

THE SCHOOL INSPECTION

A Play

by

STEPHEN HIRST

SchoolPlay Productions Ltd

15 Inglis Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3HU

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CAST

Fish	<i>Old guard classicist (male)</i>
Sue *	<i>Business and Economics teaching</i>
La Brain *	<i>Mystifying clarifications (preferably female)</i>
Eric	<i>The wily old dog of Modern Languages</i>
Foz	<i>Mischievous staffroom junior (male)</i>
Rob	<i>Teachers behaving badly</i>
Bob	<i>Design with new template</i>
The Head	<i>Aloof, ambitious, modern, (male)</i>
Maelstrom	<i>Marketing business executive Inspector (female)</i>
Sprockett	<i>Rugby for the boys (male)</i>
Flash *	<i>Quicker than he seems</i>
The Kid *	<i>Too clever by half</i>

* *These parts can easily change sex for convenience of casting.*

A 5th form Creative Textiles set:

Jem,
Olivia,
Adam,
Sally,
Alex,
Charlie,
Chris,

Laura. **A Fourth Form Rugby Team:**

Chuck,
Ed,
Sam,
Bill,
Sean,
Henry,
Rollo.

Titch *The New Rugby Team Captain / Strategic Manager*

Sharpe *The Rugby Club PR Man*

TV News Team One:

Will,
Ru,
Tris,
Pierre,
Allan.

TV News Team Two:

Josh,
Emma,
Skin,
Andy,
Jonny.

The 3rd Formers who have had self-assertiveness training:

Ben,
Sarah,
Jane,
Kate,
Chris,
Matt,
Mark,
Alice.

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ACT I

(TEACHERS' Common Room. The Escape Committee ROB, BOB, FLASH, huddled over the Times Educational Supplement. FISH, ERIC, LA BRAIN and SUE are playing Bridge; FOZ is marking books, giggling occasionally and shaking his head).

Fish: No bid.

Sue: No bid.

La Brain: No bid.

Sue: Dummy again, then. Actually, it's just as well - I really must get on. I can't possibly face 5C again without having marked their books. I don't know how you lot manage to play bridge at lunchtime.

Fish: Question of priorities.

Eric: Six of clubs, please.

Sue: Well my priority has to be that marking, I'm afraid.

Fish: It's all right, Foz will take over.

Foz: I'm marking.

Eric: I'm your head of department and you're not to mark at lunchtime - it's a new policy I've been considering for *(looks at watch)* well for some time now. New European regulations make it illegal to miss a prescribed break. If I don't make you play bridge now I could end up in the European Court of Human Rights and I hate Brussels -

La Brain: Strasbourg.

Eric: - as I was going to say, I hate Brussels alone more than I hate Strasbourg.

Sue: Well I don't understand how you manage it.

Fish: You're young.

Sue: I suppose so.

(She leaves).

Foz: What's being young to do with it?

Eric: More time when you're older - you don't sleep.

Fish: I certainly do - three or four times a day, as it happens. I don't waste time with all that bathing of children and good times with the family, though.

Foz: Quality time - the phrase is quality time.

Fish: That's it. I knew there was something suspect about it. "Good times" doesn't sound so bad.

Foz: It just means time to talk; I bet you and Hilda talk all evening.

Fish: Certainly not, the length of a brief supper only. After that it's into the study with the newspaper. You're going one down, Eric.

Eric: No I'm not - made it.

Fish: Damn - that was your fault, Foz - I didn't count properly for answering all your fool questions. Get up here for a few hands.

Foz: Youth subverted by irresponsible age once more - go on, then, deal me in.

Eric: This is not poker.

Foz: Sorry - joke.

(He joins them and another hand is dealt silently).

Rob: Here's one - look at this: three responsibility points for Head of Department at St. Katharine's in Manchester.

Bob: It's a girls' school.

Rob: So?

Bob: You couldn't teach in a girls' school.

Rob: Why not? I reckon I could do without the rugby these days, you know....

Bob: Yea, maybe, but are you ready to do without the other, if you know what I mean nudge nudge, wink wink I mean I know some politicians want to bring back corporal punishment, but I don't think that was quite what they had in mind

Rob: It wouldn't be a punishment.

Bob: Oh, and what would you call it, then - apart from the opportunity of a lifetime?

Rob: How about corporal privilege?

(Re-enter SUE in haste).

Sue: She's here, she's here it has to be her. The Head's bringing her here now - she was just behind me in the corridor - she'll be coming through that door any second.

Fish: Who? Or whom? - depending on to which part of your rather gabbled speech one should respond -

Sue: The inspector of course, who else?

Fish: Ah, of course - who else, indeed?

(Silence falls, all turn to the door expectantly. FOZ jumps up and moves away from the bridge table, towards his marking, but ROB gets to it first and it is he that is sitting studiously over it as the HEAD and the INSPECTOR enter).

Head: Thank you. I'm delighted to welcome into our fold Ms Maelstrom Hassletime, who will be the lead Inspector when we get "done" next week. *(Silly smiles).* She tells me that she doesn't bite and that her name does not accurately describe the effect she usually has on schools! *(Politely sycophantic laughter).* Not sure about that "usually".... but otherwise so far, so good, because Ms Hassletime's background includes considerable experience in marketing, which gives her a uniquely appropriate perspective on schools today, and I'm sure that we all find it very reassuring that we have an inspector who fully realises that these days education is something that we sell, as I always say, and that a good school is one that is recognisably and demonstrably better than its competitors. I know that we will benefit enormously from her observations, and that you will give her every co-operation as she embarks this week on the first stage of the process, known as "fig" - first information gather - and that she'll be in no doubt that we do give a good fig here!

Mael: Thank you very much. As the Headmaster says, this week is just a purely informal information-gather: I hope to meet most Heads of Departments just for an initial chat, to see that everyone knows what they're doing and why, which always seems a good place to start. Thank you.

