Reclaiming Education

A study of the feasibility of opening low-cost alternatives to state schools

Carried out by Tom Burkard

On behalf of CIVITAS

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Foreword

It has become something of a truism to say that education is in crisis. Like all truisms, it is an exaggeration because it is not universally applicable. There are still many good schools and many dedicated teachers in the country. In some parts of the UK, parents feel they have little cause for complaint against their state primary and secondary schools. Their children pass successfully through the system and emerge with admirable grades.

However, for other parents, who live in less favoured locations, it is a different story. In some areas the choice of schools available to parents is truly dire. They know that the children who attend their local schools are badly behaved, foul-mouthed, and likely to emerge from eleven years of compulsory state education unable to read, write or add up to a sufficient standard to make their way in the world. Their education – if it can be called that – prepares them for a life on welfare and membership of the underclass. They may have acquired habits of drug and alcohol abuse at very young ages, and some of the girls will have conceived children whilst still at school.

These failing schools are not a small minority. They embrace a significant proportion of the child population. The teaching environment in them is so bad that many are seriously under-staffed, and even lack a permanent head. Teachers are leaving the profession, sometimes after only a few years of practice, to escape the atmosphere of violence and intimidation which makes real learning impossible. The Department of Education has been reduced to recruiting teachers from other parts of the world, and there have been a number of well-publicised cases of these teachers returning, after a few months, to their homelands in what are sometimes thought of as less developed countries because they are unable to tolerate the conditions in the schools where they have been employed.

What are caring parents to do when they see what lies in store for their children in such schools? Of course, parents with sufficient income can opt out of the state system altogether and go private. Only a minority of parents are in this position, and, in any case, it is unlikely that those who take this route live within the catchment areas of the worst schools. There are many more parents who feel they have no option but to stand by and see their children adversely affected in their future prospects.

It was to address this dilemma that Civitas brought together a group of educationalists at the end of 2001. Civitas is the Institute for the Study of Civil Society. We believe that in social affairs the alternatives to state action are not exhausted by commercial services alone. We aim to revive that network of voluntary social institutions, charities, mutual aid organisations and other collective bodies which mediate between the individual and the state. In the field of education, there is a particularly impressive line of precedents for such an approach.

In the rich tapestry of English philanthropy, the provision of education to the children of the poor is one of the strongest threads. From the very beginning of the modern voluntary sector, in the days of Elizabeth I, men and women of goodwill were founding grammar schools for this purpose. These were followed by church schools, ragged schools, Christian missions, Sunday schools, City foundation schools, polytechnics and others. Most of these establishments took little or no money from the state. By the time the state undertook to make itself responsible for elementary education in 1870, the majority of the nation's children were already at school. The spread of popular mass circulation newspapers at the end of the nineteenth century was made possible, not by the state's board schools – those relative latecomers to the scene – but by a tradition which already went back hundreds of years of ensuring that those on low incomes were equipped to act as full citizens of a free society.

It was with this ideal in mind that our committee began to search for a way out of our educational dilemma by appealing to the goodwill of more prosperous members of the community, and to the natural concern which all parents, rich or poor, must feel for their children's welfare. We believe that parents must be closely involved in their children's education, and that it is desirable that they should pay something towards its cost. We believe that it is still possible to run an independent charitable school, accepting no funding from the state, in such a way as to bring the fees within the reach of many working people. We believe that it is possible to assist parents who are unable to pay the full fees by a combination of bursaries and offering parents the option of working as ancillary staff in the school.

The committee asked Tom Burkard, who has considerable knowledge and experience of the field, to conduct a feasibility study, and we are delighted to be able to publish his findings here. We have discovered, to no one's surprise, that parental concern is now so widespread that there are a number of initiatives in different parts of the country which we have looked at and tried to learn from.

We hope to be able to move forward with the intention of opening a school in the autumn of 2003.

Robert Whelan
Deputy Director, Civitas

Preface

Few people realise how completely progressive educational ideology has corrupted our schools. Taking government propaganda at face value, most people assume that the National Curriculum and the National Literacy Strategy represent a return to a traditional ideals and practices. They assume that independent schools remain largely unaffected by 'child-centred' pedagogy. They assume that all heads and teachers in RC and CofE schools are actually Christians.

If only. In *All Must Have Prizes,* Melanie Phillips shows how Conservative Education Secretary Kenneth Baker was out-manoeuvred at every turn by his civil servants, who saw the National Curriculum as an opportunity to preserve progressive ideals in aspic. In our independent schools, nearly all teachers are 'qualified'--which means that they have been exposed to the egregious doctrines taught in teacher-training colleges. And the teacher shortage is so acute that many church schools have no option but to employ anyone willing to state that they are Christian.

Incredible as it might seem, the dominance of progressive educational nostrums persists in the face of overwhelming evidence that they do not promote children's learning--let alone their moral and intellectual development. The magnitude of the problem is illustrated by my experience inspecting East Anglia's top comprehensives for the 1999 *Telegraph Schools Guide*. Of all the personable year 11 pupils who escorted me around their schools, I met only one who was capable of calculating 30% of 150. He alone understood that finding a percentage is a simple multiplicative function.

The Civitas charitable school project was conceived because we believe that all parents should have the right to choose their children's school. Parents should be able to choose schools which are free from the pernicious doctrine of moral relativism, and ones which teach children the intellectual and cultural traditions that underpin our civilisation. This is a critical moral and political issue, one which has far-reaching implications for our future. The bureaucrat's claim to pre-emptive rights to determine children's schooling is an assault on liberty, and it is profoundly undemocratic. Only those who can afford to pay twice--once through taxation, and again through school fees--can opt to have their children taught as they wish.

Those left to the tender mercies of the state school system are further differentiated by where they can afford housing. If we wanted to design a school system with the express aim of perpetuating social divisions, it is hard to see how we could improve on the existing arrangements.

The Civitas project is designed to offer a first-class private education to all children. Fees will be kept as low as possible, and parents with low incomes will have the option of working as ancillary staff or applying for private scholarships.

The American Core Knowledge curriculum will be adapted for British schools. Our classrooms will be unapologetically teacher-centred. Quizzes, tests and competitions

--now virtually banned in our primary schools--will become everyday occurrences; contrary to received wisdom, pupils love them. Tests have the added advantage of telling the teacher if teaching objectives have been met.

Our pupils will sit at desks facing the teacher (if 'progressive' teachers could only see the expressions pulled by children who sit facing away!). They will be taught by teachers who--irrespective of formal qualifications--know their subject and can teach it. The only way in which pedagogy will differ from that of bygone times is that fear, humiliation and bullying will be strictly banished. Ironically, these are virtually the only 'traditional' practices which are still common in some state schools. We aim to create a positive atmosphere based upon real academic achievement by all pupils.

Although a handful of state schools achieve outstanding results by adopting researched-based pedagogy, they are studiously ignored by the *nomenklatura* who control education spending. We conclude that the decent instincts of the vast majority of British teachers could best be mobilised by demonstrating that independent schools can deliver a vastly superior education to children from all social classes.

Tom Burkard

Reclaiming Education

Outline of contents:

After the main report was written, James Cave carried out further research in the boroughs of Southwark, Lambeth, and Hammersmith and Fulham. The demographics of these boroughs, as well as their proximity to the Civitas offices, make them a logical starting point for our enquiries. Planning policies, demographics, and existing schools were all taken into consideration. The most interesting possibility is leasing premises from existing colleges of further education.

Research Summary:

Introduction : the dog that didn't bark in the night

The underlying purpose of our proposed project is to restore moral and intellectual rigour to education. It is explicitly recognised that attempts to reform state education have borne bitter fruit, and that liberal values can only be restored by liberal economic structures. We intend to utilise voluntary and charitable efforts to establish alternatives to state schools within the means of parents with low or modest incomes--this does not, however, preclude working with commercial interests.

It does, however, exclude the possibility of any form of state subsidy, direct or indirect (such as lottery funds or vouchers). Public finance of private education inevitably leads to a greater or lesser degree of regulation. In any case there are quite a number of countries where all or some private schools receive state subsidies; these include the USA, Canada, France, Denmark, Japan, Poland and several third-world countries. There are also many countries where some parents receive vouchers for private schools fees; these include the USA, Australia, Netherlands, Belgium, Hungary, and a large number of Latin American and African countries.[1]

As James Tooley has noted, the problem with all of these schemes is that they pre-empt the growth of a genuine market in education, a market where the parent and not a corporate body is the customer.[2] We believe that restoring the autonomy of parents is an essential precondition for achieving our aims, but in order for parents to have the choice of sending their children to schools with rigorous academic standards and a firm moral and religious ethos, such schools must actually exist. They also must be affordable.[3] We recognise that the value of our effort will be in direct proportion to the ease with which it can be replicated on a wider scale; hence, it must eventually be largely self-financing.

As first conceived, this report was to include consideration of facilitating homeschooling in order to make it a more practical option for parents who are unsure of their ability to educate their children. Although this is undoubtedly a subject deserving of attention, there are already bodies such as Education Otherwise, the Home Education Advisory Service and Child Light which provide support for homeschoolers. The private sector does appear to be rising to this challenge with some success, as proliferation of educational software, tutoring agencies, and after-school tuition proves. Having homeschooled my own son, I would strongly support any new measures that would help others; however, I have not been any more successful than other committee members in thinking of any way in which Civitas could possibly add anything to the resources already available.

This report focuses on the problems of starting an independent school aimed at accommodating the children of parents who would not normally be able to afford private education.

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[1] Burnett, N. (2002) *Costs and Diversity in Schools: An International Review,* CfBT, Reading
[2] Tooley, J. (2000) *Reclaiming Education,* Cassell, London
[3] O'Keeffe, D. and Burkard, T. (2001) "The Political Economy of Error", *Salisbury Review 19:3*

It is doubtful that this project could reach the children whose parents are habituated to state handouts; the experience of the Council for British Teachers at Bermondsey School (see Appendix A) demonstrates that these parents are unwilling to contribute even token amounts to improve their children's education. The Promethean Trust has encountered this attitude in Norfolk, but we have also found that a very high percentage of families who are either from the 'working poor' or those who have just temporarily fallen upon hard times will spend considerable amounts of time and money to give their children the best education they can. This has also been the experience of the private school voucher programmes in the US; many of the poorest parents in the urban ghettos are quite happy to pay at least $1,000 per year to qualify for a voucher. In the areas where these vouchers were offered, over half of all eligible parents applied.

