

# NEGOTIATING RESPONSIBILITY: IDEAS OF PROTECTING AND DISCIPLINING THE CHILD IN LONDON SCHOOLS 1908 AND 1918

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## Abstract

This article aims to contextualise notions of state care and responsibility as set out by the London County Council in their suggested amendments to the 1908 Children's Bill. It discusses the relationships and environments which surrounded London schools, children and parents and how these may have influenced national debate. The research focuses on three schools in Woolwich, a peripheral London borough that ranged from an industrial heartland to a middle-class suburb. I argue that particularly amongst working class families and those with children deemed 'defected,' teachers had to negotiate where a parent's authority and care for a child stopped and the school's began.

**Keywords:** Schools and parental authority/responsibility; elemental education; special schools; zeppelin raids; corporal punishment

## Introduction

During the second reading of the Children Bill,<sup>2</sup> Arthur Allan, a member of the London County Council (LCC), the largest local education authority in England, suggested that the Bill should ensure that parents who failed to provide medical care for their child were liable to be charged with neglect. He argued that

experience in connection with the cripples' school, and other special schools in London, went to show that cases could be multiplied in which children had been crippled for life because the parents, though repeatedly warned, had refused to give them proper medical attendance.

Allan had been called upon to discuss industrial schools and the need to 'bring home to the parents responsibility for their children.'<sup>3</sup> This article will concentrate on how children were protected and punished in different forms of elementary education

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<sup>2</sup> While the Bill was known as the 'Children's Bill,' the Home Secretary, Herbert Samuel, amended its title to Children Act in order to make it sound more official. See Viscount Samuel, *Memoirs* (Cresset, 1945) p.56

<sup>3</sup> Hansard HC Deb, (4<sup>th</sup> Series) 24 March 1908, vol.186 cols.1272-73

(special, elementary and higher grade/central) from the introduction of the Children Act 1908 until the end of the First World War. In so doing the aim will be to understand how the LCC's concerns for the child, particularly the 'crippled' and poverty-stricken were bound up with attitudes towards parents, the surrounding environment and ideas of responsibility. The first half discusses how the LCC's ideas of protection and responsibility compared with, on the one hand, the national legislation of the Children Act, and on the other, the local experiences of parents and teachers. The Children Bill aimed to protect all children from 'unnecessary suffering, but made particular reference to infants, juvenile offenders and those whose parents were considered 'unfit.'<sup>4</sup> In London schools, particular children were singled out by LCC policy as 'special,' 'verminous,' or in need of corporal punishment and 'rescue.' Who were these children and how did they and their parents respond to certain classifications and experiences? The second half discusses how such attitudes and classifications of child and parent were affected by the air raids of the First World War, in order to understand how relationships between school and family could be maintained or disrupted by shared events.

In January 1908 the LCC appealed to Parliament for an extension of their powers and responsibilities for young offenders and those children committed to industrial and reformatory schools. Their Standing Committee on the Children Bill took the opportunity to discover 'whether the provisions of the Bill accord with the proposals...approved by the Council...and for any observations the Education Committee may desire to offer.'<sup>5</sup> Previous legislation had provided ad hoc definitions of cruelty, exploitation and environments which might cause 'unnecessary harm' to a child, but the Children Bill aimed to be more comprehensive and broader in scope. It not only attempted to protect the child and punish private individuals who ill-treated or exposed it to environments which could cause 'unnecessary suffering' (namely brothels),<sup>6</sup> but also aimed to encourage (or, with regards infants, compel) local authorities to take more responsibility for the prevention of further ill-treatment. Children would be tried in dedicated courts; the police would be able to arrest

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<sup>4</sup> Parliamentary Papers, Bill to consolidate and amend the relating to the Protection of Children and Young Persons, Reformatory and Industrial Schools and Juvenile Offenders (8 Edw.7) 1908, (hereafter Children Bill 1908) cl.11 and cl.36

<sup>5</sup> London Metropolitan Archive. London County Council Education Committee Minutes of Proceedings (hereafter LCCECMOP) March-Apr 1908, p.1165. All archive materials referred to in this article are from the London Metropolitan Archives

<sup>6</sup> Children Bill 1908, cl.11

suspected abusers without warrant, while industrial schools now had a *duty* to ‘teach, train, lodge and feed’ any inmate up to sixteen years old.<sup>7</sup> The Children Bill aimed, therefore, to ensure young persons were entitled to a certain standard of treatment, whether in a private dwelling or in the ‘custody’ of an institution. How then, did this aim, correspond to the treatment of children in the everyday world of the elementary school?

