

# Think Piece No. Five

## July 2017:

### COMPASSION-BASED EDUCATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

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#### A Word from The Future: Bruce A.G. Gill

*"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away;"* Revelation 21 v1

I confess to a weakness for SciFi, especially the remarkable tendency of the genre regularly to re-explore the question of what it means to be human. The futuristic and often apocalyptic settings for such deliberations carry prophetic resonance. However, this effect might simply be a function of the capacity of the human spirit for resistance and resilience.

Thus, in a galaxy not at all far away and in a time not at all very far off from now, and in a post-Brexit world, a post-imperial power, initiates a new system of Institutes of Learning, variegated clusters of educational communities once known separately as schools, academies, free schools and independent schools. To these were recently added radical New Community Schools, all-age school campuses spanning the early years through to age 18. Citation Review Teams assess compassion-based educational transformation in institutes of learning. These teams of peer assessors, drawn from other matched institutes of learning, comprise governors, parents and carers, institute of learning leaders and managers, teachers, teaching assistants, and other support staff as well as government-appointed review team members.

The citation for an outstanding regional New Community School in the heart of England reads.....

# KAREN ARMSTRONG NEW COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Margaret Street, Birmingham, B3 3BU

**Review dates** 23<sup>rd</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> April 2027

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected/reviewed	
	This review:	<b>Outstanding</b>	<b>1</b>
Compassionate Leadership and management		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Early years provision		Outstanding	1

## 2027. TRANSFORMED SCHOOL OF THE YEAR, CENTRAL ENGLAND: CITATION EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Part 1: The School

#### Values and Ethos

The Karen Armstrong New Community School (NCS) is a happy post-Brexit institute of learning with very many smiling faces. It has the Golden Rule at its heart and has signed the Charter for Compassion. The taxonomy of compassion ('ACTS FOR LOVE') underpins quality audits undertaken within this learning community.

Karen Armstrong NCS excellently balances high attainment with high self-esteem and is a health-promoting learning community which recognises and appropriately responds to the social, emotional and spiritual aspects of learning. Karen Armstrong NCS undertakes regular self-reviews using its own revised and updated version of the 'BE ORACLES POWER' assessment framework and takes appropriate action in response to the findings. This approach ensures that compassion is a key ongoing organizing principle underlying every aspect of the life of the school.

Karen Armstrong NCS demonstrates, celebrates, and regularly praises kindness and compassionate acts through handwritten notes, sharing at assemblies, 'thoughts for the

day', a range of awards and effective use of social media. These are just a few examples of the many ways in which the learning community values educating the heart.

Karen Armstrong NCS champions the rights of others and the needs of the planet as part of its campaigning ethos. It encourages the ideal of service, collegiality and love in action for our global and interconnected universe.

### People at Armstrong NCS

As a post-Brexit institute of learning, Karen Armstrong NCS is particularly culturally inclusive. Encouraging and responding positively to a strong student voice across the entire learner age range greatly assists the school in meeting the needs of its diverse pupil population.

All workers interviewed by the Citation Review Team (CRT) and representing a true cross-section of the entire workforce, articulated the school's vision clearly and gave personal examples of how they live its principles. Team members were particularly impressed by the governors, managers, and many other workers who said:

*'I believe we are all capable of improvement. We can transform ourselves.'*

*'Our learners are shaped by what we teach, how we teach and the kind of place we are.'*

*'Our work with the young people here makes a direct contribution to peace and happiness in the world as a whole.'*

Paid leaders and staff as well as volunteers, parents and carers, model Karen Armstrong NCS's values. Pupils at Karen Armstrong NCS aspire to the school's ideals, which were clearly visible around the learning areas. Their behaviour shows respect and consideration for the whole campus and the wider environment, each other and adults both on and off the school premises and beyond. Karen Armstrong NCS safeguards its pupils and teaches them skills to thrive in this digital age.

### Commendations

Karen Armstrong NCS:

- employs collaborative and co-created processes in classroom, staffroom and parental interactions;
- enjoys a culture of listening based upon empathetic understanding and a willingness to appreciate the views of others;
- allows space for pupils and staff to contemplate, reflect and be mindful;
- practises restorative justice and employs peer mediation as part of its behaviour policy.

### Distinctions

Compassion permeates and drives curriculum content and planning and achieves Golden Thread status.

The teaching of all pupils, which gives some knowledge of how the brain works so that they understand that human beings are 'wired' for compassion, is superb.