Surveys (including my own) consistently show that most parents would send their children to independent schools if they could afford the fees. The competition for independent school places in London is fierce, but the independent sector has reacted to this shortage by raising fees (on average 7% this year, or three times the rate of inflation) rather than by creating more places. This has the effect of putting private schools even further beyond the reach of the average parent--never mind the poor.

Nonetheless, it does seem odd that the private sector has not exploited the demand. A number of factors are at work. Most existing independent schools are charitable trusts, and not for-profit businesses; consequently, their trustees have no incentive to complicate their lives by opening new ventures. They are much more likely to be motivated by sentimental memories of their own privileged schooldays, and therefore they will be far more inclined to respond to market dynamics by raising fees--which only requires a stroke of a pen. Insofar as I could determine, in the last four years only two new schools have been started by existing private schools. This does not include special schools, which are often run by specialist consortia, and are usually maintained schools in all but name.

Firms with no prior experience in education are unlikely to be drawn to this opportunity because schooling is a complex activity and they do not understand it. Raising money for starting a school is extremely difficult because there are no clear precedents to make a business plan convincing, and British venture capital markets are unadventurous at the best of times. Starting a single school is too small a proposition to attract most investors, and starting a chain of them in such an uncertain area is problematic in the extreme. Parents looking for a good school are unlikely to be much impressed by a slick marketing campaign; rather they want a good, solid reputation or the presence of a head with a reassuring CV.

Several American private school operators have expressed an interest in the British market, but they shy at the fence because nearly all of their existing schools in the US are charters, which are state-funded. My own negotiations with the Heritage Academies, the second largest operator of independent schools in the US, foundered because they did not understand the necessity for restructuring their rather rigid development formula to suit UK conditions. Although the Edison Project (the biggest of American private school operators) has been investigating the possibility of a UK operation, their accumulated operating losses are now causing concern as to whether Edison can survive at all.

My investigations have led me to believe that starting a new school is a formidable challenge, but that it is by no means impossible. The problem is that to succeed, one must think like an entrepreneur, and people who are drawn to education nearly always lack these instincts. Conversely, entrepreneurs generally lack the moral vision and intellectual depth needed to create a worthy alternative to state schools. In my opinion, Civitas is well-placed to bridge this gap by bringing together a variety of talents who understand the importance of this enterprise.

Main findings

One of the two central findings of this feasibility study is that there are very few legal obstacles to stop us, or anyone else, from starting a new independent school between now and September 2003. After that, prior consent will be needed for buildings, curriculum and staffing arrangements--and Elizabeth Brass, of the DfES Independent Schools Registration Team says that it would be "inappropriate" for her to comment on what these requirements might be. The relevant Education Bill is currently in the Lords (see Appendix B). Finding suitable premises is still the major problem, but it would appear that planning permission is not likely to be a major obstacle (at least outside Norfolk).

My second key finding is that starting a school from scratch is a chancy business. According to the DfES, about 60 new independent schools open each year, and a similar number close. Unfortunately, they regard this information as confidential--something that should change with the new Education Act which will require the publication of Ofsted reports for independent schools. I secured a database of 49 independent schools that have started since June, 1998,[4] and sent them a letter asking for a prospectus and information how they got started. One letter was returned, marked "addressee has gone away". Seven schools sent a prospectus and two phoned me. I phoned nine schools on the list who did not respond to the letter, and I was only able to raise four of them. One number was unobtainable; I left two messages on answerphones which did not give a school name (and I got no reply); one phone was not answered; and another was answered by a person who had inherited the school's phone number.

Of these 49 schools, we have information on 13, and we have data on five additional schools not on the database. Two have reverted to nursery schools. Three schools are special schools dependent almost exclusively on pupils funded by the LEA or social services; since our brief explicitly excludes consideration of use of government funds in any guise, I did not examine these in detail. Two schools are offshoots of existing independent schools, and these were by far and away the biggest schools--thus showing the importance of a track record and an adequate capital base. Unfortunately, neither of these schools was innovative, nor were they particularly cheap.

This leaves seven schools which were started from scratch by adventurous souls--usually with three or four pupils. Current rolls varied from five pupils to 63. All but one of these (including one of the two committed Christian schools) are pretty firmly

[4] Supplied by the Register of Educational Establishments

in the 'progressive' camp. The one exception is Emmaus School in Trowbridge, a creationist school. All schools have very low class sizes--this appeared to be dictated by choice as much as by necessity. The general impression is that these schools emerged at an enormous financial cost to their creators, and at present all but one (Lloyd Williamson School in W10, with 63 pupils) could be considered the educational equivalent of vanity publishing. Although some of these schools undoubtedly will eventually succeed, it is well to consider that they are all producer-driven. Parents play a minimal role in most of these schools.

Interestingly, none of these schools reported any difficulty in securing planning permission or in registering as a primary school with the DfES. According to a consultant[5], most London boroughs view schools as positive developments, although he warned that each has its own structure plan which should be consulted to determine where schools would be allowed. Stephen Holsgrove of Thames Christian College has warned that Wandsworth most definitely does not regard schools as priority developments.

A word of caution on the registration process--Emmaus School, which has secondary-age pupils, has had problems with Ofsted, who insist that secondary schools need science laboratories. Ofsted is not happy with their provision of on-line science lessons, but it is possible that this is due to the content (creationist) more than the fact that it is on-line.

The possibility of starting a school which lies outside the DfES definition of a "full-time" school was suggested at our meeting of 6 March 2002. The DfES Guidelines suggest that full-time schools should offer a minimum of two daily sessions of two hours, and that the school year should be no less than 38 weeks, but there is no reason to believe that a school offering somewhat less than this would be exempt from registration. After-school activities are clearly exempt, as are schools which offer only nursery or post-16 education: anything in between is probably a matter of official discretion.

At our meeting it was suggested that relatively few parents would be interested in a part-time school. As much as I personally believe that the state has no business telling parents what educational arrangements are appropriate for their children, I fear that a school set up with the intent of evading regulation would have very limited appeal to the vast majority of parents. Even if they agreed with us in principle, they would be loath to allow their children to become involved as pawns in the struggle.

A tale of two schools: Holland House and St Michael's

St Michael's Catholic Small School Truro is, in most respects, typical of new schools that have been started from scratch. It belongs to the minority which are faith-based, and it is firmly committed to keeping class sizes as small as possible. Including part-time specialist teachers, they have 15 staff teaching 43 pupils ranging in age from four to sixteen. The school follows the National Curriculum, and pupils sit SATs and GCSEs. They started in a disused Methodist chapel, for which they pay a peppercorn rent, with seven pupils. Even though teachers receive less than half the salary they

[5] Jonathan Manley, Chesterton International PLC, 54 Brook Street, London W1A 2BU, 020 7312 5422

would earn in the state sector, the cost of this generous staffing ratio pushes their costs up to £3,900 per year per pupil. About a third of this comes from parental contributions; the rest is raised from charitable trusts or by private donation and fund-raising activities. No child is turned away because of lack of parental means. The school has chronic budgetary shortfalls, and the head cannot retire because of the impossibility of recruiting a replacement on their budget.

Holland House, which has our committee member Irina Tyk as head, was established in 1974, and has 140 pupils aged five to eleven. It has its own freehold property, and teachers are paid near the top of scale (averaging about £26,000 pa). Tuition is £3,705 per year (with an additional £240 for hot lunches). Class size is 20. Very strong emphasis is put on basic skills, and reading standards are exceptionally high. All children sit at desks facing the front of the class--an extreme rarity, even in independent primary schools. Teaching is unapologetically teacher-centred, and disciplinary standards are exemplary. The school is racially mixed, with a high percentage of Jewish and Asian pupils, as well as English and Chinese; while the school has a very strong moral and religious ethos, it is not faith-based. Admission is by interview, and there are generally at least four applicants for each place. Pupils are selected for their ability to concentrate and communicate with adults. The school is on a very sound financial footing.

In considering these two models, Civitas committee members will no doubt be attracted by St Michael's commitment to faith-based education, and their dedication to admitting all children (except those with 'special needs'). It is curious, however, that child-centred educational orthodoxy seems to have seeped into such unlikely corners of the educational universe. Class size is irrelevant in a teacher-centred school. This should serve as a caution--it is extremely difficult to hire a head with primary school experience who has remained entirely immune to the disastrous educational obsessions of the last generation. Even at an exemplary school such as Kobi Nazrul, teachers have their beloved 'project work'.

The Headmistress of St Michael's cautions us that it is important "that the founders share a single vision of the school", and to secure funding before the venture begins. These are wise words, based upon hard experience. Civitas must decide the extent to which it will use charitable funding, and the extent to which it intends to rely upon parental contributions. We cannot go entirely in the direction of Holland House, because our brief is to offer choices to children as far down the food chain as possible. But should we adopt the open enrolment policy of St Michael's, we would be so dependent upon charitable funding that there would be very little chance of replication--or even of mere survival.

I am personally inclined to opt for something closer to the Holland House model, perhaps admitting scholarship pupils only as funds are available, and admitting children of parents who were willing and able to work in the school in whatever capacity. Making a viable school is difficult enough as it is; we should not put on the hair shirt until we can afford to. Other means of reducing costs must be explored, as Civitas will not have the advantage of owning a freehold property which is fully-equipped as a school. If we want our school to be relevant, it must be replicable--and therefore it must be largely self-financing. Even in the US, where huge amounts of

charitable funds are available for educational purposes, donor fatigue has hit even the most worthy ventures.

The limitations of a faith-based school have already been discussed. Irina Tyk has mentioned another limitation--a faith-based school cannot be a community-based school, except in special cases such as Orthodox Jews who live in close proximity to each other. I hope we are sufficiently ecumenical to accept that it is possible to have a school which incorporates religious education and observances which will be widely acceptable.

Post-script: Thames Christian College

We found out about this school after the second draft of this paper was complete. Of all the new schools we have looked at, Thames CC comes closest to offering a useful model for our deliberations. Even though it is a secondary school and the fees (£7,000 pa) are much higher than anything we have contemplated, their objectives are very close to ours and they have made an excellent start in achieving them.

