



Pointmaker

SOMETHING CAN BE DONE

TROOPS IN OUR SCHOOLS WILL DO MORE THAN TROOPS ON OUR
STREETS

CAPTAIN AK BURKI AND TOM BURKARD

FOREWORD BY LORD GUTHRIE GCB LVO OBE DL

SUMMARY

- Some – including the Prime Minister – have suggested that the Army should be deployed to restore order in the case of future riots.
- But before we put troops on the streets, we should consider putting them in our schools.
- The US Troops to Teachers programme has had notable success in educating inner city children.
- It is now planned to develop this approach and set up a new type of comprehensive school in Greater Manchester: the Phoenix Free School, which will be staffed entirely by ex-servicemen and women.
- If successful, the Phoenix Free School could be rolled out across the cities of the UK.
- The Phoenix Academy will have a unique approach for UK state schools. This will include:
 - No moral relativism. All teachers will be expected to encourage, enforce and draw out the highest standards of behaviour from all pupils.
 - Zero-tolerance of indiscipline. Appropriate sanctions will be enforced quickly and fairly.
 - Rigorous literacy programmes. Synthetic phonics will be taught to all children with the expectation that all children – of whatever ability – will be able to read fluently within one year.
 - Encouragement of competitiveness. A vigorous sports programme and house system will engender a competitive spirit among all pupils.



- Opportunities to excel. All pupils will be pushed out of their natural comfort zone.

FOREWORD

The characteristics of the ideal modern soldier are far removed from the popular stereotype. Yes, courage, strength and resilience are of course important. But today they are secondary to other requirements: self-discipline, respect for others (crucially, so very different from self-respect), and the ability to listen, learn and adapt. In a high-tech, volunteer army, where soldiers are expected to face known and unknown danger, these qualities are fundamental.

The British army is able to encourage these attributes in the vast majority of recruits. And in my experience, those from the toughest and roughest backgrounds often respond most enthusiastically to the disciplines expected by our armed services. So I suspect that the qualities needed by the modern soldier are innate virtues, ones which can be drawn out from all of us.

But it is clear that too many of our schools are failing to do just that. The proposals here offer an alternative: a new inner-city school to be staffed entirely by ex-servicemen devoted to drawing out the best in all their pupils by demonstrating the best of today's martial values. These will be enlisted in the pursuit of the highest possible academic goals: the primary aim is to produce good citizens, not good soldiers.

This would be no sticking plaster for the social problems our country faces. Rather, it would help to address deep-seated problems which are now increasingly apparent. If this school is a success, then it should serve as a model for a chain of hundreds of schools across the country. That is why I was honoured to be invited to be the Patron of the first Phoenix School. And it is why we must hope that Coalition Ministers do all they can to expedite this extraordinary and significant initiative.

Lord Guthrie GCB LVO OBE DL
Chief of the Defence Staff 1997-2001

INTRODUCTION

As the smoke clears from our urban riots, it is becoming increasingly clear that the worst damage was caused by young people from blighted urban areas. The widely-publicised exceptions – older people from good homes and good schools – tended to be amoral opportunists. On their own, it is unlikely they would ever have dreamed of throwing a brick or a petrol bomb.

Now we are faced with the inevitable call that “something must be done”. Exactly what isn't clear. All the old remedies for poverty, under-achievement and alienation have been tested to destruction. The consequences were starkly before us on the streets of Tottenham and Croydon. But before we put troops on the streets, we should consider putting them in our schools.

A Panorama programme earlier this year demonstrated how former soldiers have worked miracles in America's violent inner-city schools. It showed how young boys and girls respond to male role models they can trust, which are all too often lacking in areas of high welfare dependency.

In England, a new Free School that is being developed will go one better: all full-time staff will be ex-service personnel. The performance of our armed forces in Afghanistan and elsewhere stands out in stark contrast to the mobs that have recently been roaming our streets.

As important as role models are, they are only part of the picture. Every liberal shibboleth taught in teacher-training courses will be discarded in favour of proven methods. Pupils will not be expected to 'direct their own learning' – most undergraduates are barely capable of this, and it is folly to expect illiterate and innumerate pupils to do the same. Rather, teachers should provide the moral and intellectual guidance that all children want and need.