(Lots of polite grinning as HEAD and INSPECTOR leave).

Foz: So do you know what you're doing and why, Eric? I've often wondered.

Eric: I'm organising you lot to teach schoolchildren foreign languages so that I can pay my mortgage - I should say that just about covers it, wouldn't you?

Foz: I think you'll find that they like a bit more than that these days, old man. After all, Maelstrom could be home by tea-time rather than hanging about for a week if that were the kind of length of chat she's planning on.

Eric: "That were the kind she's planning on"? Oh dear, oh dear.... you've always struggled with the subjunctive, haven't you?

Foz: Never mind humiliating me, squire, try picking up the maelstrom on her grammar and see how far it gets you.

Eric: Oh, I wouldn't worry too much about me if I were you - I can spin a bit of the old educational justification claptrap with the best of them if I have to.

Foz: Yea, I know - I've heard you - that's what worries me. Your stuff's all the ancient language of slightly left-wing establishment educational theory. That's not exactly where it's at these days, in case you haven't noticed. You're going to need a considerably more modern language than that this time, believe me.

Eric: You wait and see, young Foz; I can still pick up languages as quick as you like.

Foz: That's quick-LY, isn't it?

Eric: I was using the mid-Atlantic youthful vernacular I thought you'd understand. Anyway, they can't touch me: I'm European. Come on, you Brussels! (*Football chant style*). No, the wily old dogs and the young bloods will be all right - it's the Sprockets of this world you should be watching out for.

(ERIC nods at SPROCKETT, who, dressed in a track-suit, is making his way past them towards the coffee, which is near the escape committee huddled over the Times Educational Supplement).

Rob: Here's one!

Bob: What?

Rob: Job - Second in department and within travelling distance of the present mortgage - perfect.

Bob: You're already second in department. And presumably you're already within travelling distance of your house. I mean you get here, don't you?

Rob: But here's the important bit, look - Mitusevi High, recently classified as 'effective'.

Bob: Sounds pretty mediocre to me - and a pretty funny name for a school and all.

Rob: Don't you ever look at anything in the paper besides the job section? These schools with big company names are rolling in it - and if it's been "recently classified" as anything at all, then it's obviously just had an inspection - aha - and should be safe for at least a couple of years now from having to have another one

Sprock: What are you talking about, Rob? You don't want to go to Mitusevi High - we beat them thirty-five nil last season. Silly flash strip and team-building courses in some conference centre did them no good at all.

Rob: Sometimes there's more to life than Rugby, Sprock.

Sprock: Oh don't say that: I hate it when you talk like that.

Rob: Well you have to take these inspections seriously, you know - I mean what about yourself, Sprock? What are you going to say when the magic maelstrom asks you to justify what you do?

Sprock: Justify?

Rob: Yes, Sprock, justify - reasons, real, tangible ones. We're in a utilitarian world here.

Sprock: What?

Rob: Utilitarian - in other words, if it's demonstrable to a half wit, then it exists - if it's a bit subtle and difficult to grasp, then it doesn't.

Sprock: Oh.

Rob: So is there really any good, solid reason why we teach them rugby, Sprock? What's the concrete, marketable, demonstrable benefit still visible to everyone when all the wishy-washy clever-clever vague foggy stuff has been cleared away - or isn't there one?

Sprock: Well don't be daft, everybody knows

Bob: Everybody? We ain't talking everybody here, we may not even be talking human here, we're talking about inspectors.

Sprock: Rugby's all that gets some of these lads through school, Rob - you know that.

Rob: As Bob the Slob has just said, Sprock, it's not what we know

Flash: It's who we know.

(Pause of incomprehension).

Rob: No, it isn't.

Bob: Go back to your paper, Flash - you've got it horrendously wrong again.

Flash: What?

Rob: Wrong cliché, Flash - we weren't doing that one.

Flash: Suit yourself - sounded like it.

Rob: No, no that's exactly what it didn't do - it didn't sound like that at all; they were actually the right words but it was the wrong sound. *(Pause)*. You see I emphasised the 'we' - not what WE know - whereas if I'd been going to do the one you thought I was doing I'd have emphasised the 'what' - not WHAT we know - you see?

Bob: Or do you hear, anyway?

Flash: Well never mind what it isn't, anyway - what IS it?

Rob: What?

Flash: What is it?

Rob: What's what?

Flash: Whatever it is you were going to say it was.

Rob: I'm sorry?

Flash: You said that it wasn't what we know, or it wasn't WHAT we know, or it WASN'T what WE know or whatever, I don't know, so if it isn't -whatever -

then what is it then?

Rob: Uh, I don't think I know anymore you've lost me my thread.

Flash: Oh brilliant - so it isn't what we know but what it is you don't know so how are we supposed to know what you're talking about?

Rob: Uh, yea. I don't know.

Flash: You don't know.

Rob: No. I thought I did, once. Do you make your classes feel like this?

Flash: You were the one giving a lesson - babbling on about emphasising this or emphasising that.

Rob: Yea, so I was, wasn't I? Well, I'm sorry, I think.

(Enter KID).

Kid: Excuse me -

Bob: Oy, haven't you heard of knocking?

Kid: Knocking? Yes.

Bob: Well don't you do it?

Kid: Oh, no, sir. We're always told not to.

Bob: Not to knock? By who?

Kid: Everyone, sir - teachers - you know, stop knocking everything, kid, have some respect - that sort of thing.

Bob: (After pause). Okay, kid - pretty smart answer. I meant, of course, don't you knock on the door when you're coming in the staffroom?

Kid: Oh no, sir.

Bob: No?

Kid: I knock on the door BEFORE I enter the staffroom, sir.

Bob: Someone take over this conversation - before I lose it and kill him.

Rob: What do you want, kid?