Of all the schools we have looked at, TCC is the only one where the founder was not also the head of the school. Stephen Holsgrove works for the Wilsher Group, a training and management consultancy. Currently, his only teaching role is as the ICT specialist teacher, which involves minimal time at the chalkface. His motive for starting the school was to accommodate his own three children, who are dyslexic. He felt they would sink in the competitive academic climate of most independent schools in London, and he wanted them to attend a school with an explicit Christian world-view. His children attended the Dolphin School in Battersea, an independent Christian School which indirectly provided him with a headmaster (Tim Rogers) with experience of starting two successful independent schools in Australia. The Dolphin School also supplies about one-third of the pupils to TCC.

The school opened at the Hornsby Dyslexia Centre in Battersea in September 2000 with 12 pupils, all in year seven. This year, they have 22 pupils in years seven and eight (about half of them black) taught by the head and one other full-time teacher. Next year they will have a total of 41 pupils in years seven, eight and nine. This follows a pattern set by many US charter schools, which typically start with lower years pupils only and add a new year as the pupils move up. The school follows the National Curriculum, but they quite obviously adapt it liberally to suit their needs. As of yet, pupils do not sit SATs, but they will when they reach 14.

They have very few Bible lessons; instead teachers are expected to lead by example and link subject matter back to their Christian world-view. Pupils come from a variety of religious backgrounds, including Roman Catholic and Pentecostal. They feel they could absorb as many as 20% of pupils from non-Christian homes without compromising their ethos.

TCC has been especially fortunate in that they only pay rent of about £1,000 per pupil (instead of paying by the square foot). They can expand by another 100 pupils or so now that they have negotiated a similar arrangement with an under-utilised Baptist centre next door. Stephen Holsgrove has his eyes set on developing a defunct Church of England site in conjunction with the church; however, this is still in the speculative

stage. He is motivated by the fact that larger schools can do things that smaller schools cannot, and he is looking beyond the stage of working in makeshift accommodation.

I am sure that the relative success of Thames Christian College is due to Stephen Holsgrove's background in business. He is aware of the importance of planning and networking, and having a strategic vision. As mentioned earlier in this report, bridging the world of business and education is an essential ingredient in any plans to transform independent education. Stephen is quite prepared to help us in any way he can, and I am sure that he would agree to participate in future discussions should Civitas go ahead with this project. He echoes one of my conclusions--i.e. our chances of success will be immeasurably improved if we 'piggyback' on an existing school (see "Link-up with existing school" on p. 9).

Location--London or the provinces?

As a provincial, I am naturally inclined to the provinces. If one goes far enough north, premises can be had more or less for the asking. Even in Derbyshire, one can find redundant mills in idyllic river valleys. Finding staff is easy, and the cost of living is so low that teachers can be paid pretty much what one likes.

Unfortunately, low wages do not just apply to teachers. Finding parents with the means to pay any school fees, however modest, is not easy. Although a number of new schools have been started north of the Wash, my conversations with their heads convinced me to defer to the majority prejudice at Civitas and opt for London. Evidence suggests that there is a certain amount of price competition amongst independent schools located outside London and the Home Counties; it is very unlikely that many (if any) of the 40% of preparatory day schools with fees at or under £3,000 pa are within commuting range of London[6]. At least we know that we can get bums on seats without having to spend a lot of money on market research.

A number of factors will need to be considered in choosing a particular borough; these will primarily concern potential demand and availability of premises. Since these matters cannot be determined with any certainty without more initial research, a decision was made to make an initial study in boroughs close to the Civitas office in Waterloo--Southwark, Lambeth, and Hammersmith and Fulham. This was carried out by James Cave, a Cambridge graduate student, and his findings are briefed in Appendix E.

[6] Lambert, C. (2002) *Access to Achievement,* Adam Smith Institute, London

The Headteacher

This problem could prove the most difficult to solve. Of the heads that I talked to, every one (save for Tim Rogers at Thames Christian College) was the prime mover behind the creation of the school. They made inhuman sacrifices to realise their visions, which were--alas--disturbingly similar to those of Jean-Jacque Rousseau. Bear in mind that a head we hire will be expecting a reasonable salary, and will have his or her own ideas. Countless school effectiveness studies have found that inspired leadership is essential to a good school, but we will have a problem finding a head in sympathy with our moral, intellectual and pedagogic convictions.

When I was considering opening a school, I put out a notice on the Core Knowledge net, knowing that many American teachers would die for a stint as a headteacher in a small private school in England. Core Knowledge teachers at least believe that children should study an intellectually coherent syllabus, so I thought I would have little difficulty finding a sympathetic soul. If only! I never heard such a torrent of management-speak and psycho-babble in my life; hence, I quietly resolved to restrict my enquiries to Britain.

On a long-term basis, the only solution is to hire and train our own teachers and headteachers, possibly in conjunction with a sympathetic university such as Buckingham. In the short run, the first headteacher might have to be one of ourselves, even if it were only for a term or two. Even though few of us have much time to spare, it might be worth the sacrifice to ensure that the school gets off to a sound start. As the twig is bent...

Link-up with existing school?

The independent schools that got off to a roaring start were both offshoots of existing independent schools. It is not hard to see why. Parents are not going to entrust their most precious possessions to a persuasive salesman. They want to see the school in operation. Failing that, they want to see another school run by the same people.

The schools I surveyed started with only three or four pupils, despite the fact that the heads were teachers who knew dissatisfied parents. We might even be hard-pressed to find three or four pupils, especially if we had nothing to show them except an unconverted off-license or warehouse.

We can count on the advice of Irina Tyk and Stephen Holsgrove, which in my opinion is absolutely essential. But without a formal link to an existing school, the Civitas project is (in my opinion) highly problematical. The question we need to answer is whether our objectives would be compatible with that of another school.

Finding Premises

Although buying premises is generally more advantageous to leasing, only a fool would invest in London property at the height of a boom. Chris Woodhead informs me that prep schools in inner and outer London are going for between £3 and £10

million--of which he estimates about 60% represents the value of the real estate. Using this figure, the 'goodwill' plus furnishings and equipment of a London prep school must be at least £1.2 million. This value is largely a product of the huge profits that can be made when tuition is generally pegged at £6,000 pa, but this value is also a reflection of the difficulties involved in starting a school and building a reputation and client base.

Of course, by the time any of our plans come to fruition, the property boom might well have collapsed. The advantages of purchasing a freehold are obvious, and should be seriously considered at an early stage. But for the sake of planning, we should consider current rentals, which are likely to be in the mid to high teens per square foot per annum. Using the formula for space requirements for primary schools, this means that a school adequate for 75 pupils would cost a minimum of £500 per pupil per year. This is exclusive of the cost of converting the premises to a school, and this could be quite considerable.

Here we can see the importance of achieving full occupancy as soon as possible. If in the first year of operation the school is running at well under capacity, the cost of rent per pupil skyrockets, causing huge losses when you can least afford them. Yet on the other hand, if you choose a building which is smaller than your projected requirements, you are faced with getting rid of the lease and losing a lot of money on renovations which are unlikely to be of use to the new tenant. It should be noted that this is one of the primary arguments for locating in the provinces: the cost of premises is unlikely to be a major factor in the viability of the project.

In reference to renovation and conversion costs, I should add that with 25 years experience as a builder (one of which was spent working in Hackney, Stoke Newington and Pimlico), I am in a position to advise on contracting building works. Building craftsmen form an international fraternity of sorts, similar to freemasons in their original incarnation. It is a brotherhood from which London tradesmen are scorned as outright thieves and fraudsters, a disgrace to a profession which already has a dodgy reputation. Their reputation is so bad that you are more likely to hear a Polish accent than a cockney accent on a London building site.

Conclusion

The feasibility of this project rests primarily upon the funding available and the will of Civitas committee members to reach a consensus and act upon it. There are no legal obstacles which need cause too much concern--providing that we have a school in existence before September 2003. Even after that date, the obstacles are more likely to be onerous than insurmountable. Finding suitable premises and a head who shares our objectives remain the most problematic matters. Our prospects of success will, however, be greatly improved by a link with an existing school which shares many of our ideas.

One of the obvious problems we will have in reaching a consensus is deciding to what extent this school should be faith-based. I think we are all agreed that we want to start a school which has an explicit religious ethos. But there is less agreement as to the degree of emphasis this should have. In my market research (see appendix C) 80%

thought that children should be taught about all religions and left to make up their own minds, and 6% were against any religious instruction at all. In my opinion, it is both morally wrong and practically disastrous to limit our market to the 14% who are in favour of providing religious instruction to children in their own faith. See Appendix C for further comment. Our recent visit to the Tabernacle school (see Appendix A) confirms the observation that parents are probably more ambivalent on the question of religious instruction than our poll suggests.

The early achievements of the Jesuits are instructive. Few people realise that 16th century Poland was a centre of Protestant activity second only to Holland. Confronted with widespread apostasy, the Bishop of Krakow was reduced to saying that he didn't care if Poles worshipped goats, so long as they paid their tithes. Poland was largely an agrarian society, and there was little formal provision for education. Even though the extensive Polish gentry were largely Protestant, they still consented to send their sons to Jesuit schools because they were the only schools offering a sound education in secular subjects. Inside of a generation, the counter-reformation had swept Poland.

I do not think we should indulge ourselves in the luxury of serving parents who already have faith. The irony of our age is that our politicians prattle on about an 'inclusive' society, when in fact we are retreating into ever-narrowing ghettos based upon race, religion, social identity and class, occupation and even the sort of music we listen to. I believe that our school should be truly catholic in its appeal, and that we should reach out to parents who worship mammon--or even goats. We will have enough of a problem finding a head who shares our collective views on academic goals and teaching methods, and I do not think we can afford to be overly-prescriptive about religion.

We also have to reach an agreement on the problem of fees and finance. I think we cannot succeed unless we attract enough reasonably well-to-do parents to subsidise those who are on a low income. We have explicitly ruled out any form of state finance, and we just have no chance of making this a viable or replicable enterprise unless it is largely self-funding. Since there are, by all accounts, very large numbers of well-off parents in London who cannot find any independent schools at all, it is the plainest common sense to set our fee structure in such a way as to take advantage of this. For the truly indigent, there is always the option of working as ancillary staff.

In a sellers' market, it should not take a lot of ingenuity to put together a viable package that would attract a fairly wide spectrum of parents, while at the same time extracting a fair amount in fees. The only alternative to attracting a mix of middle-class parents is to have no school at all. The running costs for a single school in London would quickly exhaust the reserves of even the most generous funds, and creating a replicable model that is not largely self-financing is simply out of the question.