MORE SPENDING ON EDUCATION AND WELFARE WON'T HELP

Under New Labour, spending on education increased by 72% in real terms.¹ And by 2009, spending on Every Child Matters – a set of reforms supported by the Children Act 2004 – topped £5 billion.² Its stated aim was for all children, whatever their background or circumstances, to have the support they need to:

- be healthy
- stay safe
- enjoy and achieve
- make a positive contribution
- achieve economic well-being.³

However noble the impulses of the ministers and officials who initiated Every Child Matters, it is now obvious that spending yet more money on this kind of intervention is unlikely to yield results. Indeed, it can be argued that measures designed to improve social mobility are counter-productive because they patronise pupils instead of giving them the kind of education that would immeasurably enrich their lives and open a new world beyond the physical and mental ghettos in which they are now trapped.⁴

¹ In 2009-10 prices, spending on education increased from £50 billion in 1997/98 to £86 billion in 2009/10 – a real terms increase of 72%.

² T Burkard and T Cleford, Cutting the Children's Plan: a £5 billion experiment gone astray, CPS, June 2010.

³ www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/sen/earllysupport/esinpractice/a0067409/every-child-matters

⁴ This point was made by Alka Sehgal-Cuthbert, a teacher with 19 years experience, at a recent CPS seminar.

Pre-school interventions such as Sure Start are widely touted as the key to improving social mobility. However, the evidence is not encouraging: in the US, Head Start (the model for Sure Start) has been in place for almost half a century. The latest evaluation conducted by the US Department of Education was forced to concede that "...children's attendance in Head Start has no demonstrable impact on their academic, socio-emotional, or health status at the end of first grade".⁵ This should not surprise us: most early intervention programmes focus on training children from poor backgrounds to adopt middle-class behaviours, and conspicuously eschew teaching them the knowledge and skills that middle-class parents take for granted.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

There is an alternative: the Phoenix Free School.⁶

The first Phoenix Free School is planned for the Greater Manchester area. It will be a comprehensive secondary school serving pupils aged 11 to 18. All staff will be ex-service personnel chosen for their integrity and proven ability to mould young men and women into functional members of society.

No moral relativism

It will categorically reject the concept of moral relativism, which degrades the poor by holding them to less exacting standards than others. As ex-soldiers, all staff will have lived by the Army's values of courage, discipline, respect for others, integrity, loyalty and selfless commitment. As teachers, they will be

expected to embody these values at all times, and to encourage, enforce and draw out the same standards of behaviour from their pupils. They will, in short, be positive role models to their students.

Discipline with consent

Modern volunteer military forces maintain discipline by consent. They have to, otherwise everyone would leave at the first opportunity. The days of National Service are long gone, as are harsh punishments and mindless obedience.

In the Army or in schools, zero-tolerance works – but it only works if sanctions are swift and fair. At one zero-tolerance school, the pupils understood that classes were far more interesting when teachers could devote their entire energies to teaching. The same is true in military training: officers and NCO instructors deal with minor infractions swiftly, but they never demean soldiers.

Literacy

In many inner-city schools, few pupils have adequate literacy and numeracy skills. At the age of 14, 63% of white working class boys and 54% of working-class Afro-Caribbean boys have inadequate literacy skills. Many of these boys – at least 20% – can barely read at all.⁷ These children will have experienced a degree of humiliation and boredom in school which good readers can scarcely imagine. Expecting illiterate and innumerate pupils to succeed in other academic pursuits is lunacy.

In fact, it is not all that difficult to improve basic skills deficits – as long as the teacher has a well-structured programme with carefully-planned reinforcement which can be delivered every school day. Under the Government's Free School programme, schools have the

⁵ www.brookings.edu/opinions/2010/0121_head_start_whitehurst.aspx

⁶ These proposals have been inspired by an earlier CPS paper: T Burkard, Troops to Teachers: a successful programme from America for our inner city schools, CPS, February 2008.

⁷ Daily Mail (2007): Schools hit by death of discipline among boys.

flexibility to give basic skills priority over other curricular requirements. A rigorous synthetic phonics programme will enable the Phoenix Free School to eradicate most pupil's reading and spelling deficits in one school year or less.⁸

Sport and outdoor activities

Attention Deficit Disorder, Asperger's syndrome and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder are real problems in today's schools. But it may be that Francis Fukiyama has an interesting insight when he comments:⁹

“ADHD isn't a disease at all but rather just the tail end of the bell curve describing the distribution of perfectly normal behaviour. Young human beings, and particularly young boys, were not designed by evolution to sit around at a desk for hours at a time paying attention to a teacher, but rather to run and play and do other physically active things. The fact that we increasingly demand they sit still in classrooms, or that parents and teachers have less time to spend with them on interesting tasks, is what creates the impression that there is a growing disease.”

The Phoenix Free School will not only develop a competitive sport programme in conjunction with other local sports clubs, but it will also feature other outdoor activities such as orienteering and adventure training.