Kid: Headmaster asks if Mr. Smith could go and see him immediately.

Rob: Okay, thanks.

Bob: Close the door on your way out.

Fish: Well, Eric, I do believe that you're first on.

Foz: Go for it, Eric! One up for the wily old dogs.

Sue: Good luck, Eric, let us know how it goes.

(ERIC leaves to various whoops and cries of encouragement).

Sprock: Are people really worried about this? I mean we do all right, don't we? It's not as if we've anything to worry about is it? We're a good school.

La Brain: Difficult to say - group reaction among educated groups to threats

either real or else perceived as only potential and hypothetical nevertheless tends to run along similar lines; you'd expect a group of teachers to behave with pretty well the same self-conscious half-ironic camaraderie either way.

Sprock: So is that a yes or a no?

La brain: Ah. Time for the bell.

Rob: Oh, God - not the bell, tell me it isn't time for the bell.

Bob: It isn't time for the bell.

Flash: By the way, he's lying.

(Staffroom gradually empties, but re-enter ERIC and MAELSTROM).

Mael: I think this is better than the Headmaster's office, don't you? And then after all, the Head may have some other work he wishes to do.

Eric: Might he? That had never occurred to me.

(Uneasy laugh both sides - they both sit and MAEL takes out some notes).

Mael: So, Mr.

Eric: Please call me Eric.

Mael: Eric, yes. You are Head of Modern Languages

Eric: Yes. Just the modern, bang up to the minute, really useful ones, yes.

(Another uneasy moment - she suspects him of mockery, but his face gives nothing away).

Mael: I see. And which are those?

Eric: Well, French, Spanish and German mainly - the languages of Europe: whether we end up embracing it or fending it off we'll still need to speak their languages if we aren't to let them put one over on us all the time. Imagine how many times our sales people, for instance, will have crucially lost the pulse of a conversation from under their fingers when a couple of remarks were made in another language they didn't understand. From that moment on they will have looked like losers, always half a step behind the others - not the way you land big contracts or win healthy competitions in a stimulating and successful free-market economy.

(Pause. She's still cautious).

Mael: Eric, what would you say if I were to tell you that I'd heard you described as an old-fashioned, liberal, slightly left-wing idealist?

Eric: I shouldn't be in the least surprised, but I bet you would have heard it said with a slight curl of the lip and a contemptuous sneer.

Mael: Well yes - I mean, oh, why would that be?

Eric: Oldest trick in the book we teachers play - the devil's advocate game. If you want them to believe passionately in anything, then get on your high horse and give them a lecture on how they must believe the opposite. Works every time. Marketing people have a similar trick - they often ask advertisers to stress their weakest aspect.

Mael: *(She is warming to him).* I didn't know you knew about selling.

Eric: Oh, yes - always kept a keen interest going. I come from a family of salespeople. They think I deserted the family line, but teaching is selling, you know, and education is something you have to sell to the young, as I always say.

Mael: YOU always say that?

Eric: Oh, yes, though I think the Head has used it as well. Still, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery as they say or, as I prefer to put it, trespass on your copyright shows admiration for your product.

Mael: Quite.

(She is momentarily cautious again - ERIC almost went too far with that one, but he recovers quickly).

Eric: But there's what you say, and there's what you do. I may say all sorts of radical left-wing things - that just puts them off it - but meanwhile I'm grinding them through all sorts of competitive exams to gain marketable qualifications and showing by example a thoroughly right wing approach to life. My students, for instance, will tell you that I gripe on about how much better it would be to do the course which involves lots of literature and culture - water off a duck's back, of course, they never respond by asking to do it - and after all, they also know that it was I that chose not to do all those courses in the first place, preferring instead the business and professional use examinations which are more practical, marketable and reliable in terms of results. So that's me in a nutshell - present myself as an ageing, boring old sod, rambling on about service and socialism and woolly-minded namby pamby mollycoddling consideration for others while actually running a keen, efficient and ruthlessly effective department with the best exam results for miles around and the cleanest, most practical and value-free courses available.

Mael: *(She has gone for it)* But that's MARVELLOUS.

Eric: Oh, well, one does one's best.

Mael: But why did you say you got better results with the business courses?

Eric: Well obviously NOT because they're easier!

Mael: (*Relieved and all over him again*). Oh good.

Eric: No, no - what I said was that the results were MORE RELIABLE. Once you get into all that literature and culture and art appreciation and morality and goodness knows what, you're never quite sure what may happen in an exam, you see. You don't know WHAT the little perishers might say or what the examiner is likely to make of it! No, we find that the cleaner tick-or-cross stuff, while absolutely not any easier at all, is much more predictable in terms of getting them to do what they must do for their exams. And of course it's much more useful in the big wide world of the marketplace, too!

Mael: Well of course. And your results are really very good?

Eric: And not only in French, Spanish and German, either.

Mael: No, that's right: I see you also do well in Chinese?

Eric: China, Ms Hassletime-

Mael: Do call me Maelstrom -

Eric: Yes of course. China, Maelstrom, will be the centre of the business economy when these boys and girls enter the global marketplace, and they will need a head-start in the language for all the same reasons as we have already agreed that they need European languages, won't they?

Mael: (*Gasping*). Of course. So how many do Chinese?

Eric: Well, for the moment it's only those who, um, who are, ur, that's to say who have a special interest in the Chinese people, but soon we hope to have more doing it.

Mael: I'd have thought it would be a popular course, especially as the results are so good - everyone an A wasn't it?

Eric: (*Preventing her from looking at the results*). Yes - don't bother checking the names because you're absolutely right, yes, every one an A.

Mael: And there are other languages too?

Eric: Oh, several, yes.

Mael: It must be quite a facility to be fluent in so many languages.

Eric: Well, I don't teach them absolutely all, of course. In fact some are just one-off students who have strayed from other parts of the world and take an examination in their home language.

