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# Pastoral Care In British Schools: Some Lessons Learnt for Singapore

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## Abstract

This article describes how pastoral care is delivered in the United Kingdom and proposes a three-fold approach to the delivery of Pastoral Care in Singapore schools.<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

In late 1986, Singapore's Minister for Education, Dr Tony Tan and twelve school principals visited acknowledged good schools in the United Kingdom and United States and commended their efforts in ensuring not only their students' academic development but a total development of the individual in the personal, social and vocational aspects of their maturation. In a report which followed, called, **Towards Excellence in Schools** (1987), strong recommendations were made to introduce Pastoral care into Singapore schools.

In response to the call for Pastoral Care in schools, the Ministry of Education invited 17 schools, three of which were independent, to take part in a pilot project to implement Pastoral Care beginning 1988. The aim of the pilot phase was to encourage the evolution of individual pastoral programmes to meet the specific needs of each school. These systems would serve as models for more widescale implementation of Pastoral Care in the future.

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<sup>1</sup> This article draws upon a paper presented by Associate Professor Lawrence Chia and the author, entitled, **Pastoral Care in British Schools: Applications for Singapore**, presented at the Third Annual Conference of the Educational Research Association in Singapore, September 1988.

To gain first-hand knowledge of the organisation and implementation of pastoral systems in British schools, a study team of eighteen educationists from Singapore, comprising Ministry of Education officials, principals of secondary schools and pre-university centres, vice-principals and lecturers of the Institute of Education, visited sixteen British schools in June 1988.

The author was amongst the educationists who visited the United Kingdom and will share some observations made and lessons learnt from her British experience.<sup>2</sup>

### **Pastoral care: What is it?**

In the first major work on pastoral care in 1974, Marland described Pastoral Care as covering

“ . . . all aspects of work with pupils in a school other than pure teaching . . . looking after the total welfare of the pupil.”

Best, Jarvis and Ribbins (1980) agree that Pastoral Care refers to the non-instructional aspects of the roles of teachers and others in schools, using it as an umbrella term to include guidance and counselling as specific aspects of pastoral care. They continue to present a model of Pastoral Care as

“ . . . something which happens/should happen between teacher and student, interacting in the context of an institution called a school or college which has four inter-related dimensions (disciplinary/order, welfare/pastoral, academic curricular, and administrative/organizational) and which itself, is located in a wider social, historical and cultural milieu.”

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<sup>2</sup> The author wishes to acknowledge the contributions of the other seventeen study team members of the Ministry of Education Study Tour to sixteen British schools in June 1988, especially Mr William Thomas, Sr Anne Wong, Mrs Ng Gek Tiang, Mrs Pang-Cheng Li Yeng, Ms Ko Chai Peng, Ms Lily Thang and Dr Ong Teck Chin, whose invaluable contribution to **The Report on Pastoral Care and Career Guidance in Sixteen Schools in the United Kingdom** (MOE Report, August 1988) have also been reflected in this paper by her.

It has been described by Hamblin (1978) as part of a teaching process which focuses not only on the intellectual, but social and emotional development of each child, and may involve altering the learning environment to suit the needs of each pupil so that he can develop to his maximum potential. Pastoral Care, from a wider perspective, is considered an attempt by schools to be involved in the total, continuous development of a child, especially one who is most in need of extra care and effort (David and Cowley, 1980). Stressing the importance of a whole-school commitment to caring, Clemett and Pearce (1986) describe Pastoral Care as being effective only when,

“ . . . everyone in the school community knows, and feels secure in the knowledge, that as valued members of that community they can participate in giving and receiving encouragement, guidance and support. Such a climate will be created by the attitudes of staff and pupils and may be enhanced by a specifically designed pastoral care system. Each school would recognise its responsibility for extending care into all aspects of its work.”

At its best, Pastoral care may be seen as an institutionalised system of personalised education acknowledging pupils' perspectives and their total development in the personal, social, educational and vocational aspects of their lives. As such, pupil guidance and care are planned and the given responsibility of all school personnel.

### **Pastoral Care: What are its aims?**

Evidence from the sixteen British schools visited showed that the aims of their pastoral systems placed emphasis on knowing and understanding each pupil personally with a view to enabling each pupil to realise his full potential. As such, tailoring the school's pastoral system towards the specific needs of its consumer, the pupil, is of prime importance. The aims also focused on encouraging pupil self-awareness of their present potential whilst relating these to their future contribution to the community. Pastoral systems endeavoured to provide pupils with essential lifeskills so that they may be competent in assuming their adult roles in society.