The question of finding premises is clearly critical, so we need to decide where we want to open a school. Despite my initial preference for the provinces, the only place where demand for private school places is high enough to ensure our success is in London. Unfortunately, premises are much harder to find there. I have located a planning consultant in who is very interested in our project, and as soon as we have

narrowed our search down to two or three boroughs he will be happy to advise us for a nominal fee.

As a final observation made by Stephen Holsgrove: in order to succeed, a project such as ours cannot be closely controlled by a committee. We must be able to find a person, preferably one who will be able to act as a head, who is in agreement with our ideas, and that person must be given very wide-ranging authority to act.

Appendix A: Data on recently-opened schools

I: Analysis of data base supplied by EER

a) Location of schools:

		No.	%
1.	London & Middlesex	14	28%
2.	Lancashire, Manchester & Merseyside	15	28%
3.	SE England	10	20%
4.	W. Midlands	5	10%
5.	W Yorkshire & Derbyshire	3	6%
6.	Glos	1	2%
7.	Cumbria	1	2%
	Total	49	

b) Religious or ethical base of schools (determined by school name or contact data)

1.	Steiner/Montessori/progressive	8	16%
2.	Moslem	6	12%
3.	Christian	2	4%
4.	Jewish	2	4%
5.	Hindu	2	4%
6.	No information	29	58%
	Total	49	

II: Analysis of data of responding schools

School (see key)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Pupil/teacher ratio	6.4	7.7	8.2	10.0	7.4	5.0	5.8	7.0	1.4	3.1	5.0
Number of pupils	63	35	18	22	28	5	41	354	39	8	41
Termly fees	1895	975	1800	834	480	1400	4800	?	9630	?	1100
National Curric?	no	yes	no	no	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
SATs?	no	yes	no	no	yes	no	no	yes	no	no	no
Charitable Status?	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	no	no	yes	no	no	yes
start from scratch?	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no	yes	no	yes
ethos/objective	prog	prog	prog	Xian	Xian	prog	SEN	main	SEN	SEN	Xian

prog=progressive, Montessori or Steiner
Xian=Christian
SEN=special educational needs
main=mainstream school

Key to schools:

1. Lloyd Williamson
2. Stonehouse
3. Maria Montessori
4. Emmaus
5. Jubilee house
6. School House Brighton
7. Willoughby Hall
8. Chandlings Manor
9. Hillingdon Manor
10. Cornfield
11. Tabernacle

Other data:

Admission policy: None of the schools were selective; in most cases, this was more likely a result of having vacancies than an enthusiasm for comprehensive schooling. Most schools admitted that they were not equipped to deal with severe special needs--except, of course, the three schools that were designed with such pupils in mind. Hillingdon Manor was the only school operating at capacity.

Governance: Jubilee House, Maria Montessori and Hillingdon Manor were the only schools where parents sat on the governing body. Irrespective of formal governing documents, in schools 1-6 it was quite obvious that the heads (the founders of these schools) ran things pretty much as they pleased. The schools that did not have charitable status were run on a for-profit basis (at least in theory).

Type of school: All 10 were day schools, and only Cornfield was single-sex. All but Cornfield catered to primary-age pupils; 4 had nursery schools attached. Emmaus was the only school--other than the special schools--that accepted secondary pupils.

III: School-by-school 'snapshots'

1. *The Lloyd Williamson School, London W10* First registered as a coed day school in December 2000 with 4 pupils, this is one of the more recent start-ups. It is also one of the more successful, especially considering that it started from scratch and has no affiliations. Currently they have 63 pupils age 2-11, with 80 registered for this September. The owner/head is a teacher who was dissatisfied with teaching in the maintained sector; she started the school with her own and her husband's money. Pedagogy is strongly child-centred, but "more academic than a Steiner school". Small classes are a strong selling point. Parents find out about the school mostly by word-of-mouth, with a few Yellow Pages replies. The school employs three qualified teachers and two parents who volunteer full-time. Tuition is £1,895 per term, with seven or eight pupils receiving bursaries. Pupils do not sit SATs, and the National Curriculum only applies to nursery age pupils (who receive the statutory grant). The nursery pupils have enmeshed them in considerable difficulties with Social Services, which all goes to show that there ain't no such thing as a free lunch. Premises are a disused health clinic (on a lease), and head claims that no planning consent was required(!). They are awaiting their final Ofsted inspection and they have had no trouble with DfES.
2. *Stonehouse School, Leyland, Lancs* First registered as a coed day school in October 99 with three pupils. Grew out of a nursery school which opened in a surplus school in 1989; mission is to provide an affordable (£975 per term) and secure environment where children can develop at their own pace. All parents pay full tuition. Age range (including nursery) is 6 mos. to 9 years. Currently has 35 pupils. Head owns freehold and is sole proprietor, and employs four other qualified teachers; she plans to take on her first parent as an assistant in the near future. The school follows the National Curriculum and pupils can opt to sit SATs at 7+. The reputation of the nursery school is a strong factor in attracting pupils.
3. *Maria Montessori School, Hampstead* First registered as a coed day school in October 99 with seven pupils, the school shares premises with the parent organisation, the Maria Montessori Training Organisation, which is in turn a part of an international Montessori organisation based in Amsterdam. Definitely towards the touchie-feelie, new-age end of the Montessori spectrum. Current roll includes 18 pupils age 2 ½ to 12, and maximum capacity is 20. The school has charitable status, and parents serve on the board of governors. All parents pay the full tuition of £1800 per term. The Dutch head, Miss Luetkens, was the prime mover behind the start. They encountered no problems with planning or the DfES. Head is sole full-time teacher, but unqualified teachers teach specialist subjects part-time. The school was funded by donation, and advertising is word-of-mouth.
4. *Emmaus School, Trowbridge, Wilts* First registered as a co-ed day school in January 99 with three pupils, this is the only school surveyed which used didactic teaching methods. Bible-based creationist curriculum probably accounts for difficulty with Ofsted, which is not happy with the on-line materials from Pensacola Christian College used with secondary pupils. No SATs or National Curriculum. Now has 22 pupils age 5-16 in a redundant LEA school which has room for 45. Planning permission was not required. The school was started from scratch with funds supplied by an anonymous donor, and has no affiliations. Building is owned by separate charitable trust, and school is run by limited

company controlled by board of governors. Teachers are all qualified (two full-time, one part-time). Most pupils pay full tuition of £834 per term. School advertises in Christian press, but most new pupils come by word-of-mouth.

5. *Jubilee House Christian School, Ilkeston, Derbyshire* Leased a disused telephone exchange with 11 pupils as a coed day school in September 99; the head was joined by other teachers and parents who felt that local VA and VC schools were insufficiently committed to a Christian education. School follows the National Curriculum and administers SATs; committed to creating a "caring family environment". Affiliated with the Christian Schools Trust. Now has 28 pupils age three to eleven. Ample room for expansion; current premises will hold at least 100 pupils. No serious problems with planning permission, but the process was bureaucratic and time-consuming. This is the only school to have any real difficulty with registration; they have had three Ofsted inspections. The head attributes this to a dissatisfied parent who has complained repeatedly. The school is owned by a charitable trust, whose trustees appoint the governors. Staff consists of three qualified teachers and four unqualified, all but two of whom are part-time. Fees are less than £500 per term, and only eight pupils pay full fees. The school exists on nursery subsidy for three and four year-olds, private donations, charity events, and assistance from local businesses. The school is multi-denominational, and gets new pupils through local churches.
6. *The School House, Brighton* Opened with five pupils as a co-ed day school in October 01. Pupils all aged eight or nine. A Steiner-Waldorf school, based upon the idea that a full-time school is "too taxing" for pupils under the age of ten. This school broke away from the Brighton Steiner school. Tuition is £1,400 per term, but some parents receive a 50% discount. School is governed by a Council consisting of all parents and teachers. Although this appears to be a noble experiment in pure democracy, the curriculum would only appeal to George Orwell's sandal-wearing drinkers of fruit juice. Very much into the inter-connectedness of all things.
7. *Willoughby Hall Dyslexia Centre, Hampstead* Opened in Feb 99 with six pupils as a co-ed day school for pupils age six to twelve who suffer from dyslexia. An offshoot of Northbridge House School, a for-profit school which is about 30 years old. Took over premises from an independent school which folded, so no problems with planning. Currently has 41 pupils, which is near-capacity. Although the school follows the National Curriculum, pupils do not take SATs as of yet. School has seven full-time qualified teachers, most with qualification to teach special needs pupils. Fees are £4,800 per term, and all parents pay full tuition. School gets pupils who apply to parent school, as well as others who find out about the school by word-of-mouth.
8. *Chandlings Manor, Oxford* Started as a co-ed day school in October 99. The head sent a brochure, annotated that she was too busy to talk, so I contacted the Trust which owns the school. Essentially this is an overspill public school receiving excess applicants from Cothill Boys, which dates back to 1865. The school is set in extremely posh rural settings, with full facilities and fees to match. Member of IAPS. 354 pupils age four to eleven. Currently non-selective, but the prospectus claims that rising applications will change this. Not much here to instruct our venture.
9. *Hillingdon Manor School, Uxbridge* Opened in September 99 as a co-ed day school for children three-and-a-half to19 years with autistic spectrum disorders. The school was opened "with the cooperation of the LEA" and is run by a limited

company. Of their 39 pupils, only two are private: the rest are referred by outer London LEAs at a cost of £28,890 pa. High staffing rations: seven teachers (two unqualified), 13 support assistants, plus seven part-timers. Once again, not much here for us.