In 1908 there were 672 elementary schools in London.<sup>8</sup> Of these 539 provided a ‘sound and cheap elementary instruction to all classes of the people.’<sup>9</sup> From the ages of three to twelve, these children received lessons at their local elementary day school in reading, writing, counting, British history, botany, military drill with specific training for girls in domestic economy and carpentry for boys. Children entered Standard One at the age of seven, and could progress through to Standard Five, subject to passing annual exams. By thirteen many children had finished their schooling to seek paid work. For those who could (financially and intellectually) continue their education there were higher grade schools, which were to become known as central schools in 1910. With seven Standards, higher grade schools typically provided a broader elementary curriculum from the ages of three to 15 based on the assumption that these scholars could specialise in either ‘industrial’, ‘commercial’ or even academic work. The third style of elementary education was provided by special schools. These were dedicated to educating those considered too physically or mentally ‘deficient’ for board school classrooms. Though smaller in scale with an emphasis on ‘object,’ domestic and craft lessons (all thought to help foster independent lives), special schools provided the same five-tier curriculum that could be found in elementary day schools, allowing children to transfer with minimal academic disruption.<sup>10</sup> It is through these types of schools - their policies on punishment and parental involvement - that I aim to uncover the standard of treatment children received on a daily basis.

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<sup>7</sup> Children Bill 1908, Part I, (for local authorities duties in Infant Life Protection); cl.16, (for police power); cl.51, (for Industrial school managers)

<sup>8</sup> Based on LCCECMOP July 1908, p.1963 (133 Special schools); pp.2050-2077 (lists ‘Ordinary LCC Schools,’ this includes Central Schools)

<sup>9</sup> 1861, Education Commission. Report of the commissioners appointed to inquire into the state of popular education in England. Vol. I, 2794-I, p.17 quoted in Edmond Holmes, *What is and What Might be: A study in general and elementary education in particular* (Constable,1911) p.102

<sup>10</sup> SC/PPS/063/061. School Board for London Annual Report of the Special Schools Sub-Committee for the year ended 20 March 1903. For examples of ‘object lessons’ see Charles Morley, *Studies in Board Schools* (Smith, Elder, 1897) p.14 (used in infant lessons); p.197 (used in blind school)

The London County Council Education Committee (LCCEC), which oversaw the development of London's educational provision, had been formed under the Local Government Act 1902. Local borough inspectors and their assistants were expected to liaise between the school, its committees and head office. Each school had two committees; first, a management committee, which developed and governed the school's economic and academic administration, and second, a care committee. The care committees, typically run by local, wealthy, ladies, initially dealt with issues of underfeeding but as the school's role in the community developed, these committees, as Susan Pennybacker has argued, increasingly took on the role of 'amateur social workers,' dealing with prospective employment and issues of child abuse.<sup>11</sup> It was at this level of management that a school's approach to its scholars' educational, physical and disciplinary welfare would be officially negotiated with parents and the LCC.<sup>12</sup> It was in the classroom and at the school gate, however, where these approaches were tested by child, parent and teacher alike.

## **1 Schools and their Surroundings**

Every elementary head teacher was compelled by the LCCEC to keep 'a diary or logbook which should be a bare record of the events which constitute the history of the school.'<sup>13</sup> To contextualise the views set out by the LCC in their reading of the Children Bill, this paper explores the various perceptions of institutional and parental responsibility for the child, which were recorded in these 'bare' records kept by an elementary, special and higher grade school in the South East London borough of Woolwich. Ten miles away from the LCC's central-urban headquarters of City Hall, Woolwich included an industrial heartland of docks, an arsenal and an array of factories, as well as middle-class areas, with vast green commons that bordered on Kent's genteel outskirts.