An analysis of the aims and objectives of pastoral care (career guidance being an integral part of pastoral care) of the sixteen British schools visited by a team of 18 educationists from Singapore cited in **A Report on Pastoral Care and Career Guidance in Sixteen Schools in the United Kingdom (1988)** show that Pastoral Care sought to:

- instil in each pupil confidence, self-direction and self-discipline;
- encourage in each self-awareness of present potential, in terms of interests, abilities, values, personal qualities, while relating these to future contributions to society;
- support the academic progress of each pupil through careful monitoring to ensure that each is able to take full advantage of the range of educational opportunities offered by the school;
- provide each pupil with practical lifeskills to deal more effectively with daily living;
- develop an awareness of the options available to each pupil on leaving school, to facilitate the transition from school to the world of work, by the provision of experience and necessary skills;
- engender in each pupil a sense of social responsibility, mutual respect and an awareness of the needs of others, whilst developing social skills to enable each to relate easily to the community and serve it well;
- serve as a point of personal contact between the school and the community, through parent-school activities.

### **Pastoral Care: How is it organised?**

Each school's pastoral system was organised according to clearly defined structures representing the responsibilities and relationships of each person in the pastoral system (See Appendix I and II). Two structural systems were evident: the Vertical House system and the Horizontal Year system.

The Vertical House system organised pupils into groups called "Houses" each under the care of a Head of House, assisted sometimes by a Deputy Head of House, and always by a team of form tutors. Within each house, the pupils were allocated to a tutor on a year basis who took charge of about thirty pupils. There could be a total of three hundred pupils of different age groups in one house, depending on school enrolment.

The Horizontal Year system grouped pupils according to their years or levels. Each year was sub-divided into smaller groups of twenty-five to thirty pupils who would form a class under the care of a form tutor. The Head of Year had the responsibility of coordinating the pastoral programme, supporting and acting as consultant for the tutors.

In turn both Head of House or Head of Year came under the supervision of a Deputy Headteacher in charge of Pastoral Care or two Deputy Headteachers – one from the Lower and the other from the Upper School, the Lower School corresponding to our Lower Secondary levels and the Upper School corresponding to our Upper Secondary levels in Singapore.

All schools recognised the important role played by the tutor, on whose responsibility and effectiveness the success of the pastoral system lay. The tutor served as the first point of contact of any sort for the pupil so as to facilitate close monitoring of pupil progress and a regular assessment of pupil needs. This in turn creates the opportunity for each pupil to identify well with at least one teacher, building a sense of self-confidence and self worth. Form tutors in some schools took care of the same tutor group through the five years of their secondary education, thus making it possible to know their pupils well.

The Head of House or Year assumed overall responsibility for the welfare of the house or year pupils in their charge by overseeing the pastoral curriculum, monitoring the academic progress of each pupil through their tutors as well as through individual interviews, supervising a firm and fair system of reward and sanction and liaising with parents and the community including social services, if necessary.

## Pastoral Care: How is it delivered?

Pastoral Care is delivered, among other modes, through:

- An effort on the part of tutors to establish personal contact with pupils during contact time set aside for registration (attendance-taking) and planned tutorials.
- A Pastoral Curriculum of planned tutorials, for example, Personal and Social Education or Personal Development courses. These courses are tailored to meet the specific needs of pupils and delivered through structured experiences like role play, discussion and values clarification exercises which usually follow a group format. Examples of themes forming Personal and Social Education courses are:
  - The pupil's place in the school.
  - The pastoral group as a small caring community.
  - Relationships, the self and social skills.
  - Communication skills.
  - Decision-making skills.
  - School work and study skills.
  - Academic guidance and Careers education.
  - Health and hygiene.
  - Personal interests.
- The academic curriculum, for example, encouraging self-confidence and building problem solving skills during Mathematics lessons.
- The hidden curriculum – teacher attitude is an essential factor in the success of pastoral systems, thus the hidden curriculum has a lot to do with whether or not Pastoral Care

is experienced by pupils. For Pastoral Care to be successful, a whole-school approach to delivering care and guidance needs to be taken.