Mael: Oh. But what's the point of that?

Eric: Strictly between you and me, Maelstrom, there's none at all - but it's another A grade isn't it? Good for their application forms, good for our league tables, good for morale - I've sometimes thought they ought to re-take every year!

Mael: Well, yes, why not? You've certainly sold the idea to me! (*Gets to her feet*). Eric, it has been a real pleasure talking to you.

Eric: Not at all, the feeling has been entirely mutual, and I look forward to seeing you again.

Mael: I hope the whole inspection will be so easy!

Eric: I'm sure it will. I think we know what we are doing here.

Mael: Of course. I think we all know exactly what we're doing here. 'Bye then.

Eric: 'Bye.

(As soon as she exits one way, FOZ enters the other).

Foz: How'd it go?

Eric: Call an informal staff meeting, Foz; I think wily old Eric has discovered how to handle this one

Foz: Is it difficult?

Eric: No - surprisingly easy. These successful types these days are really very simple beings with very simple credos - touch a couple of very obvious switches and you're there. In fact it's so simple that I could write down a couple of straightforward instructions that even Sprock could follow. In fact, I will.

(Lights fade and out while he sits writing on a piece of paper. As lights come up again SPROCK is discovered in the same place with the same piece of paper, staring at it with obvious incomprehension and mistrust. MAEL enters and SPROCK frantically hides the piece of paper).

Mael: Ah - Mr. Sprockett. Thank you for being so prompt. There's really no need to be so nervous, I assure you - I think this is a wonderful school. It must be tremendously exciting to be part of a company so dynamic and forward-looking and innovative.

Sprock: Uhhh

Mael: I must admit to thinking that you'd be a little traditional, stable and unspectacularly hard working. *(SPROCK smiles and relaxes, recognising himself).* But not a bit of it! *(Instant confusion returns to SPROCK'S face).* It's all thrusting, radical, real-world stuff!

Sprock: Uh-huh.

Mael: Now, you're Head of Rugby, aren't you?

Sprock: Rugby, yes. That's right. Rugby.

Mael: Though you do other things as well?

Sprock: Yes.

Mael: But Rugby's the main thing and the thing you're head of?

Sprock: That's right, yes - rugby.

Mael: Right. So what are your aims within the rugby department, Mr. Sprockett?

Sprock: Aims?

Mael: Yes, aims - not objectives, I think we all know what the objectives of a rugby coach are, don't we? (*Uneasy laughter*). But your aims?

Sprock: Well... to have good teams, obviously, and to win matches

Mael: Yes, quite - as I think I said, we all know the objectives ... but the aims? Longer term I mean WHY win matches?

Sprock: (*Tries to take a surreptitious look at his piece of paper, as if it would act as a crib-sheet*). Well, that's the object of the game, isn't it? You have to play that way in order to have the game at all, and then the boys enjoy the winning, which is good as long as it doesn't get to be too much of a thing for them, and makes them feel good about themselves - and then if they lose one or two that can be all right too - makes them grow up and see things in perspective a little.

Mael: (*Limited enthusiasm*). So it's all about building confidence and maturity.

Sprock: (*Real enthusiasm*). Yes, that's right. They enjoy it, you see, and it gives them something to be good at and - well - I often say that it's all that gets some of them through school, you see, because

Mael: And beating other schools has other benefits, doesn't it?

Sprock: Well, uh, yes of course for instance, if it's a cup match you don't get another game unless you win.

Mael: Yes. Quite. And then you can beat more schools, can't you? Which makes you look a better school than them, doesn't it?

Sprock: Ah! Well, you can't always judge a school like that, of course - I mean some schools just don't choose to emphasise the rugby because maybe

Mael: But nevertheless, even though it is not conclusive, your winning rugby matches must help this school look better than some of its competitors, mustn't it?

Sprock: Competitors?

Mael: Other nearby schools.

Sprock: We don't necessarily compete with the nearest ones, actually - it depends on who's got a good rugby spirit, you know - not just who's best, but who plays in the right sort of way.

Mael: It must be a wonderfully exciting time to be in rugby, Mr. Sprockett, as the game goes professional - all those opportunities, all that money to go for

Sprock: Well, as for the money, we've got a few pitches and all the equipment. Buses are expensive, of course

Mael: But going professional all the buzz of excitement, and now the boys can really dream that one day they could make a living out of it, maybe commanding huge transfer fees.

Sprock: I like to keep that out of it actually. It's teamwork and working together, not huge egos and win at all costs. It's the love of the game, and the pride, and the dedication, and not letting others down (*Pause*).

Mael: In fact, you're a real amateur.

Sprock: Oh, well, thank you. Thank you very much. I like to think so, yes.

End of Act I

ACT II

(Enter a number of schoolchildren to the empty staffroom).

Jem: Come on, it's all clear - bring it all in.

Olivia: Where shall we put the flipchart?

Jem: Far end, look.

Adam: Where's the syllabus book?

Sally: It's on the shelf over here.

Alex: I'll display this stuff over here - come on, Laura.

(They cover all the surfaces with tie-dye stuff and bits of clothing. ADAM marks a section in the syllabus book with a highlighter. There are also charts, boards: they are preparing for a sales pitch).

Charlie: What now?

Jem: Cards!

Chris: Got them.

Jem: Okay, we're ready.

Chris: Bell went exactly one minute thirty seconds ago.

Alex: They'll be here any second.

Charlie: We're ready.

Laura: So we just wait?

Jem: That's it. I'll delay starting as long as possible - get as many in as we can first.

(Pause. TEACHERS start to enter).

Flash: What on earth's this? Well what's going on?

Jem: Please come in.

Bob: Come in? Please come in the staffroom he says.

Rob: What the heck's all this stuff? *(Looking at exhibits).*

Fish: Well what do we have here?

