

## **Crib sheet**

**Will Woodward, John Crace and Francis Beckett**  
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### **Lesson 1: food + school = change**

The villagers in Ruhira, south-west Uganda, have problems that can't adequately be expressed by statistics. But here are a few anyway. Half the population lives below the poverty line. Some 30%-40% of children are underweight. One in seven six- to 18-year-olds has never been to school or has dropped out.

Since Ruhira became one of the UN's millennium villages (officially last March, effectively last August), a team of experts has been trying to find ways of lifting the place out of extreme poverty. With a spending limit of £56 per person per year, they have been looking not just at agriculture or medicine, but across the board, figuring that you can't fix one area without the others.

And so it is with education. After conversations with the locals, the project used some of the food produced from improving crop yields to provide proper meals at school, at breakfast time and at lunch, to around 1,900 pupils and 70 staff. Pupils are now packing into the schools, and getting there early so they don't miss out. The same is true of the teachers. Concentration has improved, and so have results.

Now they have a new problem: the children are so enthusiastic they are demanding a longer school day.

At Omwicamba primary school, one of the schools visited last week by Jeffrey Sachs, the UN adviser and director of the Earth Institute in New York, and George Osborne, the UK shadow chancellor, enrolment has gone up from 518 to 625, "a result of good feeding", according to the headteacher, Polly Muyambi. This year, in national end-of-school exams, the school got its first top-grade pupil.

"It was incredibly exciting to see how something as straightforward as offering a decent meal to the children was enough to ensure a surge in numbers attending school," Osborne said.

The day after visiting the project, Sachs gave a stark, combative speech to the great and the good in the Ugandan capital, Kampala, telling them to buck up their ideas in the fight against poverty. And that meant introducing the school-feeding programme countrywide, he said. "Children that go to school in the morning without a meal and try to sit through lessons until midday cannot learn."

Sachs went on to say that the children's stomachs are often not empty, but filled with worms. So once every four months there should be a mass deworming at school, he said. They will need new classrooms. He has plans to link them to the internet.

Sachs isn't easily impressed. But he was by how much the lives of children has changed in four months. If you have a little money for aid, some of it should go on this, he said. School food isn't an optional extra but a necessity.

One wonders why, in this country - albeit a much wealthier place, in altogether different circumstances - it took our political leaders so long to realise the same thing.

**Will Woodward**

### **Learning centre named for Ted**

To teachers, he was the educationist who stuck up for them when everyone else was giving them hell. To the many readers of his columns, he was the writer who took on both Tory and Labour governments for their interference in and betrayals of the education system. To people living in the West Country, Ted Wragg was all this and more. He was director of the school of education at Exeter University for 25 years and his commitment to best practice and widening participation meant he regularly kept his hand in by teaching in local primary and secondary schools.

So when Exeter College last week opened a newly refurbished building, catering for students with a wide range of learning difficulties and disabilities, there was no hesitation in naming it after Wragg. "Ted had tutored a number of lecturers at the college," says Joy Mosley, head of foundation studies, "and one of the last projects he undertook before he died was the TV programme *The Unteachables*, where he and a few others took on some students who had failed to achieve their potential in mainstream education. This is precisely the ethos of our foundation studies department."

The department was created seven years ago with just 70 students; today it is one of the largest faculties in the college, taking in around 400 young people with a variety of emotional and learning difficulties, ranging from those who have been excluded from school to those with severe disabilities. All courses are based around a student's individual needs and abilities, and one of the key features of the new building is a mock flat where teenagers can learn the necessary skills to live independently. There is also a specially adapted kitchen where those with additional needs are taught about healthy eating and cooking.

"We don't believe anyone is a lost cause," Mosley says. "We've had some incredible success stories from some of our non-traditional learners. One of our students got the best English GCSE in the country and another, who had been out of the education system for years and written off academically, has been encouraged to apply for Oxbridge."

**John Crace**

### **Not quite the academies' Waterloo**

Roger Aspinall, a self-made millionaire, plans to turn his old school, an ordinary comprehensive, into a gleaming concrete-and-glass monument called the Roger Aspinall Academy. In his first day in the school, he contrives the departure of both the headteacher and the elderly head of English, against whom he's had a grudge ever since the man taught him and pronounced him thick.

Last Thursday's episode of *Waterloo Road* shows what can happen when television tries to tackle hot issues. Emails went round anti-academy campaigners last week telling them it was going to be hard-hitting. They must have been dreadfully disappointed.

Aspinall was made a thoroughly unpleasant character. "I'm a man of precious few words. Not an intellectual like yourselves," he tells the staff, with an audible sneer. A sympathetic teacher was given lines like: "You think it's all right to buy the school? I'll take a couple of pounds of teachers and a couple of bags of pupils?"

Yet the writers of the BBC programme have swallowed whole the big lie about academies. They assume Aspinall is using his own money. In fact, he will get total control of the school in return for a tiny proportion of what is actually spent on it.

Told that the man he wants to fire is the teachers' union representative, Aspinall says with glee: "Big deal. I've seen off 100 union reps in my time." In fact, the teacher, who is given the unlikely name of Grantly Budgen, walks out of the job when he is criticised. Yet every union representative knows the first rule: never resign, because then you've got no employment rights. If they want to be rid of you, make them fire you.

And Budgen is a lazy, drunken bully who hates the job. All the teacher union representatives I know are energetic people who love teaching, otherwise they wouldn't put in the hours of unpaid extra time the union job demands.

Aspinall's son enrolls in the school the very day Aspinall arrives, apparently to get away from his father. (Honestly.) The staffroom contains a jealous and manipulative former lover; two girls fall for the same boy (Aspinall's son, naturally) and one of them will slap the other's face next week; and half the staff are sleeping with the other half.

The press release tells us that Aspinall's changes will "reek havoc". They mean "wreak". It's Waterloo Road that reeks.

**Francis Beckett**