10. *Cornfield School, Redhill, Surrey* A commercial day school for girls in care run by Cornerways, Ltd. Currently has eight pupils age 12-18, all referred by social services, who provide all funds. The head didn't even know what they charge per term. Not relevant to our concerns.
11. *Tabernacle School, Kensington* This school was not on our database, but it has had a lot of publicity because of the efforts of the Harrow Club to evict it. It was started in 1999 as a non-denominational Christian school with three pupils and it grew rapidly, and now has a waiting list--even though the future of the school is precarious in the extreme. At the time of our visit on 31 May 2002, the Harrow Club had been granted possession and the bailiffs were expected any day. They arrived on 14 June, by which time emergency accommodation had been secured in a private school in Notting Hill until the end of the summer. The school is a co-ed day school with pupils from three to18; at the time of visit they were of predominantly African race (the previous year's class photo showed three white pupils). Some of the older boys had already been excluded from other schools. The eldest pupil – a girl of 18 – is about to go to college to study art and design. About 65% of the pupils carry full fees, with subsidies available for the rest – mainly single parents. Teachers work for less than half of scale. Pupils sit in cubicles and fill in worksheets supplied by the "School of Tomorrow" (apparently a fundamentalist Christian organisation) for all academic subjects, thereby allowing quite a full range of abilities and ages to be accommodated in a small school. Although I cannot imagine that many if any of us would be attracted by this curriculum or its delivery, it is fair to say that the school has succeeded in attracting a lot of parents whose previous enthusiasm for Christianity was limited. Perhaps most parents don't care what religious instruction their children receive, so long as it lacks the attributes of a cult.
12. *Bermondsey School* This school was not on our database but it was visited early on in the life of our project because it attracted considerable media coverage as an example of parents making a stand against planners. The school was started in January 2001 for Year 7 children whose parents refused to send their children to a secondary school eight miles away, which had been designated as a failing school, when there were no places available in local schools. A management committee was formed by local MP Simon Hughes, two councillors and other community figures. Funding was received from various trusts and the London Borough of Southwark provided rooms above the public library in Rotherhithe. The management group employed three teachers, but no head. They were initially under the misapprehension that a City Academy would be built in the area immediately. From April 2001, the Council for British Teachers took over the management of the school and committed to providing funding until the end of the year. Caroline Dargon, the project manager was confident that a City Academy would be established in the area in due course but not for some time. However, since City Academies are selective and Bermondsey School was serving under-achieving pupils, she did not know how many of the children currently attending the school would be eligible for a place. Many of the children came from homes where educational aspirations and expectations were low. In many homes there was a suspicion of formal higher education. The parents were

unwilling to pay anything at all. Ms Dargan explained that they had been asked to contribute 1.25p per week towards the cost of a cleaner, but most neglected to do so. The school was dirty when we visited on 15 November 2001. Bermondsey School had at that time a full-time headmaster, three full-time teachers and two part-time teachers. Ms Dargan viewed the school as a feeder back into the mainstream, and felt that for some pupils there was a need for an alternative to large comprehensive schools. The school was currently serving 35 children in Year 8 only. By December 2001 there were no further offers of funding, so CfBT withdrew and the school closed.

Appendix B: Registration procedure for independent schools

NB: This is a brief of existing regulations for registration of independent schools. These will be superseded on or about September 2003. The enabling Education Act is now in the Lords, and copies will be available for the 26 June meeting. Comments on the probable impact of these changes are given at the end of this appendix.

I: Who must register

Any establishment which provides full-time education for five or more pupils age five to sixteen must register with the DfES. There are no legal restrictions at all for organisations which provide tuition or other educational services on a part-time or occasional basis. The Promethean Trust, which provides after-school tuition and INSET provision, has been operating since 1990 without compulsory reference to any statutory body save IR. Our Treasurer is an ex-employee of IR, one of our trustees is a lawyer specialising *inter alia* in charity law, and there are plenty of officials in county hall who would like to see the back of us; were there any such legal obligations we would know about them by now. Although we have been registered with the Charity Commission for four years, registration is an option, rather than a requirement for educational organisations.

It is an offence to conduct an unregistered independent school. The age range of 5-16 in fact includes the term in which a child reaches his 5th birthday, and carries on until the completion of the school year in which the pupil becomes 16.

II: The application

Application must be made within one month of the school's opening. Form 101 requires that the applicant supply details of the following:

1. school's address & phone, as well as those of the proprietor, director, trustees, or chairman of the board of governors (as applicable);
2. numbers of pupils with age and sex, and status (full-time, part-time, boarders);
3. number of pupils with recognised special needs;
4. whether the school admits pupils according to ability or aptitude;
5. date of advice from fire authority;
6. name, age, sex and qualifications of teachers (full or part-time)
7. name, age and sex of ancillary staff
8. name, age and sex of directors or trustees
9. name, age and details of special needs pupils

Upon receipt of form 101, the DfES grants provisional registration, subject to a criminal background check of the proprietor and members of staff.

III: Inspection procedures

The fire authority will visit to determine whether there are adequate means of escape and whether the building meets relevant codes in regards to firedoors, etc. Ofsted will pass judgment on the suitability of premises, staffing and instruction. Boarding schools are subject to separate inspections by the National Care Standards Commission and/or local social services.

Only one of the schools we contacted had any difficulty with the inspection procedure, and they claimed that this was the result of a complaint by a disaffected parent who made false allegations. The suitability of premises will be determined by HMI in accordance with Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999; these are designed to ensure that there is adequate space, toilets, lighting, ventilation etc.

Although there is no set period that must elapse between provisional and final registration, it is expected that it should not exceed two years. Subsequent to final registration, schools can expect Ofsted inspections at least once every six years; schools registered with the Independent Schools Council are inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate.

IV: Special needs pupils

A school which has been granted final registration may opt for approval under Section 347 (1) of the Education Act 1996 if it caters mostly or wholly to special needs pupils. This is only relevant if the school intends to take local authority placements. Although this is an extremely lucrative business and a 'sunrise' industry, and three of the recently-opened schools that contacted us were engaged almost exclusively in it, consideration of this is well outside our brief.

V: Nursery provision

Nurseries which are an integral part of a 5-16 independent schools are exempt from registration requirements with the Ofsted Early Years Directorate. Nursery education carries a mandatory grant, and most of the schools I spoke to took advantage of this to subsidise their fledgling schools operation. It would be awkward for us to offer nursery provision--low-income parents might not appreciate foregoing a grant because of our principles.

VI: Length of school year and day

While these requirements are not "mandatory", independent schools are "expected to follow the guidelines of maintained schools"--i.e., 38 weeks per year, and a minimum of a 2 hour period both morning and afternoon (technically, 380 sessions per year).

VII: Standards for final registration

Standards are expected to be "broadly comparable with those in maintained schools".

Perhaps the most worrying part about the Education Act 1996 is that it "requires parents to cause [their] children to receive efficient full-time education suitable to their ages, abilities and aptitudes. *This requirement takes precedence if it conflicts with other considerations, such as any general parental preference and the particular objectives or style of a school."* (my emph.)

In practice, this means little. Ofsted is not about to raise any kind of a fuss about any school that any of us would be inclined start, especially in view of what passes for an education in so many maintained schools. However, the Act makes it clear that in all cases, the LEA and the DfES reserves the right to determine what children are taught. This could, at some future date, cause problems in the area of sex education--I don't think any of us would have anything to do with a school that taught primary pupils about all manner of sexual activities as though they were 'lifestyle' choices devoid of moral implications or even negative personal outcomes.

It should be noted that secondary schools receive a lot more scrutiny in terms of curriculum. For instance, one school we contacted had problems because they didn't have a science lab.

VIII: The National Curriculum

Although not mandatory, "independent schools have been strongly recommended to take account of its principles".

As repugnant as this may be in principle, there is a good case for considering National Curriculum content. We need to assure parents that their children will not be disadvantaged when they get to secondary school. But this is not really a problem; see the appendix on the Core Knowledge Curriculum.

IX: Qualification of teaching staff

According to the DfES, "Teachers in independent schools do not have to be formally qualified, but the Secretary of State will expect at least some of them to have either the appropriate qualifications or relevant experience". Most independent schools do employ 'qualified' teachers, although specialist teachers frequently lack a teaching certificate. The recently-formed schools overwhelmingly employed qualified teachers, but this is hardly surprising considering that most of them were started by teachers.

Unfortunately, even the most traditionally-minded teachers pick up an enormous amount of progressive baggage when they go through teacher training. The Promethean Trust will not, as a matter of policy, employ qualified teachers to work with dyslexic children. On three occasions when we have run training courses that included qualified teachers, we found that they could not let go of all the whole-language dogma they had absorbed. Against this, we have to weigh parental expectations, and the possibility of negative publicity.

In the long run, we should develop in-service training programmes to train our own teachers and, with luck, help them get a qualification of some description.

X: Other regulations

1. Independent schools must keep a register of admissions and attendance, and these must be available for inspection by HMI. Schools must report irregular attendance to the LEA.
2. Certain changes (ie, school name or address, proprietor or head, closure of school) must be reported to the DfES within one month.
3. Annual Schools Census must be completed each January.
4. Schools must provide truancy rates and exam results for publication (this latter is mystifying, since schools are not required to administer exams).
5. Schools must carry out List 99 checks on all employees. Criminal Background checks are strongly recommended.
6. Schools must report all personnel discharged for misconduct.

XI: Probable impact of changes in registration procedure

The main changes expected from the pending legislation are that independent schools will be required to satisfy Ofsted of the suitability of premises, curriculum and staffing arrangements *before* they begin operations, and that they will have to pay for the privilege of being inspected by Ofsted. Elizabeth Brass, the DfES official in charge, claims that it would be "inappropriate" for her to comment on what criteria will be used in regard to the former. We can be reasonably certain that the Secretary of State (in fact the civil servants in relevant areas) will have fairly wide discretion as to what they will be and how they will be enforced. For schools with under 100 pupils, the charge mooted for Ofsted inspections is £2,000; however Ms Brass clearly favours a sliding scale based upon the number of pupils. This charge will only apply to the inspections which normally occur at 6 year intervals, and they will not apply to re-inspections.

This legislation has been drafted in consultation with independent schools, and it is clear that they are, so to speak, in favour of pulling up the drawbridge. However, I do not think we need be unduly concerned, providing we are prepared, and providing that we have a sound business plan. There will be a certain amount of expense involved, but this is unlikely to major in relation to the cost of the entire project. There will almost certainly be considerable delays that will have to be allowed for--unless we are able to get a school into operation before the legislation comes into effect.

Appendix C: Results of Norfolk Market Research 2000

What kind of schools do parents want?
A summary of market research carried out in Norfolk in June, 2000

A questionnaire designed by The Promethean Trust was sent out to 2,000 Norfolk parents by Map Intelligence of Norwich. Information supplied by respondents showed that the database used was at least two years out of date, so it is very difficult to determine how many of the intended recipients had moved. Map intelligence analysed 201 responses, and a further 35 questionnaires were received subsequent to this. A response rate of 12% is extremely high for postal surveys, and with an up-to-date database it would no doubt have been somewhat higher. In all, this indicates a very high level of concern about schools. 74% of all respondents indicated that they would send their child to an independent school if they could afford the fees--and a further 11% already had their children in private schools or intended to do so.