La Brain: It looks like a manifestation of a remarkably rapid cultural change.

Jem: Ladies and Gentlemen, what we have here is THE latest phenomenon to hit the commercial world.

Olivia: It satisfies all the requirements of major commercial success.

Sally: Its impact will be as dazzling as its design.

Laura: It has a specific market.

Alex: Automatic publicity.

Charlie: Low overheads.

Chris: Low taste.

Adam: Guaranteed sales.

Sally: Regardless of pricing.

Olivia: A tie-dye school uniform made by the school itself makes good commercial and educational sense. It would be worn with pride, signifying not only membership of the school, but also a prime example itself of its achievements.

Jem: Members of the school would be instantly recognisable all over the city, and the inevitable social competition of boys and girls always wanting to be seen in the best clothes would be channelled directly into their own efforts in the tie-dye department, thus increasing incentive to do well at school!

Sally: School rebels who refuse to co-operate with dress regulations would have to wear smart, plain clothes, which is what you've been trying to persuade them to do for years!

Laura: Tie-dye drapes, batiks, bean-bags and upholstery would all combine with the new dress regulations to give the school a really powerful identity, instantly recognisable.

Alex: A really strong corporate image.

Chris: The same impact as if you stamped a school logo all over everything and everyone!

Charlie: A unique selling point, or USP, as they call it in professional circles.

Jem: And furthermore, its commercial success would be guaranteed not only because school rules would force everyone to buy it

Olivia: But because schoolchildren will insist, yes insist, on paying far too much for these things, because they will all have

Omnes: Labels!!!

("Skoolwerk" labels are distributed by all the sales team).

Olivia: Once these labels become the thing, schoolchildren will pay anything for anything with one of these labels on it ... skoolwerk calculators, skoolwerk spelling aids, skoolwerk rugby boots

Jem: And as well as all this, as yet another additional bonus, this scheme is fully one hundred per cent examinable!

Adam: For our closing sequence we need the help of a volunteer member of staff - do we have any volunteers? I could do it myself but then you would be less ready to believe me, and I want you to believe me because there are no tricks here, I assure you.

Bob: Yes, all right.

Adam: Mr. Slocombe, thank you so much. Now, Mr. Slocombe, do you have a syllabus book in the staffroom?

(BOB looks doubtfully at ROB, who nods and points to the shelf).

Bob: Ur, yes, yes we do.

Adam: Where is that book, Mr. Slocombe?

Bob: It's here.

Adam: Take the book down for me, Mr. Slocombe, and open it at Page 324 - do you see anything unusual?

Bob: Why, yes: there's a section highlighted *(shows it round)*. How did you DO that?

(Applause).

Adam: Now, Mr. Slocombe, can you read those words for me?

Bob: Ur, Crossover syllabus. Business Arts or Economic Designs. An A level or GNVQ is available for an Art or Design project which then forms the basis of a business studies enterprise which must show understanding of creative accounting and artful exploitation. Full details follow.

(More applause, which dies away as the HEAD's presence is noticed).

Head: Well, this looks interesting. If I'm not very much mistaken we appear to have here a group of fifth formers, apparently in the staffroom making a sales pitch. Remarkable. It would seem to be the creative textiles lot. Excellent, excellent. Well done, children, you can pack up and go now. I'm sure you've learned much by the experience.

Jem: Yes, sir.

Olivia: Thank you, sir.

(HEAD nods approvingly at the exhibits as the fifth form grab their stuff and leave).

Head: Good - well this changes the tone slightly of what I have to say. I have the preview of the inspection report. I have been pleased, even surprised, to hear of some of the initiatives that are apparently in progress here, *(STAFF exchange cautiously smug glances)* and I am QUITE DETERMINED to see that EVERY ONE of them is in place by the time the report appears. *(STAFF look a little alarmed)*. I had thought that this may be something of a rush and extra burden for many of you, imagining that some of you had let your

enthusiasm gambol a little ahead of your actual achievements when making some of the claims that you evidently did, but am delighted to witness this evidence that at least some of you have already managed to put into effect the changes you are apparently pursuing. Very well done. Ms Hassletime was particularly acute, I should say, in remembering every detail of some of the extravagant claims made to her, and was so enamoured of them that she absolutely insisted on my giving her the opportunity to return very shortly to see how much progress has been made with each one of them.

(Nervous shuffling and some dark looks at ERIC: it seems that the MAELSTROM has taken them all for a ride...).

Head: She was struck, however, by one, single member of staff whose modesty and unquestioning loyalty to idealistic, kindly values marked him out. She described Mr. Sprockett as *(Reads)*. "providing a supportive and protected bubble in which to educate children in isolation from the real world, teaching them games, especially rugby, with no other object in mind besides letting the children grow through engagement in a common though demanding pursuit which they enjoy." *(Pause)*. Consequently she has strongly recommended that *(Reads again)* "the teaching of games and rugby be terminated immediately in order to make room for more of the powerfully relevant and work-orientated initiatives that other members of staff so passionately support, and that Mr. Sprockett's contract be examined in the hope of finding him more suitable work. - Perhaps we could have a word, Mr. Sprockett?"

(Exeunt HEAD and SPROCK).

Eric: Poor old Sprockett.

Fish: I hope you mean that.

Eric: I am still capable of sincerity, you know, even if there is little call for it from an educated man these days.

La Brain: Though it would be interesting to deconstruct your remark, even given its sincerity: are you sympathising with him because he's lost his rugby, or because he's alone amongst us in being incapable of bullshitting to his own advantage? If the latter, then are you really sorry for him, or are you ironically expressing sorrow at the rest of the world for not appreciating his relative worth?

Eric: Both, I suppose. Without all the profound ironic crap at the end. I'm just sorry that he didn't have the necessary skills to avoid an unpleasant fate.