Academic goals

⁸ One of the authors of this paper, Tom Burkard, is recognised as a leading advocate of synthetic phonics (Michael Gove MP has commented that he has “... done more than anyone living in the fight against illiteracy in this country”). His programme, Sound Foundations, will be used at the Phoenix Schools.

⁹ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2002/may/13/health.highereducation>

Once basic skills deficits have been remedied, all pupils will follow a course leading to IGCSE exams. These are not necessarily more difficult than conventional GCSEs, but they offer a much better structure and provide a superior foundation for A-levels and higher education.¹⁰

At the Phoenix Free School, teachers will actually be teachers, and not ‘learning facilitators’. Pupils will not be expected to demonstrate ‘problem-solving’ abilities in the absence of knowledge and understanding of relevant academic disciplines.¹¹

Pupils will be grouped ‘vertically’ in each subject according to academic achievement, rather than age. Progress will be continuously monitored with oral and written quizzes as well as formal tests.¹² All pupils will therefore be given the opportunity to excel and in order to do this they must be pushed out of their natural comfort zone. Constant achievement and assessment will encourage children to learn.

Teachers employed by the Phoenix Free School will receive tuition allowances to enable them to continue to improve their own understanding of the subjects they teach through distance learning courses.

¹⁰ Conventional GCSEs have come under very heavy criticism from both the left and the right, and the Coalition has already announced significant changes.

¹¹ Research from the cognitive sciences show little support for the notion that pupils can learn all-purpose ‘critical thinking skills’. In other words, learning to apply algebra to real-life problems will not help pupils think critically about the writings of key enlightenment thinkers.

¹² A recent study has revealed that testing is an extremely efficient means of consolidating learning: see <http://www.purdue.edu/newsroom/research/2011/110120KarpickeScience.html>

However, pupils need to be prepared for employment. It is fantasy to pretend that they all will go on to higher education and professional jobs. Most vocational qualifications now on offer are of limited value, or none at all.¹³ The Phoenix Free School will therefore develop a strong work-experience programme, in conjunction with local and national partners, which will be open only to pupils prepared to work hard enough to make employers value them.

Competition

Educators often argue that competition “demotivates” the losers. This is nonsense. In sport, every match has a loser, and participants almost always come back for more.

It is true that putting illiterate children in the same classroom as gifted pupils is highly demoralising for the former. So this will not happen at the Phoenix Free School. For purposes of instruction, pupils will be grouped according to ability in each activity.

Pupils will also be assigned to houses that have a similar mix in terms of ability and ethnic origin. Outside of formal classes, the most able pupils will be motivated and encouraged to help those who are making the least progress. A competitive spirit will be encouraged to develop between houses. There is no better way of fostering co-operation, teamwork, leadership and problem solving than through competition between groups. This is the way everything works in the world outside school.

Parents and the community

In most schools, staff keep parents at arm's length – especially if they are poor. Teachers

are caught in the middle: they may resent policies imposed on them by the DfE and Ofsted but have no choice but to support them. It is difficult to explain the charade of 'personalised learning' to an outsider. No rational person can expect a teacher to create up to 150 different lesson plans each day.

Teachers at the Phoenix School will have no such dilemma because they will all be using the same common-sense approach to teaching and learning that has served so well in the armed forces.

The Phoenix Free School will therefore seek the closest possible links with the community. After school, local people will be encouraged to teach their skills, much as they did under previous adult education programmes. These classes will be open to everyone, not just Phoenix pupils.

Above all, we recognise that true self-esteem can emerge only from honest achievement: when young people leave school with an inflated sense of self-worth and entitlement, the consequences are seldom to their advantage—or society's.

CONCLUSION

The first Phoenix Free School will only be able to open in two years time (unless the Coalition can decide the problem is urgent enough to merit special attention).

But should this first school meet the standards set by its founders, then it could be the first of many such schools across the country, increasing opportunities and social mobility in the most deprived communities in the land.

And, as a beneficial side-effect, the next time that riots break out in Britain, we should expect that few, if any, participants come from such schools.

¹³ Policy on vocational qualifications is now under review by Professor Alison Wolf. Major – and welcome – changes are expected in this area in the near future.



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THE AUTHORS

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Tom Burkard is the co-author of the *Sound Foundations* reading and spelling programmes, which are rapidly gaining recognition as the most cost-effective means of preventing reading failure. He is also the author of *Inside the Secret Garden: the progressive decay of liberal education* (University of Buckingham Press, 2007). He has written nine CPS reports, and many of his proposals are now official policy. He is a Visiting Fellow and a doctoral candidate at the University of Buckingham, and has recently accepted an offer of a Visiting Professorship at the University of Derby.

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