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<sup>11</sup> Susan D. Pennybacker, *A Vision for London 1889-1914 Labour, everyday life and the LCC experiment* (Routledge, 1995) p.203. See also EO/DIV6/MAY/LB/4, Maryon Park Logbook 1913-1921, p.175 (training school leavers); pp.186-187 (child abuse)

<sup>12</sup> Care committees would, for example, ensure parents sort medical help for their child. See Stuart Maclure, *One Hundred Years of London Education 1870-1970* (Allen Lane, 1970) p.101. For an example of management committees liaising between parents and LCC see EO/DIV6/POW/LB/1, Powis School Logbook MD 1894-1913, p.139 in which the managers are called upon to confirm whether a child received 'irregular punishment.'

<sup>13</sup> EO/DIV6/BLO/LB/6, Bloomfield Road School Diary/Logbook Girls 1913-1928, extracts from the Code of Regulations for Public Elementary Schools and from the Elementary Schools Handbook of the Council

Maryon Park Elementary School was five minutes south of the docks, set between a telegraph factory and the main road from Woolwich into Greenwich. It had an annual intake of about 1,000 scholars in 1908. While the school itself was a large three storey building, standing on a high and comfortable looking road, its intake came from the low-lying, marshy, streets beneath. Charles Booth's turn of the century *Survey of London Life and Labour*, which systematically recorded the socioeconomic conditions of each London street, vividly described the poverty surrounding the school. Filled with the 'foetid smell of dirt, dirty women and children,' it was a place where 'dogs, broken crockery and foul language [were] abundant,' and where 'men and women [were] strong and young and unskilled and drunken.' On an autumnal morning many children would have left what George Duckworth described as 'poor,' two storey cottages, walked past a vacant Gypsy pitch, small rented gardens filled with 'onions and rhubarb' to arrive at their school and be able to look out to the river, where the day industrial school, the *Warspite* truant training ship, loomed ominously on the shoreline.<sup>14</sup> Although a small minority continued their education in central schools or went on to gain labour certificates, most children were recorded as finishing their formal education at twelve.<sup>15</sup>

Bloomfield Road School was two miles south east of Maryon Park. It opened as an elementary board school in 1877, but by 1908 it offered a curriculum of seven Standards for boys and girls. According to the Booth reports, it was situated on the top of a well-to-do road, with many houses employing one or two servants.<sup>16</sup> However, unlike Maryon Park, Bloomfield Road was nestled amongst markedly more 'comfortable' streets where 'none [were] very poor.' Scholars came from lower middle class families, who were able to keep large gardens, with pet rabbits and pigeons, and though not described as 'drunken,' Bloomfield's surrounding inhabitants could afford to spend much of their 'money and evenings in the public houses.'<sup>17</sup> A number of fathers made their earnings from small businesses or worked as foremen. Consequently, while

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<sup>14</sup> George Duckworth, 'Walk 75 Friday 11<sup>th</sup> May 1900 with PC Clyne,' in Charles Booth, *The Streets of London: The Booth Notebooks. South East* (Deptford Forum, 1997) pp.283-286. See X/095/035, Maryon Park Boys Admission and Discharge, for details of addresses

<sup>15</sup> X/095/035, Maryon Park Boys Admission and Discharge, p.1A of a random sample of 49 male scholars only three continued at Central schools, while 29 left purely because they were 'of age.' The girls admission and discharge records are missing, therefore evidence is more anecdotal see EO/DIV6/MAY/LB/4 Maryon Park Girls Logbook 1913-1921, 6 Dec 1913, p.176, in which the school arranges for girls to be sent to a 'half-time Dom. School after leaving school, for 6 months.'