La Brain: I thought maybe you were admiring him for retaining his sincerity.

(ERIC looks at LA BRAIN uncomfortably: the answer is no, but he cannot say it).

Foz: Leaving aside the soul-searching for the moment, did I understand the Head correctly? I mean it seems to me that he was more or less saying that we're going to replace rugby with selling your own creative textiles - is that right?

Fish: Well if Rugby's got to go, then it will leave some space on the curriculum, and it does seem that we've quite a few things to fit in somewhere.

Sue: What have you got to fit in, Fish?

Eric: Oh, yes, do let's hear what little extras the Latin and Classical History Department committed itself to in the course of inspection.

Sue: Yes, come on, Fish, how come you're not for the chop? You must have started off looking dodgier to the Maelstrom than any of us.

Fish: Of course you ignorant peasants won't have spotted that even her name is a direct classical reference. Actually I was going to have a little chat with you fellows at the Economics and Business department about a few things, Sue, might even get Eric on board, too. Few ideas about tourism, travel and the heritage industry to turn over with you.

Sue: You sold her that?

Fish: We're all of us salesmen, Sue, and you young, up-and-coming thrusters must always be ready to be surprised by the occasional achievements of the wily experienced types who've seen a thing or two.

Bob: Oh, and by the way, Sue, we could probably do with some help with the accounts in the Design shop, too - we'll pay, of course.

Sue: The what?

Bob: The Design Shop. The department has to go self financing.

Eric: Bob - I'm so sorry

Bob: No worries - actually it was my idea.

Foz: Your idea?

Bob: Sure - actually it'll be easier, and I'm getting tired and finding the appeal of easy increasingly difficult to resist.

Fish: Easier?

Bob: Oh, sure. Never mind academic concepts of quality and educational value and all that - modest commercial success is a much easier god to serve: keep it cheap, repetitive and simple, remember the lowest common denominator has the widest appeal and get the design department production line rolling - no worries.

Fish: But what about your public exam results?

Bob: Well, you never know: I should be able to find a board somewhere which will feel that a design that is commercially successful is by definition good - it's a popular point of view these days - in which case results won't suffer too

much.

Sue: But if your results are poorer it'll drag the rest of us down.

Bob: Not altogether my problem, is it?

Sue: It will be - you're part of this school.

Bob: Not financially I'm not: I'm self-financing, remember. The school can require me to be good, or it can require me to finance myself, but I don't see that it can require me to do both.

Foz: You've been spending too much time with Rob.

(Pause).

La Brain: Well, so far we've got child labour in the Creative Textile and Design sweat-shop, or redcoating in some heritage theme park - any other bids for what to do with the time released by the demise of rugby?

Sue: Well it's not a problem, is it? Obviously I like the Business and Enterprise emphasis, but every department's always saying it needs more time to cram and drill its students into examination success, and we've all picked up a few extra commitments - classical tourism or whatever - in this inspection, so I suppose the time will just get divided up between us, and won't turn out to be enough. That's more or less what the Maelstrom said should happen, isn't it?

Flash: But is that what the children need? I mean what would be good for them as a replacement for rugby?

(Pause).

Rob: I'm sorry, I don't understand the question.

Bob: I think you've done it again, Flash.

Foz: The children? What have they got to do with it?

Sue: If we start doing these things we've been discussing we'll be preparing them for the real world, Flash - isn't that what it's all about?

Flash: Well why not just take them out of school altogether and put them in real child labour sweat-shops? No greater preparation than just getting on with it, is there? Why give them your daft little mock-ups when they could go and have the real thing?

Rob: Doesn't it ever worry you that you don't make sense to anyone?

Flash: Oh, shut up you.

Rob: Damn, there's that lightning repartee again - crushes me every time.

Foz: So let's get this straight, Flash: you're saying now that there's no point in teaching them at all and that there's no point in playing business games and problem-solving decision-making simulations and heritage tour

designing, because instead you could make real businesses in schools with real problem-solving and decision-making and designing

La Brain: And real profits, and real bankruptcies, and real exploitation, and

Foz: in fact you're saying that the best school is the thing itself so why not do away with schools and just get on with the thing itself from as early an age as possible?

Flash: Yes.

Foz: Yes?

Flash: Well, yes - that's what I'm saying, but it's not what I mean: I mean the exact opposite.

Foz: Right. You mean the opposite of what you say.

Flash: Well of course.

Foz: Oh, of course - well obviously.

Flash: It's called sarcasm - you must have heard of it: you just used it yourself.

Foz: When?

Flash: Just now - when you said "oh of course - well obviously" in that sarcastic tone of voice calculated to mean "how was I supposed to have known that?" because I'd just said that I meant the opposite of what I said. But you were meaning the opposite of what you were saying when you replied yourself. So you're obviously familiar with the device, seeing as how you were using it yourself.

Foz: Right. So I was only pretending not to understand that you meant the opposite to what you said.

Flash: You got it.

Foz: I got it. (*Pause*). But I don't get why.

Flash: Why what?

Foz: Why was I pretending not to understand that you meant the opposite to what you said?

Flash: Because it was an easy cheap laugh at my expense. By being thick and deliberately missing my point so that you could ridicule it, you made it look as if one of us were thick. People think you're clever because you talk in a quick, unconsidered way and they think I'm thick because I speak in a slow, measured manner, so you made them laugh at me for being thick by being thick yourself.

Foz: No. I did it because that idea about doing away with school and getting on with the real thing seemed genuinely persuasive.

Flash: Yea, well, that's the trouble with sarcasm; there's always someone so dim that he takes you literally.

Foz: Yea, right. (*Realises*). What?

(Enter the fourth form, garbed in a pro-rugby sort of way).

Fourths: Save our rugby! Save our Rugby!

Fish: What the deuce is this?

