

**Meeting of QVINE (Quaker Values in Education Group), Friends House,
London, April 30, 2015**

More than 90 delegates from Area Meetings from England attended this conference. Before the three specialist sessions (Educational Policy; School Organisation; Classroom Teaching), four speakers addressed important policy and practice issues relevant for the Quaker community involved in education.

The lead address was given by *Tom Brighthouse*, on “The flawed values of our schools: how can England turn its schooling system based on ‘knowing the price of everything and the value of nothing,’ into one based on the values of a civilise society”.

Tom, veteran head-teacher, director of education in Birmingham, and government advisor, told us that the current search for “British values” which every school is obliged to transmit, failed to acknowledge that “values” are different in each of the four countries of the United Kingdom. His own version of ‘trans-national’ values was that in educational policy, *every* child would be a success; all children are gifted; all education should be inclusive, and should never exclude any student for any reason; education should for each individual, be a creative and lifelong process. He commended to us the motto of one of his comprehensive schools: “Think for your self and act for others.”

Alison Spottiswoode, Quaker and teacher of modern languages, spoke of her long and fruitful experience of student exchanges with Italy and France, and the jubilant realisation of students that “we are all the same”. She lamented the current narrow focus on attainments and tests, which caused great anxiety for students and teachers alike. Under conditions of stress “seeking that of God in other people” was crucial.

Graham Ralph, Quaker and retired Deputy Head of Bootham Quaker school in York, and now a governor of Bootham, and of Breckenborough School, Thirsk, a specialist, publicly funded Quaker school for more than 50 teenaged boys with diagnoses on the autism-spectrum, and other diagnoses. He told us that “All teachers are natural leaders”, and that leadership is born of love, in the Quaker style. A teacher’s commitment and care must be unconditional (just as the care and love of the parent is unconditional). Give your students freedom, Graham said, and they will respect the equality you have granted them. When conflict occurs, in school or in society, Graham’s motto is: “Let’s see what love can do.” Graham’s recently published: *Faith and Practice in a Quaker School*, is now available.

Ruth Cadbury is a birth right Quaker, from an old Quaker family. She attended a Quaker School, The Mount, in York. In 2015 she was elected Labour MP for Brent and Isleworth, after many years of service on her local council. She observed that most parents in her constituency did not want faith-based education for their children, but most of the new academies were faith-based. Commenting on youth unemployment, she observed that there was a skills gap between what employers were seeking, and what school leavers could offer. Similar disjunctions of meaning,

values and purpose exist across the educational system. The government offers not leadership, but “structured meddling” which ignores the real needs of children. She noted that the recent White Paper on Academies contained no mention of children’s needs at all.

Discussion groups In the large discussion groups (with about 30 in each) which occupied the rest of the day, teachers, lecturers and policy makers told often moving stories about the lives and aspirations of the children they taught and cared for, and the importance of knowing the child as an individual, and respecting and nurturing the ‘whole child’.

The evaluative report on a study of the ethos of five of the six English Quaker secondary schools is now available, and shows that the original ethos and purpose of these Quaker-foundation schools is still being maintained. They offer a glowing example of what a good school might be. But unless such schools receive local authority funding (as is the case with Quaker Newtown School, Waterford) they must perforce charge fees for a quality education. One delegate, making reference to this Irish model, argued that Quaker schools in England might become academies with local authority funding, and admit students from their local areas, while continuing to offer a Quaker-values led education.

This vigorous group will continue to thrive, and a further session is planned at BYM, 2016.

See QVINE’s website: www.qvine.org.uk

Delegates were urged to contact Quakers with educational roles, to seek contact with correspondence groups at the Area Meeting level, so as to gather the views of a wider section of the Quaker community.

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May 1st, 2016.