

Friday 26 November 2021

Dear Everyone

Headlines:

- Advent Service Sunday 28 November – attended by Years 6 – 8.
- Good Schools Guide – revised for 2021 and just published
- https://www.goodschoolsguide.co.uk/schools/st-pauls-cathedral-school-london/3692335#tab_review
- I I+ Scholarships at SPCS– applications open for current Year 6
<https://www.spcslondon.com/admissions/scholarships>

How corporate language drips into our lexicon is fascinating. From *going forward* to *reaching out*, the English language is a wonderful mongrel that is quick to sniff out and gobble up new ways of saying things.

Walking our dog Parker towards Columbia Road flower market on Sunday morning is always an adventure in stuff to sniff at and chew on. En route I peer into the lobbies of corporations having a day off. On the walls of these lobbies are sometimes scrawled aphorisms that relate in some general way to their business.

When dressed up as mission statements and visions, not of the Bernadette kind, what these corporate aphorisms rarely tell us is anything about what these firms actually *do*.

This corporatized language has seeped into and taken hold of education, too. This week I attended an education conference, and the opacity of the discussions, from *frameworks* to *pathways*, was both circumlocutory and a long way from talking about what schools actually do.

Poking fun at this stuff is *passé*. Yet corporate nonsense continues to have a life of its own. Only last week, I saw a boxed package that was relaunching the future. Just think about that for a moment. In it was a biscuit and a set of stickers. I loved stickers as a child. Stickers were, to my mother's constant irritation, stuck all over my bedroom door and ruined the paint. What on earth am I supposed to do with stickers as an adult? They are now in landfill.

A good friend of ours came to supper at the weekend, a senior executive in the world of big brand global enterprise-wide cloud-based software-as-a-service solutions and the conversation moved to the now common *cri de coeur* post lockdown. Mental health.

Organisations want to listen, they want to look after their people and some of the evidence for this is *Wellness Wednesday*, *Thankful Thursday* and *ReFresh Friday*. Miserable Monday my wife quipped. An advertorial in the weekend newspaper promotes a digital detox which you can get, er, online.

If as adults we continue to accept this abstraction unquestioningly, however well meant, then what hope for sense making for our children? I don't hear children saying that when they grow up they want to be someone who holistically maximises agile go-to-market overstretch, neither do they say that they want to take the less-is-more pathway to pivoting the framework.

Lucy Kellaway was for many years one of the very best journalists at pricking the balloon of corporate twaddle. She retrained to teach, and co-founded a charity called *Now Teach* to encourage people from corporate life into schools. Kellaway turns her journalistic focus on what is lacking or broken in our education systems, and is now writing from the front line rather than the news desk.

Recently she wrote about financial literacy. Kellaway reports on the dangers of teenagers trading online with the scarce resources of their families - crypto is especially attractive to teens, apparently.

Young people, Kellaway reminds us, enjoy risky behaviours, in part through ignorance of consequence, and in part through thrill seeking. Here's an interesting piece from *Psychology Today* which also comments on how young people respond to peer pressure and social exclusion.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/the-wide-wide-world-psychology/201506/why-are-teen-brains-designed-risk-taking>

With such an emphasis on wealth creation, and worry about their career prospects, little wonder teens are prone to the allure of what appear to be free money schemes.

Then the even darker problem of teenagers becoming money mules. Think county lines drug trafficking and move that online for money laundering. It's big business, extremely attractive and can be completely ruinous to a young person's life. It is surprisingly easy for them to end up with a criminal record and unable to get credit as an adult, or even do time.

This is affecting young people in families from all walks of life (2019: 5,819 cases among 14-18 year olds). Cifas, the fraud prevention service in the UK, reports that mule herders are now moving their attention towards the middle-aged, with bigger transaction opportunities.

For a while I was getting scam 'phone calls allegedly from my bank. Easy to spot - once you've been had. I turned my attention to conversion: 'Did you ever imagine that you'd be working as a fraudster when you were at school?' Moving on to, 'With your skills of persuasion, you could get a legitimate job.' I can see this looks patronising and perhaps smacks of the liberal middle-class affliction of 'something must be done' from the comfort of a large house with a large automobile. Unsurprisingly, mostly this moved the conversation to be rather one sided on their part and often extremely swearsy. On one occasion extremely funny, too, but unprintable.

But one man I spoke to dropped the pretence, and we had a really good conversation. He knew what it means to do time in prison, had lived dangerously on the streets selling drugs, and frankly, defrauding people from his bedroom was much, much safer. He accepted the risk that he might be back in the penal system. Without any hint of disingenuousness, he said he had enjoyed our talk. It is possible it had been the only decent conversation he'd had all day. After all, his is not an easy career to discuss with your friends and family. When you're living a lie, the sense of isolation must be intense.

Earlier this term I played the trumpet at our local church for the Harvest festival. The two-person choir included a governor of one of Her Majesty's prisons. Might I visit? He said they have to be really careful about *why* people want to visit – prisons are not zoos. We talked about penal reform, and about what kind of education is available to offenders. Not much, he said. Less and less, in fact. Most of the day, people are in their cells, and a large proportion of the prison population are suffering mental health issues which are often the root of their offending in the first place, and it is not being adequately addressed. He said very many should not really be in these institutions at all. At a cost of £45,000 a year and rising, incarcerating people even for a short time often condemns them for life. This left me feeling utterly useless. What hope for the man scamming people from his bedroom?

Literacy of the kind I am most familiar with deals with the nature of words, the power of description, persuasion and manipulation and being alert to multiple meanings, or twaddle. But financial literacy is a whole new world of complexity now it is also online.

This weekend I will be heading for the hills. Four weeks more or less straight through from the start of this half-term, with the weekends filled with some of the most extraordinary events for our young people, a huge thank you to the residential team who look after our choristers.

Dawn, Parker and I will be off the leash on Saturday morning and in the woods, the golden late autumn horizon a balm for the eyes and a fresh frost on the ground.

I look forward to seeing very many of you on Sunday through the flicker of candle light.

In the meantime, here's The Clash's, *Career Opportunities*. Track five, side six on the original triple album, *Sandinista*. Recording a triple album was bit of a thumb at the record company's execs.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yaH9LRY8jLI>

And for something a bit more upbeat, here's Dolly's 9-5, live at the 50th Anniversary concert at the Grand Ole Opry.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQv3LkIHESI>

Bop about people!

Bop n/vb. Origin, from the jazz tradition of singing nonsense words like bebop and debop. Bebop became the name for a style associated with Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie.

Best wishes

Simon