Postal surveys elicit a self-selected sample, and this must be borne in mind in interpreting the results. One could reasonably expect that parents who took the trouble to respond would be among those who are more concerned about education, and quite possibly among those who are most disaffected. On the other hand, Norfolk's schools are fairly average, in terms of exam results, and compared to schools in large urban centres they are quite safe physically. Also, Norfolk people are notoriously deferential, and they tend to accept whatever fate the authorities decree.

Although the postcodes surveyed represented a reasonable mix of urban, suburban and rural homes in and around Norwich, it would be unwise to extrapolate the results of this survey to all areas of Britain, and most especially to London. Almost half of the respondents reported that their total household income was <£20,000, and only 10% claimed family income in excess of £40,000. However, the concerns expressed by parents who responded to this survey are probably not atypical.
Our survey had two purposes. At one level, we genuinely wanted to find out what parents wanted in an independent school. On some questions, such as how far parents were prepared to travel, or whether they wanted hot lunches, we were totally agnostic. On the other hand, we had no intention of compromising our views on many questions, such as the nature of the core curriculum or on discipline. If we differed from a substantial percentage of parents on any aspect of these issues, we had to think how we could address this dissonance both in our publicity and in our dealings with parents. On some issues, we were willing to compromise. Although I would prefer a school which allowed parents to opt for religious instruction in their own faith, only 14% of our respondents opted for this. 80% thought that children should be taught about all faiths, and left to make their own decisions. Presumably, few of this 80% would object if the first option were an alternative for parents with firm religious convictions.

I have included my comments on the responses to most questions, and many of these are based upon views which are contentious (to say the least). I make no apology for propounding these views--they are offered in hope that they will stimulate debate, rather than to pronounce definitively on any given issue. They are all issues that we will have to think about.

We might also want to look at the 2001 MORI survey on parental attitudes to independent schools, which costs £30. I am not sure how useful it would be, and I suspect that for now, this brief will tell us as much as we need to know on the subject.

1. How do you rate the state schools in Norwich?
Overall, schools got a C+ rating. Only 1% gave them an 'A'. Interestingly, parents rated their local schools much higher--especially primary schools, which earned a B. Local high schools rated a B- . Parents may be loath to criticise their own schools because a parent who knowingly sends their child to a poor school has got a case to answer.

2. What are parents' main concerns about their primary schools?
The four main areas of parental concern are:

1. Failure to work with parents
2. Poor preparation for high school
3. Preventing bullying
4. Spelling standards

3. Attitudes to independent schools
Only 1% of the sample ticked "Independent schools have no place in a democratic society". The absence of David Sparts in Norfolk should come as no surprise; even those who didn't like the idea of independent schools believed that parents should have the right to send their children to them. Only 15% ticked "I would never send my child to an independent school".

The level of fees was clearly an important factor. If tuition were £600 per term, 64% would be "more inclined" to enrol their child, whereas only 16% would be "less inclined".

4. Basic skills
Progressive nostrums found the least support when it came to reading and maths. 78% agreed that "A school should guarantee that all children--even dyslexics--learn to read and spell", and only 18% thought that "children will learn to read when they are ready, and it's wrong to force them". In maths, 84% agreed that "children should learn basic maths without a calculator". An interesting pattern emerged: low-income respondents had the most traditional attitudes about reading, and high earners were most dubious about calculators.

None of this poses a problem for any school any of us might wish to start. Even the 18% who thought that children shouldn't be taught to read until they are ready would be most unlikely to object if their own child was actually taught how to read.

5. Information technology
Only 2% of the respondents took the Luddite view that children spend too much time in front of a VDU already. 39% felt that "IT skills are so important in today's world that they should be taught from the beginning", and 62% took the more moderate

stance that computers should only be introduced after pupils had the knowledge to use them intelligently.

Alas, the Luddites are right. In nearly all subjects, information technology is the enemy of good schooling; John Clare (in the *Telegraph*) and James Dellingpole (in the *Spectator*) have written devastating accounts of computer sessions in real, existing schools. Pupils stay on task only for so long as the teacher is giving them individual help. Every single bit of evidence that IT works wonders in schools comes from the people who are peddling the software and/or hardware. This topic will be considered elsewhere, but it is well to bear in mind what the public wants.

6. Science
Here the progressives have it all their own way. 89% favour a 'hands-on' approach to learning about science. Anyone who has ever witnessed the mind-numbing triviality of primary school science projects will weep.

7. Foreign languages
74% are in favour of teaching a foreign language. I suspect that the 20% who thought that they "should not distract from more important subjects" were thinking about their child's problems learning to read and write in English. While it may be very desirable for primary schools to offer foreign language(s), we should bear in mind that finding good teachers is nearly impossible--commercial language schools are the only hope.

8. Discipline
The good news is that 64% of our respondents ticked "All children are happiest when they have strict rules that are constantly, sympathetically and fairly enforced", and only 4% opted for "Strictly enforcing rules stifles creativity and makes children sullen and resentful".

The bad news is that 38% ticked "Each child is different and a teacher should make allowances for individual needs and personalities". It would appear that moral relativism has made substantial inroads, even in Norfolk; however this was one of the few items where there was a striking difference between rural and urban postcodes.

Regardless of one's own views on morality, mere utilitarian considerations dictate the strict rule option. Otherwise, schools get bogged down in endless debate on rules and enforcement. In practice, nearly all parents will support good discipline, even if they pay lip service to relativist doctrine.

9. Homework
I was surprised to find that as many as 17% of our respondents supported my personal view that "Children should be able to learn all they need during school hours". In the distant days of my youth in the USA, homework for primary pupils was unheard of. We still learned a fair bit during school hours, even though my dominant memory is watching the hands of the clock make their agonisingly slow circuit. It has not got better since.

The majority view (84%) was that "Regular homework teaches children good study habits and responsibility". This is the triumph of hope over experience. These days,

most homework assignments are either done by parents, or downloaded from educational software--all that children are really learning is how to avoid disagreeable chores through manipulation or dishonesty. I have yet to meet a parent who could honestly state that their own child had developed a love of learning from his or her homework. These assignments are a logical extension of the belief that the child (and not the school) is responsible for learning. They are a source of constant friction between parent and child, and I have not the slightest doubt but that most of that 84% would secretly--if somewhat guiltily--welcome a severe curtailment of the current mania for busywork. (end of diatribe.)

10. Teaching methods
Only half of our sample opted for the didactic option. Considering the large majorities who believe that basic skills must be taught, it would appear that many parents simply do not realise that 'child-centred' pedagogy produces very little learning.

11. Religion
Only 14% agreed that "A school should allow all children to have religious instruction in their own faith". 80% thought that "Children should be taught about all religions and left to make their own decisions". 6% felt that "Religious instruction has no place in schools".

Paradoxically, religion sells schools; of that there can be no doubt. While the most obvious explanation is that religious schools have a better academic record, parents feel that their children are safer from bullying, drugs, and moral perversion. It is also likely that some parents regret losing their faith (or having none), and hope their children will pick some up in the bargain.

12. Parental involvement
Most parents (56%) were happy to assist in school on a voluntary or paid basis, but 31% claimed to be too busy to assist, even with after-school activities.

13. The school run
When asked how far they would be willing to travel to get their children in the school of their choice, no consistent pattern emerged. 22% did not answer. 19% would go no further than 3 miles, yet 14% were prepared to travel more than 10 miles. Bussing and car-pool schemes found favour with most respondents. Of course, travelling times in the Norwich area are less than in most urban areas, mostly because population density is fairly low. It would be unwise to generalise from these findings.

14. School dinners

71% were prepared to pay for hot lunches.

15. After-school clubs

80% were in favour, and only 6% against. Clearly, this is a big selling point--especially with families where both parents work. 43% were prepared to assist in running an after-school club.

16. Special needs

One of the big surprises of this survey was that only 10% suspected that their child might have a tendency towards dyslexia. National Curriculum tests indicate that between 25% and 30% of all pupils are seriously behind in reading, and a recent Manchester study indicates that this probably understates the problem. Very few parents of these pupils are unaware of their children's literacy problems. The hereditary element of dyslexia might explain our returns; parents who themselves have marginal literacy skills no doubt bin any survey that comes in the post.

Summary:

This survey was commissioned with a view to starting an independent school with the widest possible appeal. A school which is aimed at a particular constituency (ie, a certain religious group, or homeschoolers) would not necessarily find it useful.

Had we been in a position to go ahead, the survey would indeed have given us useful information as to what parents want. This is not to say that we would have done things which we are against, but it would help in the presentation. For instance, many parents were keen on computers, and most were keen on homework--both things which I regard as unnecessary distractions in primary school. Rather than buying a lot of expensive computers that would sit around idle as they rapidly became obsolete, we would have killed two birds with one stone by having optional homework assignments whereby the unfortunate pupil had to learn how to use his dad's computer at home--or by making it an after-school activity.

Reading between the lines, I suspect that about 15% to 20% of our respondents were true believers in the great progressive experiment, and it would be a waste time trying to accommodate them. Factoring their replies out, we are still left with a fair amount of prejudice in favour of certain questionable educational fads. I doubt that these are much to worry about.

One question that I did not dare ask was whether parents were in favour of PHSE. I firmly believe that this has no place in any school, let alone primary school. Unfortunately, I suspect that many if not most parents would disagree. PHSE is a minefield--if you don't teach gay rights, you will be pilloried (as certain Sussex schools have recently discovered). I believe the safest option is to leave the subject strictly alone.

I do not expect that all members of the committee will share my prejudices, but I trust that the results of this survey will be of interest.

Appendix D: The Core Knowledge Curriculum

(Extracts from an article which appeared in the June 2002 *Salisbury Review*)

CORE KNOWLEDGE AND THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM:

A Conservative Plan For "Inclusion"
by

Tom Burkard and Dennis O'Keeffe

Introduction

It is widely recognised today that our educational arrangements are in crisis. The crisis is not new. There has been an obvious problem of mass illiteracy and innumeracy for decades. More dramatic than this is the crisis of intellectual confidence that has overtaken us since the 1970s. This crisis is identifiable in the bitter dialectic which has characterised the stark contrasts between intellectual and cultural traditions. The central questions are easily identified. Is there such a thing as superior art or culture? Is the idea of a worthwhile national, intellectual tradition compelling? Above all, is there a moral life potentially uniting all the members of society, a moral life which our educational arrangements should strive to transmit to the young?