<sup>16</sup> Duckworth, 'Walk 78,' Booth, *The Streets of London*, p.297

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p.297

many children left the school at the same age as their Maryon Park counterparts, most boys were able to find work and apprenticeships in their fathers' industries while many of the girls gained scholarships to LCC colleges.<sup>18</sup>

Equidistant from Maryon Park and Bloomfield Road was Powis Street Special School. Situated on Woolwich's main high street, which had a mixture of residential and commercial premises, the school was conveniently located next to the main tramline. Easily accessible by its central location and good transport links, the school was originally designed for 'blind' children, but from 1904 it began to accommodate young people who were deaf, along with others described as 'crippled' or considered 'mentally deficient'.<sup>19</sup> Children were sent by order of the LCC from across London, and while some came from local schools, including both Bloomfield and Maryon Park, many children were expected to board with local Woolwich families during the week, as their own homes were considered too far away.<sup>20</sup> While some Powis Street scholars left schooling at thirteen or even went to college, most were referred to residential schools.<sup>21</sup>

## 2 Protection and Legislation

When the LCC Education Committee returned the Children Bill to Parliament on 8 April 1908, they had proposed no less than 43 amendments.<sup>22</sup> Most modifications related to Part 4 which dealt with Industrial and Reformatory schools. The LCC insisted that local authorities had a responsibility to take charge of vulnerable youths and young offenders, as *children*, until they were sixteen, not Parliament's proposed fourteen, and amended clause 98, so 'as to prevent the possibility of young persons under sixteen years of age being sent to prison.'<sup>23</sup> Legislation generally required that those over 13

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<sup>18</sup> For boys see X095/300, Bloomfield Road Boys Admissions Register 1877-1898 p.1. For Girls see X09/301, Bloomfield Road Girls Admissions Register, p.1. Of 49 girls who left in Bloomfield Road in 1905, 27 were 'overage,' one became a lab monitor at the school, 12 gained various forms of scholarships, three continued their education at the local secondary school and six moved out of the borough. On all logbooks parental occupations are typically only recorded for the father.

<sup>19</sup> *London County Council Education Service Particulars 1910-1911*, pp.189,193

<sup>20</sup> See EO/DIV6/POW/LB/1, Powis School Logbook MD 1894-1913, p.204 'very dull and babyish'; p. 206 'very deaf'; p.433 'an enormous boy.' For geographical examples see EO/DIV6/POW/LB/2 Powis School Logbook MD 1913-1921, p.240 scholar from Hoxton, p.232 scholar from Balham

<sup>21</sup> X/095/329, Powis Street Blind School Registers 1895-1928, p.4

<sup>22</sup> LCCECMOP March-April 1908, pp.1218-1221

<sup>23</sup> LCCECMOP March-April 1908, pp.1220

entered an adult world, whether this be in work or penal institutions.<sup>24</sup> So why did the LCC want to adjust this and why was their amendment accepted?<sup>25</sup>

Under the Education Act 1870, all of London's three to twelve year olds were compelled to attend an Elementary school and to pay a weekly fee towards the costs of their school. Most children from poor and working class families had always contributed to the running and income of their household. However, under the Education Act, families had to organise their weekly timetable and income around this new requirement. While children continued to work outside of school well into the twentieth century, their labour was increasingly curtailed through legislative measures, forcing the child out of the workplace and into the classroom.<sup>26</sup> Children were now subject to formal education for increasingly longer periods relying on adults for their economic well-being; as Anna Davin has argued, for middle class reformers and legislators this helped to reinforce an image of the child as being innocent and irresponsible with a 'right' to this 'natural state.'<sup>27</sup> For those school-aged children who did seek paid work or did not attend school regularly, concern rose in the LCC that because such children entered the working environment, unnaturally young, with little general knowledge and a lack of financial acumen, they were not so much innocent but ignorant of the world's dangers. The LCC's Local Government Committee (LGC), for example, argued that while the Education and Industrial Schools Acts went some way to protect the child from 'evil influences' and 'dissolute parents,' the Children Bill could be an opportunity to 'rescue' those aged fourteen to sixteen, who had finished school, and though not 'delinquents' had been 'reared' in the 'poorer quarters.'<sup>28</sup> While the LGC argued this was generally 'a very critical period of a child's life,' the singling out of those born into poverty implied that it was a particularly critical period for a child who lacked the apparently protective support of a classroom or a comfortable home. Indeed the LCC's Education Committee (LCCEC) agreed, arguing the statutes needed to 'place upon any authority or person the duty of looking after the welfare of such children.'<sup>29</sup> If legislation