As outstanding Eco-School that has achieved Green Flag status in successive assessments, environmental awareness is extremely high.

Excellent use is made of pupil, staff and whole-system assessments that affirm and actively build on good practice.

The history project exploring the social, political and economic background to the 2017 General Election, the Brexit negotiations and their consequences, is an outstanding example of how Karen Armstrong NCS is proactive in its local and wider community and in building local, national and international cohesion.

## Part 2: Local Support Agencies

### CENTRAL ENGLAND GOVERNMENT REGION

The CRT review of the context of the achievements of Karen Armstrong NCS looked at the use, quality and impact of local support agencies for educational transformation including the regional Government Office. It asked three key questions of headteachers, leaders and governors within the local institute of learning and of others regionally:

How well does your local support agency know your ethos, performance and the standards your learners achieve?

What measures are in place to support and challenge you and how do these meet the needs of your learning community?

What is the impact of local support and challenge over time to help you transform?

The CRT found some effective examples of how, through reviews and telephone surveys, the local provision supported learning communities, with many examples of effective challenge to refocus on compassion over the last five years.

Performance data and other information are used well to provide challenge by those transformation facilitators who have established strong partnerships with learning communities over time.

Support and training for governors provided by the local agencies was their strongest contribution and most feedback was very positive.

Developing partnerships between local agencies and local networks of learning communities hold promise for the future in driving educational transformation. Headteachers provided several examples of more recent occasions when local providers had been proactive in brokering support and in trying to develop the regional Compassionate Leadership Scheme.

Strategies to evaluate the impact of local challenge and support for learning communities are well developed. New community schools are clear that there are shared criteria for assessing the effectiveness of the support and challenge each local agency provides.

Relationships between learning communities and transformation facilitators are consistent in their effectiveness and mitigate the frequent changes in the nature and number of these roles that over the last decade have had a limiting effect on the impact of the support and challenge provided for some learning communities.

Institutes of learning report that performance data are used in conversations between local transformation facilitators and leaders of the new community schools with a sharper focus on the performance of specific groups of pupils, particularly those who are most vulnerable.

Opportunities are taken to gather evidence about the quality of provision in nursery schools in order to establish baselines for measuring compassion and progress in the longer term.

The quality of Human Resources support from local agencies is of a high standard as is the external support sourced by some individual new community schools to manage staff development or performance improvement. Leaders of institutes of learning in the region perceive that local authorities, academy chains and other local providers take a consistent lead in using the identified strengths in new community schools to help other learning communities to become more compassionate. They report that partnerships these leaders have established independently within network groups enhance the support and challenge provided by relevant local providers.

Such provision made to regional learning communities has not only improved in the last year or so, but has also firmly established and embedded a clear, strategic vision for compassion-based educational transformation that will lead to sustained and demonstrable impact in new community schools across the region.

### **Areas for improvement**

The survey responses suggest that the proliferation of local agencies providing education across the region means that institutes of learning have differing approaches to educational transformation despite efforts to promote the regional Compassionate Leadership Scheme.

## Review team

Bruce A G Gill	Lead reviewer
Maurice I Coles	Additional reviewer
Gilroy Brown	Additional reviewer
The CRT team	Please see appendix one for a list of all those involved in peer review.

.....May the force be with you!

For more discussion of ideas contained in this Think Piece see *Toward the Compassionate School – From golden rule to golden thread* (2015) Edited by Maurice Irfan Coles. A Trentham Book. Institute of Education Press



**BRUCE GILL** is based in London where he works actively in religious education, complementary education and community development. He is a Church of England representative on Southwark SACRE and a member of the NASACRE Executive serving as Chair between 2011 and 2013.

Bruce taught in ILEA and Birmingham schools between 1975 and 1985 before becoming a schools inspector in each local authority. During the 1990s he was Chief Inspector in Lambeth and Assistant Director-Personnel and Equalities in Birmingham. In 1999 Bruce became a local government Chief Officer when he acted as Birmingham's City Personnel Officer and in October 2000 as the Head of the Equalities Division of the City Council.

He joined the Civil Service as Head of the Race Equality Unit in the Home Office in 2002. From April 2004 Bruce was the Secretary to the public Inquiry into the death of Zahid Mubarek before leaving central government in April 2006 to join Southwark Education Department as Equalities Adviser. He worked as Assistant Director 11-19 Services in the newly formed Children's Services Department before commencing work on a freelance basis in April 2008.