

*Brampton Manor is a large multicultural inner city comprehensive school located in East London.*

*50% of students are entitled to free school meals and a third of the intake arrives with levels of attainment far below the expected level.*

*55 languages are spoken by members of the school community.*

This special edition features Brampton Manor, a secondary school in East London. Five years ago it had failed an Ofsted inspection. This edition records some of the ways they have responded to the challenge of the inspection, and actively pursued creating a school culture that is successful, vibrant and supportive of teachers, students and parents.

My interest in the school arose from my research for a book on supporting teachers sponsored by Teacher Support Network. Interviewing teachers from all over the country, I found that amongst the passion, the enthusiasm and the dedication, there were feelings of despair and powerlessness, feelings that are inevitably transmitted to the young people they teach. There is, in England, a 40% drop out rate of newly qualified teachers after only three years. How can that trend be reversed? Brampton Manor have found answers that have worked for them.

I came across it almost by chance when the school counsellor, Lesley Bond, attended one of my workshops on Spirituality at Work. I asked her if I could visit her school as part of my research and since then I have visited the school over twenty times, facilitated staff and student residentials and have seen for myself what can happen with good leadership and a committed staff.

Most people in the school would acknowledge the role the head teacher, Neil Berry, has played in this turnaround. I had an informative, inspiring interview with him which I have written up as the first article. He shares his ideas about leadership and building on strengths that have contributed to the change in the school culture. By focussing on what could be celebrated, his ideas were very similar to those of Appreciative Inquiry (AI). Lesley Bond details some of the early steps that eventually led to AI becoming more explicitly part of the school culture, and the benefits that resulted. Even when she knew little about it (she is now very skilled and knowledgeable in it) she had the intuition about its potential, and I am grateful to her for hosting early meetings and for her support.

An important milestone in contributing to a change of culture was the decision to take away staff and students together on a residential using Appreciative Inquiry as a way forward. This was ground breaking and not without risk. Paul Howard, a parent governor,

and two of the students describe their experiences and how much trust could develop in this setting.

Another approach that was used very effectively was a Values Assessment, devised by Cultural Transformation Tools. This involves people choosing from about a hundred values that have been specially tailored for the client group. They are in three categories – values that are important to me, values I see in my organisation currently, and values that I would like to see in my organisation's culture. Phil Clothier, one of the directors of Cultural Transformation Tools trained some of the staff of Brampton Manor and a parent governor in using Values Assessment, and he describes some of his work and the theory behind it. Because it can be done on line, it is possible to get a feel of an organisation's culture very quickly.

Nicola Williams, a member of the Senior Management Team at Brampton describes how a combination of AI and a Values Assessment helped to land some of the changes. Her enthusiasm, dedication and perseverance have been crucial to the changes.

The Values Assessment was used very effectively by a class teacher, Michelle Pitt, and she describes how she introduced it to her class.

The last articles by Lesley Bond and myself are on non-violent communication. We have both found it very useful in our personal lives and wonder about its use in schools. I have interviewed someone whose staff team have adopted it even though they found it very challenging not to resort to more usual authoritarian ways of communicating.

I know how important education is in the lives of young people, not just from theory. I have watched my four sons either flourish or languish according to the interest their teachers have shown in them. I am sure a more democratic, supportive school culture can give teachers the space to do this, as well as helping to reduce their stress. On a so-called practical level I believe that happier schools will achieve better results. It is not a question of paying attention to needs at the expense of standards, but a belief that by paying attention to needs and a positive school culture, the standards improve. A win/win.

Thanks are due to Patrick Nash and Teacher Support Network ([www.teachersupport.info](http://www.teachersupport.info)), who have sponsored my research; to Richard Barrett, Joan Shafer and Phil Clothier of Corporate Transformation Tools ([www.corptools.com](http://www.corptools.com)) who all enabled Brampton to participate in a Values Assessment by giving time and resources. And finally to Brampton itself - the head, and all the staff and students I worked with whose passion to help to realise the potential in each one of us has been inspiring.

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Robin will be organising a conference on 'Looking at Schools with an Appreciative Eye' in Findhorn, October 5-8th.