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<sup>24</sup> Elementary Education Act 1870, s.74; HC Deb, (4<sup>th</sup> Series) 24 March 1908, vol.186 cols.1271-72 in which Allan argues that twelve to fourteen year olds are found to be 'too young' for existing Reformatory schools

<sup>25</sup> Report from Standing Committee B. on the Children Bill; with Proceedings, Thursday 11 June 1908, p.43

<sup>26</sup> See Anna Davin, *Growing Up Poor* (Rivers Oram Press,1997) pp.4-5; Lionel Rose, *The Erosion of Childhood Child Oppression in Britain 1860-1918* (Routledge, 1991) pp.6, 72-74

<sup>27</sup> Davin, *Growing Up*, p.100. See also V.A. Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: the changing social value of children* (Basic Books,1985) pp.3-21, 208-28

<sup>28</sup> LCCECMOP March-April 1908, p.1365

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p.1365

had created an image of a child who needed to be equipped with certain skills before it was ready to encounter the adult world independently, then the LCC was concerned that those born into poverty would not gain such skills by fourteen. These children needed explicit protection from a poverty-stricken world that they were perhaps already encountering. It was an approach to child welfare which underpinned the LCCEC's policy towards children whose parents were 'in poor circumstances.'<sup>30</sup>

In February 1908 the LCCEC had wished

To draw attention to the urgent necessity for such arrangements being made in regard to the cleansing of children, as will prevent the possibility of their coming into contact with adults. School children who need cleansing in most cases belong to an entirely different class from that to which the adult persons requiring cleansing belong.

The verminous child is the victim of circumstances beyond the child's control, and, notwithstanding its condition, may not have lost its sense of self respect [sic], while the verminous vagrant has probably made his own circumstances and probably lost all sense of self-respect [sic] and of the decencies of life.<sup>31</sup>

According to the LCCEC, because the verminous child (typically infested with lice or ringworm) was a 'victim of circumstance' and the adult 'vagrant' a wilful maker of it, the two should be treated differently: one with sympathy and one with caution.<sup>32</sup> The verminous child was not yet the verminous vagrant and it needed to be kept this way. The LCC's amendments to the Children Bill would later suggest that young persons brought before a court, whose parents were 'vagrants,' 'dissolute,' or with 'criminal habits,' should be separated from them by means of an industrial school.<sup>33</sup> If the LCC wanted to separate the child from its vagrant or dissolute *parent*, it is perhaps unsurprising that they were also keen to avoid children meeting such *strangers* when in LCC custody. The LCCEC argued that by dealing with children in separate cleansing stations, there was less likelihood of any 'harm to arise.'<sup>34</sup> This harm was not just imagined as physical, however, but mental. The LCCEC's attempt to keep the verminous adult and child separate was an attempt to keep one subject from influencing the other's behaviour.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p.652

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

<sup>32</sup> For example of 'verminous' see EO/DIV6/BLO/LB/6, Bloomfield Road School Diary/Logbook Girls, 14 October 1913, p.229

<sup>33</sup> LCCECMOP (March-April 1908), p.1215

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p.1215



If cleansed of its environment, the child in its current verminous state was a victim, but if left in the 'bad company' of vagrant adults, the child would also lose its 'self respect.' The LCC's separation of dirty children from dirty adults worked along the same principle, therefore, of the amendments to the Children Bill that fourteen to sixteen year olds should continue to be separated from older convicts or from their unfit parents. The intention was to protect the victim of circumstance – here the impressionable poverty-stricken child - from learning to be the wilful troublemaker that the dissolute adult was seen to be.

### **3 Special Schools: Troublesome Victims**

The complex idea suggested by the LCC and followed up in their amendments to the Children Bill that the poverty-stricken child was both the victim and the potential maker of problems, was paralleled in the treatment of 'deficient' children and their parents in local schools. For example, at Powis Street initial descriptions suggested that scholars were stubbornly uncooperative, with some being described as, 'a dreadful child who does nothing but cry and shout,'<sup>35</sup> while the affects of poor parenting were noted in another as 'troublesome and spoiled.'<sup>36</sup> After some time, the same children would succumb to the teacher's influence, 'settling down into an ordinary MD [mentally deficient] scholar,'<sup>37</sup> and 'becoming amenable to discipline.'<sup>38</sup> Just as verminous children were seen as 'victims' too weak to control their circumstances, a good student at Powis Street was one who complied with the teachers' expectations of vulnerability, which in this case was to be docile and subordinate.