La Brain: It appears to be a save-our-rugby protest.

Fourths: *(Variously).* Yea that's it right yea sure is better believe it
.... yea.

La Brain: But not a particularly articulate one.

Fourths: No! That's right dead right yea sure isn't better believe it
.... yea - I mean no, uh

(Enter SPROCKETT).

Sprock: What's going on, lads?

Chuck: We heard about the rugby

Ed: They can't get rid of rugby

Sam: They can't get rid of you -

Bill: So we thought about it.

Sean: As much as we could, anyway.

Henry: And we came to a decision.

Rollo: Yea, we did.

Chuck: It's only the rugby that keeps us going anyway, sir, so unless they re-
instate it

Rollo: What?

Chuck: Put it back -

Sam: Sorry, I was only looking at it. *(Puts something back down on the table).*

Chuck: We're going to withdraw our labour.

Ed: We're on strike.

Bill: Non co-operation.

Sean: Even less than before, that is.

Henry: I was co-operating before - wait till you see what it's like when I'm not
even trying!

Rollo: Yea, just you wait!

Sprock: Look lads - this is really good of you, and I'm touched - I really am -
by your loyalty to the game and to me. Thank you. But you have to go to
school and do your best. That's what it's really all about. The rugby's a
means to an end, you see, it's not the end in itself.

Chuck: It's the end of rugby, isn't it?

(A mind-boggling moment of possible misunderstandings).

Rob: Oof! It's the end of rugby the possible ambiguities You want to sort that one out, Flash?

Sprock: It won't be so bad without rugby, you know. I mean these business games - learning about marketing and selling and that - I mean it sounds all right. And there's a lot of all that sort of thing in rugby these days, so it's sort of connected, isn't it?

Henry: Is it?

Sprock: You can't win, that's the main point. Your game plan's a non-starter. You can't withdraw your labour - schools aren't businesses and you're not a product, so going on strike doesn't really threaten anyone except yourselves - and that's too distant a threat to frighten the world with. Schools are a service - to you. To refuse to accept what it's offering won't cause any hardship to anyone else for ages yet. And by the time the world's noticed that you didn't get yourself educated there won't be much to be done about it, you see. Striking won't bring back schoolboy rugby. (*The FOURTH FORM start to smile*). No, don't smile - I know what you're thinking: what does Sprock know about being educated, you're thinking, but let me tell you

Chuck: It's not that, sir. It's just that we do have another game plan.

Ed: Hope you don't mind, sir.

Sam: But we've appointed a new captain.

Bill: A new kind of captain.

Henry: Not the traditional sort.

Rollo: No!

Sean: More of a strategy manager, you might say.

(*TITCH, previously invisible, pushes his way to the front*).

Titch: We anticipated the limitations of strike action in the closed community, so we went for the wider arena of public relations and media manipulation - that's where the school is vulnerable these days. Sort of thing you learn in some of these business games, I gather. But before we got in touch with the press it was essential to have a proper ally - someone big enough to win the ball off the school in the first place, as it were - so we got in touch with the RFU and some of the local rugby clubs. Very concerned, they were. At first we thought they might even send a couple of the boys round, kind of thing, but apparently Rugby Clubs are more sophisticated than that these days, and into all this kind of PR stuff too, so they sent their PR man round - he just got here. (*Enter SHARPE*).

Sharpe: Hello, Mr. Sprockett, good to meet you having heard so much about you - feel like we've been in the front row together for years. Sorry to hear about

your little spot of bother - hope to have it all sorted out very soon indeed. Very bad for rugby if schools start pulling out - I expect your Head's amenable to a bit of sponsorship and that sort of thing, isn't he? In fact I'm told that's what it's all about in schools these days, isn't it? Well, don't you worry, because that's my patch that is, and I think we can take the school where we want it to go, can't we? Know what I mean? The rugby brotherhood needs you here, Mr. Sprockett. And we will fix it.

(Enter, on the burst, a camera crew and news team - STAN in charge, RU the front man).

Stan: Okay, okay, hold it right there, everybody. You - what's the story? Ru, get up here and listen in on this -

Sharpe: Good story, you'll use this. Naturally I can't tell you this yet, but I think you'll find that Mr. Sprockett here is soon to announce that he's managed to land a very lucrative sponsorship deal which will change the face of schoolboy rugby.

Stan: Do I look to you like some local rag hack?

Sharpe: Well, no.

Stan: This, you pathetic imbecile, is national television.

Titch: Well this is a national first, pathetic imbecile yourself, Think about it - teachers going out looking for major sponsorship, professional sport in schools, competitive tendering for the curriculum - this is the start of something that could have the most profound effect on the state of education, sport and the whole cultural ethos of the nation.

Stan: Who the hell is the kid?

Ru: He's just some kid.

Stan: I like the kid, perhaps we can use the kid. Maybe the journey isn't wasted. What else have we got today?

(STAN and RU consult schedule).

Sprock: Excuse me, Mister - I didn't catch your name we can't give them that story - it isn't true -

Sharpe: It will be, Sprockett - don't bug me, now, I'm losing this guy.

Sprock: But I haven't landed a huge sponsorship - the Head won't accept it: he wants rid of me and Rugby.

Sharpe: Believe me, Sprockett, when he sees it's already happened on the news he'll go for it. Now leave me alone.

Stan: Your story's small-time, jerk, despite the kid. We've no room for it.

Sharpe: You don't like the story, we'll change it - give me a moment on the mobile.

Stan: Hey, you're learning - that's good. But I haven't time to stick around and watch until you get good. We're out of here.

Sharpe: No problem - I'll give it to the other lot.

Stan: The other lot?

Sharpe: Excuse me - I'm on the phone.

(He turns his back on STAN who attempts to strangle him but is prevented by his crew. Enter JOSH and EMMA with another crew).

Josh: Nice shot.

