports, business and military world I encourage delegates to analyse some of the behaviours and processes at work behind the great success stories of our time and to see how these could be used to

inspire and motivate oneself, pupils and colleagues within their own businesses.

The model does not offer answers – delegates consider their own success, question their current thinking and behaviours through a series of interactive exercises which cover the eight key elements of the research:

Curiosity: the driving force of progress

Futurism: above and below the line thinking

Awareness: the SAT NAV of success

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