Not all children were, however, docile: indeed some were resolutely rebellious. On 7 June 1916 Mrs Windle, the Headmistress of Powis Street, discovered that, 'Tilley, How and Sawyer, three of the biggest boys placed a doormat in the path of the blind teacher in order to trip her up; this was done deliberately and of set purpose, these three boys can see.'<sup>39</sup> Why had these boys decided to strike out at their teacher and what does the school's response reveal about the child as a 'victim of circumstance' and the teacher as a judge of 'unnecessary suffering'?<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> EO/DIV6/POW/LB/1, Powis School Logbook MD 1894-1913, 22 Aug 1910, p.173

<sup>36</sup> EO/DIV6/POW/LB/2, Powis School Logbook MD 1913-1921, 3 June 1914, p.232

<sup>37</sup> EO/DIV6/POW/LB/1, Powis School Logbook MD 1894-1913, 10 Oct 1910, p.174

<sup>38</sup> EO/DIV6/POW/LB/2, Powis School Logbook MD 1913-1921, 5 June 1914, p.232

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 7 July 1916, p.243

<sup>40</sup> Children Bill 1908, cl.11,

In 1911 How's father had caused 'some trouble' by refusing to 'to enter [...] his child to a Blind School.'<sup>41</sup> While the LCC and the Head of Powis Street evidently felt that How needed specialist schooling, his father clearly disagreed. How's son was myopic (short-sighted) which meant that although his sight was impaired, he could be raised at home with minimal consideration of his disability – so why would he need to attend a school for the blind? The LCC, however, saw such parental questioning as a deliberate disregard for the problem. The head of the LCC's special schools' committee, Mrs Burgwin, argued in 1903, for example, that

it was difficult in many cases to get parents to see that the abnormal or defective child should have training under the best possible conditions. It was of common occurrence that the defect was concealed or denied, if it were in any way possible.<sup>42</sup>

Perhaps, therefore, in imitation of his father's objections or his own dislike for being classified by the LCC as *blind*, How tripped up the very embodiment of the 'blind school,' his blind teacher.

Myopic scholars proved the most 'troublesome' for Powis Street School.<sup>43</sup> Many truanted, while both Tilley and Sawyer who had also taken part in the tripping up of the blind teacher, were suspected of stealing from their blind peers.<sup>44</sup> By being able to maltreat those who embodied their supposed deficiency, Tilley, How and Sawyer, took advantage of and mocked an education system which classified them as 'blind' when they were partially-sighted. In the opinion of Mrs Windle, however, the boys ultimately expressed 'sorrow' for their actions and a keenness to 'atone.'<sup>45</sup> According to the logbooks, punishment in the school took the form of isolation, 'double tasks,' no playtime and meetings with the headmistress.<sup>46</sup> While many other forms of schooling used corporal punishment, Powis Street eschewed it in favour of the 'firm and kindly' discipline which was encouraged in special schools.<sup>47</sup> After all, these myopic children,

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<sup>41</sup> EO/DIV6/POW/LB/1, Powis School Logbook MD 1894-1913, 22 Feb 1911, p.183

<sup>42</sup> SC/PPS/063/061, Annual Report for 1913, p.7

<sup>43</sup> For examples myopic scholars described as troublesome see EO/DIV6/POW/LB/02, Powis School Logbook MD 1913-1921, 8 June 1916, p.243; 26 Nov 1915, p.239

<sup>44</sup> Myopic boys found truanting see *ibid.* 16 May 1918, p. 249; Tilley accused of stealing see 19 Oct 1914, p. 233; Sawyer severely punished for stealing 30 March 1914, p.231

<sup>45</sup> EO/DIV6/POW/LB/2, Powis School Logbook MD 1913-1921, 8 July 1916, p.243

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* 9 July 1916, p.243. There is no detailing of 'double tasks' in any of the other sources, so quite how punitive this was as a punishment is difficult to gauge.