Emma: Did you get that? We could have used that.

Skin: What?

Emma: The footage - film of Stan assaulting a member of the public.

Skin: Did he? Who filmed it?

Josh: Well you're the cameraman.

Skin: I didn't film it.

Josh: Why not?

Skin: I didn't even see it.

Emma: What's going on, kid?

Titch: Do you want the same story as we gave him or a better one?

Pierre: Hey, boss.

Stan: What?

Pierre: See that piece of machinery Andy's using.

Stan: Yea?

Pierre: That's a 32X Capacitor. Allan's only got the 30S: they can get their stuff back faster.

Stan: Damn. No way of beating them?

Tris: We could go live.

Ru: We can't go live - there's no news.

Stan: Do not tell me what to do. What are we?

Ru: We're a news team.

Stan: What are they?

Ru: They're a news team.

Stan: Therefore this is news. Standby to go live.

Tris: Ready!

Ru: But what do I say?

Sharpe: *(Waving his phone).* Don't worry about it - I've got something!

Tris: We're on!

Ru: Sorry to break in on your schedule, folks, but we're here in this apparently ordinary boys' school in Manchester of all places in order to bring you absolutely exclusively the stunning new development which may have the most profound effect on the state of education, sport and the whole cultural ethos of this nation.

Titch: Hey, that's mine!

Emma: What's yours?

Titch: That reporter just stole my line.

Sharpe: That's right. Ladies and Gentlemen, you are about to witness Mr. Sprockett, an apparently ordinary games teacher, sign a contract with a major rugby club for several times his present salary, and another one on behalf of the boys in his rugby team - the very first step in the process that will take sport out of schools and place it in the clubs where it belongs.

Sprock: Eh? But schoolboy rugby doesn't belong in the professional clubs - nor do I what's he talking about? I thought

Sharpe: (*Hissing*). Do us all a favour and don't think - a minute ago you were sacked, now the whole nation knows you're a professional coach at three times the salary so shut up and let it happen.

Emma: (*To his team's camera*). Stunning evidence of irresponsible tele-journalism is coming to light in a provincial school in Manchester.

Josh: (*Likewise*). But perhaps it comes as no surprise when the name of the television company concerned is revealed. Our reporter interviewed an innocent, naive young schoolboy named Edward.

Emma: (*Stooping to TITCH*). Now, Edward, tell us what the nasty man did.

(*Enter the THIRD FORM*).

Ben: Changes are being made here that affect our lives.

Sarah: And we're not being consulted!

Jane: Or even informed!

Kate: We've got rights, you know.

Chris: And consumer-power, apparently.

Matt: You need us.

Kate: We could all leave and go to another school.

Mark: And you wouldn't have a third form!

Alice: We demand to know!

Ben: Good one, Alice - you learned a lot when that outside agency came in and did that course on assertiveness.

Sarah: Our tutor tried to stop that course.

Chris: But the guy said that anyone who hired in outsiders to do their teaching for

them obviously wasn't worth listening to.

Sarah: So she gave in.

Jane: And the bloke said that she'd given in so easily

Ben: ... that she ought to join in and do the assertiveness course as well!

Stan: This is open rebellion, right?

Alice: Right!

Stan: (*To the 4THS*). And this is another open rebellion, right?

4ths: (*In unison*). Right!

Stan: Yes! Ru!

Ru: Today at this deeply troubled school the gaps in current education policy are showing. Every parent and teacher's nightmare has here shockingly become reality - open rebellion has broken out as the third year - just the little year nines as young as twelve - have occupied the staffroom, only to find, as if in a scene from some French farce, that it has already been occupied by an open rebellion among the fourth year and

(*Noises off*).

Ru: ... here - even as I speak - to complete the total lapse into anarchy, here come the fifth form

Jem: Make sure the camera gets the full-length shot of the blue, and can you do a close-up of this label, look?

Chris: Tie-dye uniforms are available at unbeatable child labour, sweat-shop prices

Sally: Designed by schoolchildren for schoolchildren.

Alex: Good value and an excellent cause.

Laura: National distribution no problem.

Olivia: And every suit bought will help the education of not one, but several children.

Charlie: Good old-fashioned but fashionable school uniform !

Adam: A particularly fetching royal blue is popular.

Jem: Finished off with the gold flash tie-work.

Head: (*Entering*). Enough! This has all gone far enough. Never could I have dreamed that such an insecure, ill disciplined over-reaction were possible. (*Sees camera, grins, and switches to smooth selling mode*). I think we have learned much from the visit of Ms Maelstrom Hassletime who is not, of course, a school inspector at all, but the Head of a Management Consultancy that I called in to shake things up a little and review our effectiveness by re-examining some of our basic assumptions - a process long overdue, I should add, and one carried out quite excellently by Ms Hassletime.

(Stunned silence, during which SHARPE answers his phone).

Sharpe: Hello? Hello? The secretary? Well whose secretary? the secretary of State? Minister of what? *(Hands it to HEAD)*. It's for you.

Head: Hello? Oh good afternoon, sir. Yes, sir. Oh, did you, sir? On television a few moments ago? Well, Bedlam is a rather strong term, sir, and I must say You've done what? Already on their way? I'm afraid I'm not familiar with this term "swat", sir. An emergency action team of inspectors? With powers to goodness gracious, I see Whose budget? OUR budget? But that doesn't... HOW much? Well, I know we have to make it worth his while but at that price, who is this guy? Well I'm sure he is a managing director, I wouldn't want the coffee boy No, sorry, yes it was Well, who? Local, yes so she should be here literally in minutes, oh good Managing Director of a consultancy firm that has had some experience with schools And her name is WHAT? Maelstrom Hassle

Mael: *(Entering)*. Hello! Back again with a new hat on this time! Now let's see if we can get this mess sorted out, shall we?

THE END

