

I write as Head of Ford Secondary School, a position I am pleased and proud to hold.

Ford School is situated in Auckland Road, off Wolseley Road, and takes pupils from North Prospect, Keyham and Ford. We have approximately 450 on roll and a staff of 24.8.

I became Head at Ford in April, 1982, following a career which started in 1962 and having served in secondary moderns, 1962-67, and comprehensive schools, 1967-82.

My views are based on the role Ford plays in education in Plymouth, not only in the present, but the past and future, and are a personal statement. They are not necessarily the views of the County's Officers or the School Governors.

"I BELIEVE THERE IS NO LIMIT TO THAT WHICH CHILDREN CAN ACHIEVE."

Education should therefore be a process which sets no limits. Children should be encouraged and stimulated to be constantly stretching for and reaching new horizons.

I will not have in my school the attitude "They are only ...". "What can you expect from ...", "There is no point in ..."

(happily I do not get it!)

To this end children should work in as bright and lively surroundings as possible and their tasks should be interesting and the encouragement must be constant.

In addition there must be a wide variety of contexts: social, cultural and sporting, for the pupils to partake. Education is not confined to the classroom and this is all part of widening the pupils' experiences and extending their horizons.

For the above conditions to exist, we need to look at schools themselves, and in Devon I find a contrast. The county area possesses such schools, Tavistock, Ivybridge, Totnes, and in fact all the Devon towns possess lively, evolving comprehensive schools that are to everyone's credit. Plymouth is different.

The system within the City can at best be described as MIXED, for within the City boundaries there are grammar schools, comprehensives and secondary moderns. Certainly the comprehensives being developed in Southway, Estover, Eggbuckland and Lipson are going to be fine schools, and certainly there is a plan before Sir Keith Joseph to reorganise West Plymouth, but it is all too late.

For too long in Plymouth, and in West Plymouth in particular, pupils have been denied the educational opportunities and experiences they could obtain elsewhere in the county.

Small, ill equipped secondary moderns, short of basic facilities and unable to staff a valid curriculum, have been the pattern for too long in much of this City. Valiant efforts by dedicated staff have been unable to overcome these basic handicaps. This means that far too many of our young people have been denied the environment in which to develop and use their abilities to the full.

I remember my interview for Ford. Seven of us appeared - identi-kit candidates from up-country comprehensive schools. Five withdrew on seeing what was a surprise for us all. I stayed, encouraged by the prospect of two extra staff and new Science laboratories, but why did Ford have to wait that long for basic facilities? It was, after all, 1982!

We were able to broaden the curriculum by introducing French, Computer Studies, Physics, Outdoor Pursuits and Sports Science, and have been able to increase the range of our examinations, but all this could have been done before - many years before.

West Plymouth is still without a comprehensive school. Children can gain entry to one by travelling, but not all parents see the wisdom or need for this.

We do our best for our pupils, but are hampered by no on-site playing fields. We did use the ones at Trelawny School - they are now built on. The fields at North Down are uneven, unsuitable for athletes, and have no changing rooms.

Our solitary gymnasium is also the Assembly Hall and Drama area. Falling rolls have meant staff cuts and the struggle to maintain an adequate curriculum is an intense one.

It cannot be stressed too strongly the unfair handicaps that West Plymouth children suffer. For that reason I welcome the plan now awaiting ministry decisions. It will mean that my school, and therefore my job, will vanish, but it will go some way towards alleviating the inequality of opportunity that currently exists.

It is, of course, too late. One hears horror stories of debate and rejection of seventeen other plans. It says little for our city fathers and their professional advisors that the years of debate were so unproductive and

harming to our young people.

The current administrators are to be congratulated for grasping the nettle. I hope the Ministry do not discover flaws in the plan, and am more worried by some school Governors' and Councillors' fears that the scheme is to be done on the cheap. Inequality of opportunity has for too long existed in this city and must be eradicated.

By the end of the decade I would like to think that all Plymouth children have the same opportunities, and the North Prospect, St. Budeaux, Ford, Keyham, Stoke and Devonport areas are not penalized as they are now.

Education is a life enhancing experience, helping us to extend our range and choice of activities, whether they be work or leisure, and it is only fair that the best of chances are available to all.

Perhaps the planned comprehensives at Penlee, Kings Tamerton, Devonport and Burrington can make this possible. It is the duty of all those concerned with education in this city to see that they do.