- Special programmes like Induction programmes for pupils making the transition from primary to secondary schools and residential experiences designed to develop rapport between tutors and pupils and to teach social skills and engender camaraderie among peers.
- Special Needs programmes which cater to the needs of pupils requiring a special curriculum to maximise their potential. Alternative curricula is developed and implemented for low achievers (for example through a modular approach, remedial lessons, etc), physically handicapped and the gifted.
- "Special Interests" programmes where pupils are encouraged to take enrichment courses which interest them, taught them new skills and sometimes led to life-long hobbies.
- A varied range of curricula, focusing on lifeskills training and equality of educational opportunity.
- A comprehensive system of Careers Guidance, where it was mandatory in some schools for all pupils to take Careers education courses, and participate in Work Shadowing, Work Experience and Industrial Tutor Schemes.
- A system of pupil profiling which provided a pupil with a personal record of his academic as well as non-academic abilities. A special feature of profiling was the fact that pupil profiles were drawn up through negotiations between the pupil and teacher. The pupil received at the end of his education a Record of Achievement which would give prospective employers a detailed summary of his abilities and achievements.
- Continuing and warm relations with parents and the larger community.



## **Pastoral Care: What systems support it?**

To support the pastoral duties of tutors, most schools employed support teachers where these were needed, especially for Special Needs programmes. Two schools found the services of school counsellors helpful and employed them to care for pupils with emotional and behavioural problems.

An educational support team comprising an Educational Welfare Officer who checked the attendance of pupils and made home visits, if necessary; an Educational Psychologist, to whom pupils with emotional and psychological problems were referred; and a Careers Officer, employed by the Local Education Authority, serviced all schools.

Support of school programmes and activities by parents and the larger community, for example, employers, was high.

## **Applications for Singapore**

Where Pastoral Care was seen to be effective in the sixteen British schools visited, it was evident that emphasis was placed on a whole-school approach to the delivery of Pastoral Care. In such cases, school ethos and philosophy reflected the all-round personal growth of each pupil. Pastoral responsibilities were well defined and staff members consulted on the aims, planning and practice of Pastoral Care, and where this was more evident, there was a sense of ownership and thus dedication to and confidence in, the pastoral programme. In all schools, Pastoral Care was planned for, either in terms of a pastoral curriculum, or integrated within the academic programmes, like, "Special Interests". It has been recognised and emphasised in the **Report on Pastoral Care and Career Guidance in Sixteen Schools in the United Kingdom (1988)** that teacher attitude was a crucial factor influencing the success of a pastoral system.

Bearing all this in mind, it is thus proposed that Pastoral Care in Singapore be delivered via a whole-school approach, acknowledging that Pastoral Care must be inherent in all aspects of school life. All staff should necessarily have pastoral responsibilities.

This approach to Pastoral Care<sup>3</sup> would necessarily involve its delivery via:

## I A Pastoral Curriculum

This would consist of a planned curriculum of activities aimed at developing and enriching a pupil in lifeskills – personal, social, educational and vocational. In introducing a pastoral curriculum, schools may want to consider the following:

- Developing a programme of structured tutorial sessions, either daily or weekly, specifically focussing on pupil needs in the personal, social and vocational realms.
- Recognising and highlighting the pastoral elements in non-academic programmes which have great potential for providing Pastoral Care, for example, Moral Education, Religious Knowledge, Physical Education, Health Education and Extra-Curricular Activities. These programmes, already part of a school's planned curriculum, can serve to promote Pastoral Care for pupils. For example, opportunities for personal growth abound through extra-curricular activities which can be used to build self-esteem, self-acceptance, self-discipline as well as friendship, to utilise pupil talent and interests in meaningful ways, to develop personal and social skills and to involve students in service towards the school and larger community.

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<sup>3</sup> The author wishes to acknowledge the contribution of Sr Elizabeth Tham in the conceptualisation of this framework, which has been adapted from a joint paper by Sr Elizabeth Tham and the author entitled, **Pastoral Care In Singapore Schools: Its Concept and Practice**, presented at the Seventh Biennial Conference-Workshop of the Association of Psychological and Educational Counsellors in Asia, held in Bangkok, July 1988.

## II The Academic Curriculum

It must be emphasised that there is an urgent need to consciously be aware of and recognise the pastoral potential of each academic subject in the curriculum. It is imperative that attempts be made to integrate Pastoral Care with the academic curriculum. To do this, the primary pastoral needs of our pupils need to be ascertained and planned ways of integration into daily lessons identified and put into practice.

## III Individual or Pastoral Casework (Student Counselling)

Individual casework/pastoral casework refers to one-to-one contact with pupils with the aim of getting to know and understand them better and consequently helping them to maximise their potential. These encounters may be developmental, where tutor and pupil may be engaged in negotiation of the pupil's progress, potential and aspirations. One-to-one encounters may also serve a remedial function, for example, in remedial work in an academic area, or, in counselling a pupil with a personal problem.

