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A crutch for worried teachers ^{in public schools}

IT is amazing to be a member of the staff of a Government English School (KGV) and read Neil Perera's article about a predicted "mass exodus" of teaching staff (SCM Post, May 12).

An "exodus" consequent on disestablishment and ESF takeover of Government English schools: is this sensational journalism or bluff-calling by some of KGV's teachers?

Central in the article was the claim that so-called "highly qualified senior teachers" (education officers or EOs) are concerned about their pupils, "for whom we are professionally responsible."

They claim, according to the article, that a good schooling for a pupil "depends largely on constants" especially continuity of staff. What rubbish!

Since January this year, at least three of these "highly qualified senior teachers" have said goodbye and good luck to their examination classes and

departed "on leave" during the crucial pre-external exam buildup phase of their students.

This seems not to be unusual. When your leave comes, you take it mate . . . Professional responsibility?

The article also claims that the "sort of people now being attracted at vastly lower salaries are inexperienced people, not long in the job and without the highest qualifications . . ." Again, what rubbish!

There are relatively few "new generation" teachers and the quality and experience leaves the apparently money-conscious "old guard" far behind.

The newer teacher, typically, has a double or master's degree (unlike the single bachelor's degree of the EO), has come to Hongkong for professional experience rather than pure financial gain, has proved himself in English comprehensives, US high schools or Commonwealth state schools and has

occupied posts of responsibility in these schools.

Some EOs, in contrast, have never taught in England, not to mention an English comprehensive and may well be many years behind some educational developments in the UK.

Neil Perera's article may be good journalism with a catchy title ("Teachers plan a mass exodus"), but it seems to use some rather questionable arguments as support.

Is Neil Perera trying to make a case for some worried teachers, with negligible or outdated experience in their "home country," who would rather retreat to Brunei than return to Britain? One wonders.

If Neil Perera is simply doing a job of catalytic journalism then he does do well: much debate could follow from his "exodus" article.

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If teachers' salaries are not raised...

OUR association agrees with much of the article on Government English-speaking Schools (SCM Post, May 13) and appreciates your bringing attention to the staffing situation.

However, we as a committee are taking every reasonable step to improve the terms of all teachers; particularly those on the newer and lower salary scales, and certainly do not wish to disturb the equilibrium which exists at present in the schools.

In your article you quote: "...but the sort of people now being attracted at vastly lower salaries are inexperienced people."

The fact is that the teachers at present employed on post-1974 salaries are all well-qualified, with considerable teaching experience.

With no defined career structure and low salaries, many find it impossible to renew their contracts. Valuable teachers are being lost and teaching continuity destroyed.

There is a real danger that, with the tight job situation and impending pay award in the UK, and the worsening exchange rate, similarly able and experienced staff needed to replace them will not be available.

If the present high standards are to be maintained, salaries must be raised to realistic and competitive levels now.

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