To our grandparents any answer save "yes" to these questions would have seemed absurd. Yet we will argue that the ascendancy among key educational decision-makers today supplies negative answers to all three questions. In other words, we now languish under the doctrines of Post- Modernism. These are apparent we will show, in the National Curriculum itself. There is a determination to build negative answers to our three questions into the very fabric of our national life. No, there are no superior cultural achievements, no valid intellectual hierarchies, no universal or binding moral tradition.

We are not alleging that our post-modern National Curriculum is undisputed. There are many men and women, highly educated or otherwise, who would still answer our three questions positively. As we shall see, however, the nays have the upper hand.

Unfortunately, moreover, alongside Post-Modernism and Cultural Relativism, there sits in the National Curriculum and the rest of our current educational practice, another, opposite error, but one just as deadly. This is scientism, the belief that human affairs are comprehensively amenable to scientific management, that there exists a kind of "science" of politics and social administration, such that the problems of mankind can be ironed out or planned away. The very idea that we can have a successful "National Curriculum" is one glaring manifestation of this error as we shall see. The other is the vast solecism of the contemporary "Special Needs" industry.

The scientism of the National Curriculum presupposes that we can identify with precision the curricular needs of the whole population, and minister to them in codified form, with detailed, centrally planned arrangements. The second, Special Needs error, is the belief that we can successfully identify and compensate for the deficits with regard to successful learning, which characterise the whole school population.

Finally, alongside the scientistic errors, we now have a new and burgeoning error in educational administration: blind improvisation. Successive Conservative and Labour administrations having failed to deliver the curricular goods on the basis of our present monopolistic educational organisation and its excessive reliance on public finance, are now beginning to imitate the Americans, and call in private ways and works from business and commerce, to get us out of our socialist educational doldrums. As we shall see, these improvisations cannot work on their own. What is needed is a restoration of the key philosophical assumptions of our traditional educational life. We will be advocating the "Core Knowledge" Programme with which Prof. E. D. Hirsch is striving to revitalise American education.

I. The Error of Conservatives who do not Conserve

Those who argue that the Conservative Party must "move with the times" if it is to become electable lend credibility to the thesis that the Tories are the "stupid party." Indeed these politicians must be very stupid to think that Tory voters have the slightest concern for their personal ambitions. They will not turn out to vote for Blairites with blue rosettes. Conservatives would, however, do well to ponder long and hard New Labour's rhetoric about building an "inclusive" Britain. As with most New Labour ideas, this was stolen from a Tory-in this case, Benjamin Disraeli. And as always with the current administration, the rhetoric serves only to disguise the reality.

For example, the right of headteachers to exclude unruly pupils has been severely curtailed. What did Blair and Blunkett accomplish with this gesture of "inclusion"? They undermined what little authority heads and teachers have left. They gave a clear signal to pupils that they can get away with anything-at the same time as patronising them with the message that they constitute a kind of *untermenchen*, that is to say that they are not responsible and moral beings. They thrust these pupils back into schools where they have almost no chance of improving themselves. In consequence, everyone else suffers. After spending all their energy controlling these young people, some of whom are junior psychopaths, instead of pursuing their vocation, teaching, teachers quit or have nervous breakdowns. Well adjusted pupils suffer greatly, learning little in lessons which are continually disrupted.

Now the most amazing result of this monumental folly has been to unite teaching unions and Tories on the question. The teacher shortage has become so acute that many inner-city schools are hovering dangerously near enforced closure. Of course, the schools that are most severely affected are those serving the poorest areas. Blair's policy of social inclusion is having exactly the opposite effect to what was intended. Not being satisfied with denying poor children escape routes by abolishing grammar schools and the assisted places scheme, Labour has now turned many of their schools into institutions which deserve the name bestowed upon them by their inmates. On

our council estates, schools are routinely referred to as "prison."

Yet the ideal of "One Nation" is a noble one, however much the term may have been debased and perverted by the Tory left. You do not create one nation, however, by throwing unmonitored money at the poor and sprouting politically correct platitudes, while at the same time denying people the means to better themselves. For instance, the sale of council houses was one of the most successful Tory policies because it liberated tenants from a mutually unprofitable serfdom. The individual's inclusion in society is not defined so much by what he gets out of it, as by what he puts into it; and for those who attend schools which breed cynicism by their failure to teach so much as the three Rs, opportunities to become productive members of society are greatly diminished.

Two decades of education reform have produced few tangible benefits. Whatever the trend in exam results, university lecturers are unanimous in reporting a precipitous drop in A-level standards. In recent years, for example, a pass grade in A level English does not, as one of the authors can testify, signify the ability to use full stops correctly, let alone proficiency in the use of the possessive apostrophe. Even if there were a highly competent teaching force in teacher education, which there is not, progress is made obstructed by the established interest groups. It is extraordinarily difficult for politicians to implement positive change, because the main obstacle to reform is the civil service itself and the rest of the educational establishment.

One Labour response to this problem is the introduction of more Private Financial Initiatives (PFIs) and Private/Public Partnerships (PPPs) to manage failing schools. This is doomed - the very last thing our schools need is more "management.". In the last 30 years US businesses have contributed vast amounts of management expertise (and money) trying to prop up state schools, and it has not worked. A glance at the financial pages of any newspaper is instructive - the private sector is just as capable of mismanagement as is the state sector. Without the control of markets (or a very strong ethos of service), all enterprises degenerate into empire-building. The long and dismal history of defence procurement from Pepys the to present demonstrates the inherently corrupting nature of the arrangements that Labour is promoting. Unfortunately, the Government's determination to abolish the forces of conservatism is matched by its ignorance of the past.

II. The Question of Markets in Education

In a previous paper, we argued that structural reform in education can succeed only to the extent that it allows parents to choose freely in an educational market where barriers to entry are removed. We cautioned that markets alone cannot produce good schools-these can be supplied only by schoolteachers who have the judgement to understand what a good education is, and the ability to deliver it. Central to this is the definition of what should be taught, or the curriculum.

IV. Post-Modernism and the National Curriculum

Nonetheless, the ultimate problem in education will always remain the curriculum. Our National Curriculum bears an uncanny resemblance to parallel instruments adopted by the 48 US states that dictate what is to be taught to children. The post-modern project is disguised by a thin veneer of "traditional" subject matter, which itself is fragmented in such a manner as to deny the pupil an understanding of the

deeper structures of knowledge. To show how this confidence trick has been pulled, consider some examples from Key Stage 3 History. At first, we are reassured to see that our 11-14 year-olds are now taught a familiar outline of British history from 1066 to present (pre-Norman history is covered in primary school). It contains familiar dates and events. Pupils read short extracts from original sources, and evaluate them- all very reassuring. What we do not realise is that there is little need for any factual knowledge to be retained; in examinations, the pupil will be required only to "evaluate" similar sources. And when we look more closely, we realise how selective the topics are. In Study Unit 3, Britain from 1750-c.1900, they include:

a. Factory life and reform
b. The struggle for public health reform
c. Parliamentary Reform, 1832
d. Chartism
e. Violent protests
f. Skilled workers and industrial change
g. Poverty and politics, 1880-1910
h. Farmers and foreigners
i. Slower industrial growth and economic decline
j. An African empire, 1880-1902
k. Religious change and social reform

What is conspicuously lacking is any appreciation of how and why a small and rather damp island created a revolution which transformed the world. You may rest assured that our pupils will gain no understanding of the thinkers who and ideas which laid the foundations of liberalism; John Locke is mentioned only once, to denounce him as a hypocrite for condemning slavery whilst holding shares in the Royal African Company. You will look in vain for an understanding of how the creation of an independent judiciary created security of property unknown elsewhere in Europe, which in turn acted as a magnet for capital and enterprise. The development of the constitution is barely mentioned; pupils learn nothing of the political debates of the 17th century, which created our system of checks and balances—which New Labour is now unravelling with indecent haste. Instead, no opportunity is lost to portray the darker side of our past- great care is taken to create the impression that there was something uniquely evil about our ancestors. In the welter of extracts demonstrating how the wealth of Britain was built on the cruel exploitation of slaves, our pupils lose sight of the fact that slavery was and is endemic in Africa, and that Britain was the first nation to outlaw slavery and the slave trade.

In short, these documents go as far down the road to denying the validity of our European cultural and intellectual heritage as is politically possible. In reaction to the American equivalent of this kulturkampf, the Core Knowledge Foundation devised an alternate curriculum which is designed to be acceptable to all races and cultures in the US - as well as to serious scholars concerned for the survival of their disciplines. It reflects the realities of American cultural history - a core of ideas, traditions and beliefs from the British Isles which has evolved in constant contact with each new wave of immigrants. It restores structural integrity to academic disciplines. Despite strenuous attempts by Politically - Correct educators to brand the Core Knowledge Curriculum as "right-wing", it has now been adopted by 1400 primary schools, or about 1 ½ % of all US primaries. In 1990 there was only one Core Knowledge school;

this phenomenal growth has been due in equal measure to the enthusiasm of teachers and of parents - in no case has it been imposed by law.

V. The National Curriculum is Unviable

The dichotomy between freedom and state control has been with us since the days of Athens and Sparta. Our National Curriculum, for all the lip service it pays to individual freedom, is Spartan in concept and content. It is one of the principal instruments by which the "forces of conservatism" are to be abolished. The process by which a Conservative Government was gulled into signing a cultural suicide note was brilliantly documented by Melanie Phillips in All Must Have Prizes. Since it was published in 1997 it has failed to spark a serious debate on the National Curriculum.

There are many factors which could account for this silence. The National Curriculum had long been touted as a return to academic rigour, and the initial opposition of teaching unions lent a certain credence to this delusion. Once committed to the National Curriculum, the Conservative Government was all but powerless to stop it, even as it became obvious that civil servants had seized the opportunity to further their own agenda. The original bedding-in period prior to the publication of All Must Have Prizes had been very difficult; the panicked retreat from a grossly over-ambitious launch gave teachers legitimate cause to think that lunatics were minding the shop. Once an acceptable compromise had been reached, some teachers came to see the advantages of a National Curriculum. After absorbing an enormous amount of abuse in the press as a result of the disastrous rule of our educational "Red Guards" in the 80s, some teachers began to appreciate the advantage of no longer bearing the responsibility for the curriculum. During the first Blair administration, David Blunkett skilfully maintained the pretence that Labour's reforms were working, which stifled consideration of the problems that were all too obvious to teachers.