## Conclusion

It is believed that this whole-school approach to the delivery of Pastoral Care is the answer to enhancing personal growth, thus serving the goal of achieving excellence of an all-rounded kind and respect for the development of young people.

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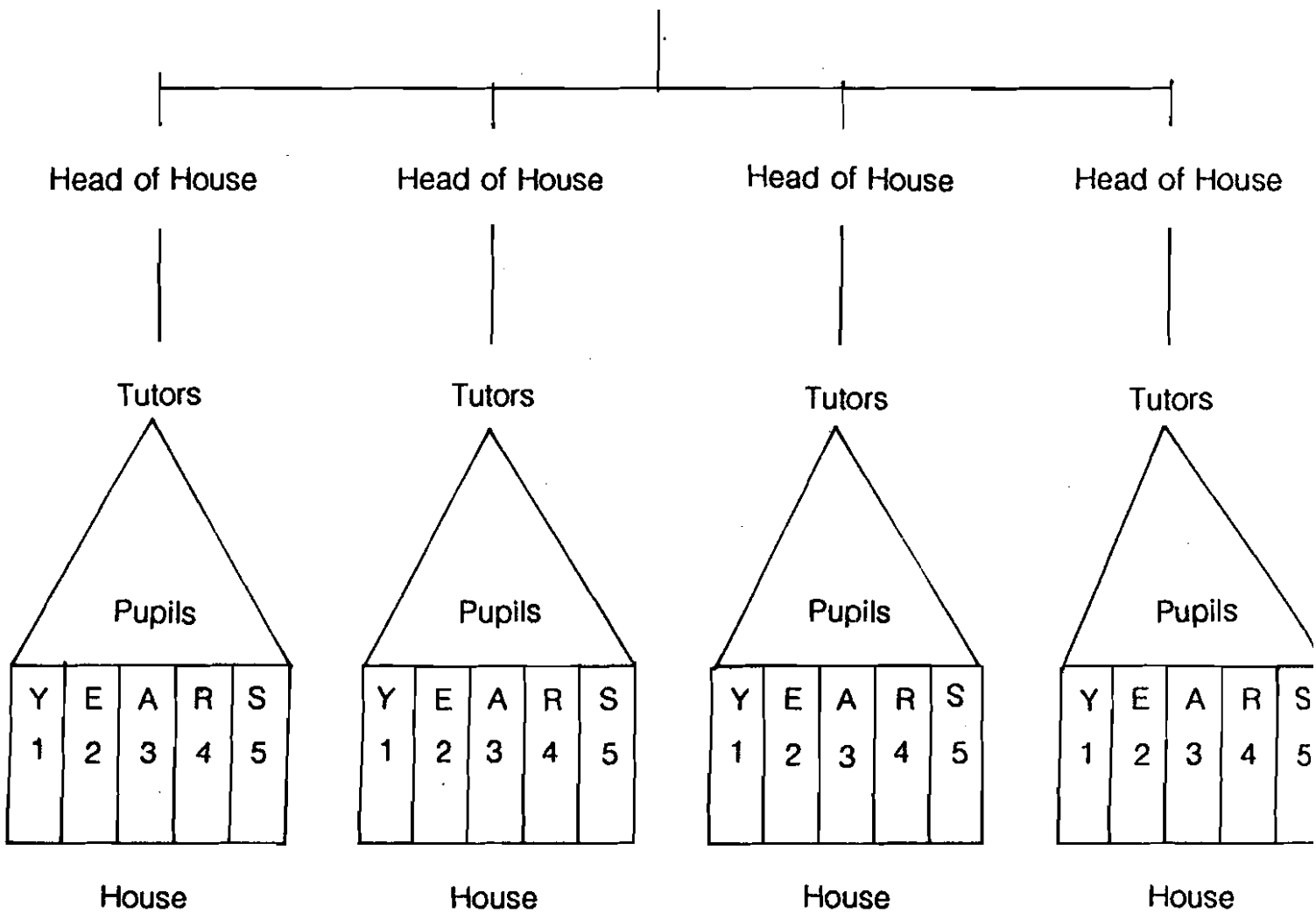
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APPENDIX I

VERTICAL HOUSE SYSTEM

Head teacher

Deputy Head teacher



APPENDIX II

Horizontal Year System

