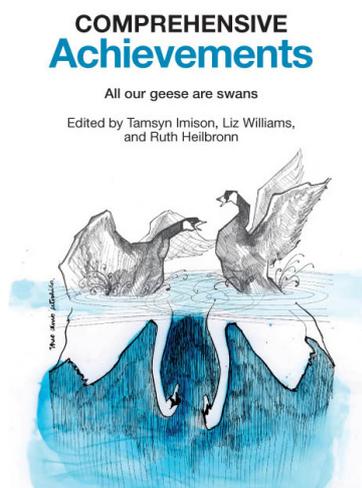


ASSOCIATES NEWS

Book review: *Comprehensive Achievements: all our Geese are Swans* edited by Tamsyn Imison, Liz Williams and Ruth Heilbronn

ISBN 978-1-85856-530-9



In June at a lunch party for eight women I met a woman who was three years ahead of me at Oxford who said her preconceptions about comprehensive schools had been totally changed recently when she read Dame Tamsyn Imison's book. I had heard of the book and a review copy popped through my letterbox within a week or so. Tamsyn and I were both on SHA Council for a number of years and I visited her school, Hampstead, and found it very impressive. One of Hampstead's most famous pupils was Zadie Smith who went on to Cambridge and to become a world famous novelist.

She writes: "I have always considered myself extremely lucky to have attended Hampstead School... It was more than an education; it was an experience, one of the most fulfilling of my life." I remember her latest book *NW* focuses mainly on a group of school friends maturing into early middle age, obviously partly based on some of her experiences at Hampstead.

The book has a chapter of 15 student voices followed by a chapter of seven parent and governor contributions and then a long chapter of 27 staff voices ranging from teachers, many of whom are now headteachers themselves, through to Tamsyn's PA and the school's site manager. Several staff sent their own children to Hampstead. All voices are united in praising the success of Tamsyn's 20 years of inspirational headship at Hampstead 1980 to 2000, though at least two of them quote the remark "We've seen more pilots than British Airways!"

The school's motto is "Learning together, achieving together". Several remarkable features of the school are often mentioned such as no uniform, no bells, staff development achieved through an innovative school-based MA involving many teachers and pioneering work with a large cohort of refugee students. Mark Mayne, who taught there from 1997 to 2012 singles out four qualities of the school:

- responsiveness to the student voice
- a sense of friendliness between members of the school community
- creativity
- a truly comprehensive mix of students

We surely all agree with Tamsyn when she writes in chapter six "Postscript, we profoundly believed that every child and every adult has huge potential and good within them that only needs to be unlocked."

An inspirational book.

Maureen Cruickshank