In fact, however, there are no circumstances in which the National Curriculum could work in a way satisfactory to an open and free society. The whole project belongs to the error which Hayekians call "constructivism," the doctrine that there are no blocks on our constituting reality the way we decide.

In fact there are many impediments. To make a national curriculum the matrix of a nation’s intellectual life is to assume that we can in detail know what the population's intellectual, cultural and pedagogic preferences are. The public's preferences in this regard are in fact, vast and extraordinarily varied, as well as unstable and changing from day to day. Even if the preferential mosaic were less complex, we could not know it. We have no way of establishing so complex a mix. The belief that a pre-emptive bureaucratic stylisation could minister to all of it is the purest moonshine. What you get is supply-led determination of the curriculum, with all the ideologies of the moment -- those of race, sex, class, multiculture, childhood progressivism etc. You do not get a clear, overall picture of what the Wayward Elite want. But you do get the essence of the Hampstead world view.

VI. Conservatives should Now drop the National Curriculum

Circumstances have now changed again. Sir Michael Barber, the influential head of the Standards and Effectiveness Unit at the DES, is planning to strip out much of the remaining content of the National Curriculum and replace this with a module on "critical thinking skills"-as though there were not sufficient emphasis on this dubious

notion in each and every subject area already. The Conservative Party can now disown this dreadful cuckoo without loss of face, but without a constructive alternative they will not be able to make headway on the issue. Teachers have become so accustomed to teaching as they are told to teach that the National Curriculum will retain an enormous pre- emptive force simply because it is there. With Blunkett's departure to the Home Office, the press has suddenly discovered that the relentless decline of British education has not even been checked, let alone reversed. With the Government so exposed, a serious debate on the curriculum is now possible.

Our position is that no curriculum should be imposed by the state. We adhere firmly to the Athenian side of the equation, because we believe that state control can be justified only from arguments of necessity. But we still believe that nations cohere by virtue of shared values and culture. The operative word is "shared." You cannot secure this by compulsion. Compulsory sharing is an oxymoron. It works no better with culture than it does with property. Even if were we in a position to impose a curriculum which reflected our values, and the values that we believe are shared by the majority of Britons of all races, we would decline to do so. Inevitably it would be rejected by many, especially those who currently dictate policy in the DES, the QCA and education quango-land. It would be rejected by the grandchildren of Orwell's sandal-wearing, fruit juice-drinking socialists. It would be fiercely opposed by all those who believe that intellectual freedom is incompatible with "social justice," and by those who have arrogated to themselves the right to decide what thoughts are unacceptable.

VII. The Core Curriculum: A Conservative Way Forward, though not in the Party Sense.

It would be just as wrong for us to tell them how their children should be educated as it is for them to tell us about ours. We say this even though their beliefs are actually incompatible with real justice-to say nothing of the principle of inclusion. Looking dispassionately at real, existing schools one cannot help but notice that current arrangements exacerbate social differences and work to the extreme disadvantage of the very people who are supposedly the objects of our educators' concerns-as the material situation of the underclass improves through ever more generous benefits, their isolation and moral corruption proceeds to worsen. This is a system of bribery, a kind of Danegeld for the lumpen proletariat as we pay them, so to speak, to stay out of sight.

Much of the problem stems from the assumption of educators that children raised on sink estates are all-but-uneducable. The old socialist belief that "education cannot compensate for society" still holds sway; it is, after all, a convenient excuse for schools that fail. In consequence, the National Curriculum has been stripped of more challenging material so that it will be more "accessible." Thus children who are least likely to receive intellectual stimulation and instruction at home get very little in school either.

Unlike the reform of special needs provision, the creation of a Core Knowledge Curriculum for Britain could not and should not become a Conservative Party issue. As a matter of official policy, no school should be forced to adopt any curriculum. We need not fear a return to the little red schoolhouses of the 70s and 80s; we forget that

school choice was all but non-existent then. These days, a Maoist head would empty a school more quickly than an Aids epidemic in the staffroom. For the last twenty years we have tried to enforce standards from above, and it is time we faced the obvious truth that these efforts have been counter-productive. They can never work, no more than any Stalinist command-and-control structure can work. We have merely empowered the worst elements in the educational profession and driven the best teachers out of it.

On the other hand, it is imperative that conservatives (with the small "c") make common cause with people from all parties who fear for our intellectual and cultural heritage-to say nothing of the tattered remainder of our liberties, now under full-scale assault from New Labour. In the US, the Core Knowledge Curriculum was determined by a consensus of serious scholars and teachers representing all a wide range of cultural interests. By capitalising on popular discontent with standards of literacy and numeracy, they have outflanked the forces of post-modern political correctness. Although there is much in the US Core Knowledge curriculum which can be imported to the UK more or less intact, it is urgent that scholars begin to think about standards in subjects such as History and English, where an American syllabus is not of much use. Schools in the state sector would be slow to adopt a Core Knowledge-type curriculum, but interest in the private sector could be generated by encouraging their participation in its design.

Designing a new curriculum is a daunting task, even if we draw upon the work of the American Core Knowledge Foundation. Its credibility will depend upon those who can be persuaded to contribute their time and expertise. It will require money. But we should reflect that unless we address the task, the eventual outcome of the culture war will be decided by default.

Appendix E: Acquisition of Premises

James Cave, a Cambridge graduate student, spent two weeks in June 2002 trying to identify an area which would support an inexpensive independent school, and to locate suitable premises. As it is unlikely that other essential problems-- staff and financing-- could be resolved before 2003, no attempt was made to view premises which are currently available.

The boroughs of Southwark, Lambeth, and Hammersmith & Fulham were chosen for these enquiries because of their proximity to the Civitas offices next to Waterloo Station, and because their populations include a range of low-income to affluent residents. It may prove that other areas will offer better possibilities, but the current study provides a framework against which this can be judged. Data from government and research websites can provide a quick reference for future enquiries in other areas.

Demographics--In the first instance, it should be noted that most primary school pupils live near their schools. Although parents are increasingly willing to drive some distance to find a 'safe' school, most planning policies favour developments which benefit local residents. Hence, one of our main considerations in choice of location must be the presence of parents with incomes sufficient to pay school fees of at least £3,000. All three boroughs considered have unemployment rates of about twice the national average, so it is highly unlikely that we would have any difficulty in finding adequate numbers of pupils to fulfil the school's charitable mission.

On the basis of demographic data available, James Cave determined that Southwark is the most suitable of the three boroughs considered. It has the highest proportion of residents with incomes in the range between £16,000 and £48,000, and it has a much larger school-age population than Hammersmith and Fulham. Lambeth, on the other hand, has higher percentages of very poor and very wealthy residents. It also has the highest percentage of wage-earners employed in the public sector. The Promethean Trust, which is a private educational charity, very seldom gets enquiries from parents who work in the public sector.

Existing schools--The quality of existing schools is also a key factor in determining potential demand. State schools in Southwark and Lambeth are recognised by the Government to be 'failing', whereas Hammersmith & Fulham schools generally perform better. Such good schools as can be found in the former two boroughs are generally well over-subscribed.

It is difficult to identify independent schools which do not belong to the ISC, but three prep schools were found in Lambeth, three in Southwark, and six in Hammersmith and Fulham. The Lambeth schools were the cheapest; one (Oakfield Prep School) charges £1505 per term. Southwark had the most expensive (and prestigious) schools, Dulwich and Alleyn's. All these schools were selective and over-subscribed.

Planning permission-- Obtaining a change of use to D1 (the category which includes churches, clinics, nurseries, museums and educational establishments) is contingent upon a number of factors, which will vary from one borough to the next. All local

authorities now must draw up a Uniform Development Plan (UDP) which co-ordinates planning policy with other local authority matters such as education, transportation, roads, etc. The existing Southwark UDP, which is under revision, contains these criteria for judging applications for change of use to school premises:

> Planning permission will normally be granted for new health, social and educational facilities, whether proposed by the Council, Area Health Authorities, the private sector or voluntary sector, provided that they meet the following criteria:
> (i) it can be shown that the proposal would directly benefit disadvantaged groups in Southwark,
> (ii) there would be no significant loss of amenity to nearby occupiers;
> (iii) the proposal would not conflict with any other plan policy;
> (iv) that where appropriate, provisions are made to ensure that the facility can be used by all members of the community (for example there is access for people with disabilities and child care facilities are provided);
> (v) the proposal should normally be located within close proximity to the area it is intended to serve;
> (vi) the proposal meets Social Services or Education standards where appropriate.
>
> **Reason**:
>
> 4.17 Health, social and educational facilities provided by the Health Authorities and the Council, or by the voluntary and private sectors should benefit all Southwark's residents, be well located with respect to their users and clients, and be accessible to all members of the community, particularly people with mobility difficulties or disabilities.
>
> (Source: Southwark LB UDP (1997), available on the Southwark LB website)

The most prominent consideration is adequate car access so that parents do not unduly inconvenience local residents. Councils are also unlikely to approve change of use from residential or high-street retail.

Potential premises-- James Cave concludes that office space, which is available for let at costs within the scope of our projected fees, should only be considered if all else fails. He points out, quite rightly, that the time that it would take to process an application for change of use would introduce an element of uncertainty to the project that would probably be unacceptable to parents and staff who have to make hard choices. Vacant institutional premises are hard to come by and likely to be expensive.

He concludes that our best option is to investigate letting from existing educational institutions, and more specifically colleges of further education. I quote his report:

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> Many of the large FE and Adult Colleges in London have to maintain very large properties, often divided over a number of sites, because they cater for an enormous number of students. They often operate with vast overheads, and may welcome some financial support, however limited. Many of them already let space to other organisations. In some cases, this might also provide a way of attracting potential parents. Many of the larger colleges already provide day-care and in some cases schooling facilities for the children of students; and although, in maintaining strict independence, CIVITAS would not wish their school to become this kind of facility, it may be the case that some college-users might be attracted to our project. In addition, being based within an already reputable institution may make the project more attractive to potential parents.

A number of potential colleges are identified, including Morley College in

Westminster Bridge Road. The report concludes with the recommendation that a carefully drafted timescale be made to co-ordinate all of the variables (finance, staffing, pupils and premises) which are, unfortunately, somewhat inter-dependent. As soon as possible, work should begin on a business plan; this will serve to concentrate attention on the matters essential to the success of the enterprise.