<sup>47</sup> SC/PPS/063/061, Annual Report for 1903 p.49

like their verminous counterparts, were ultimately still victims of circumstance; it was not their fault, Mrs Burgwin argued, that many had 'been much petted by long residence in hospitals, and made selfish by the care they receive at the hands of their friends.'<sup>48</sup>

Under the Children Act, any action by an adult which could cause 'injury to his [sic] health' – both physical and mental – could result in a charge of cruelty.<sup>49</sup> Powis Street's holistic approach to discipline, suggests there may have been concern that it would be perceived as cruel to inflict corporal punishment on an already 'defective' child.<sup>50</sup> Many local institutions tended to work under the assumption that some children, namely girls, were more susceptible to injury than others. In elementary board schools, for example, heavy handed punishment or indeed academic pressure was typically considered by parent and teacher to be detrimental to a girl's health.<sup>51</sup> Meanwhile, in the juvenile courts girls were never punished by birching, unlike their male counterparts.<sup>52</sup> In special schools, however, boys and girls were positioned equally, the aim always being to forge independence.<sup>53</sup> Tilley, How and Sawyer, for example, would have been taught lessons in cooking and cleaning, subjects which in an elementary board school, would only ever have been taught to girls.<sup>54</sup> If these boys were being expected to appropriate feminine tasks, could it be that corporal punishment, with its masculine associations, was considered by Mrs Windle to injure these boys, whose welfares had been framed as feminine?

#### **4 Corporal Punishment and Welfare**

As suggested in Powis Street's approach to discipline, the type of punishment meted out was dependent on perceptions of the child and its welfare. Part II of the Children Act would define cruelty towards children as that which 'wilfully assaults, ill treats,

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid. p.49

<sup>49</sup> Children Bill 1908, cl.11

<sup>50</sup> SC/PPS/063/061, Annual Report for 1903 p.4

<sup>51</sup> On the gendering of punishment in schools see Davin, 'Growing Up,' p.129. The majority of complaints made at Maryon Park school, were concerned with the welfare of girls not boys. See EO/DIV6/MAY/LB/2, Maryon Park Boys School Logbook 1910-1913 pp.245-246  
EO/DIV6/MAY/LB/4, Maryon Park Girls Logbook 1913-1921, pp.181, 184 -185, 190. On the gendering of the curriculum see PP 1887 Elementary Education Acts. Second report of the Royal Commission appointed to inquire into the working of the Elementary Education Acts, England and Wales C.5056, p.120. See also EO/DIV6/MAY/LB/4, Maryon Park Girls Logbook 1913-1921, 25 June 1919, p.190

<sup>52</sup> Thanks to Kate Bradley for bringing this to my attention

<sup>53</sup> SC/PPS/063/061, Annual Report for 1903 p.49

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, pp.10-13

neglects, abandons, or exposes such child or young person...in a manner likely to cause...unnecessary suffering, or injury to his health.'<sup>55</sup> The emphasis was placed on the word 'unnecessary.' Suffering was acceptable as long as it was deemed necessary. In the disciplinary context of punishment, beating and caning could have a place. Who decided, however, when necessary became unnecessary?

Regulation No 1070 (a) of the Education Committee stated

Head teachers are to use every endeavour to reduce all forms of punishment to the minimum compatible with the welfare of the children and the school, and are not in any case to inflict, or allow to be inflicted, corporal punishment (save for grave moral offences) until other methods have been tried and failed.<sup>56</sup>

As was suggested by Mrs Burgwin's description of discipline in special schools and Powis Street's approach to punishment, the LCC's official policy on corporal punishment was to view it as a last resort. The regulation did, however, seek to ensure the 'welfare,' not just of the child, but also of the school. As a result when the London Teacher's Association (LTA) complained in 1913 that 'difficulties in maintaining order occasionally arise from...young teachers...not [having] the power to inflict even slight corporal punishment,' the Education Committee were able to agree that new teachers needed to be able to inflict corporal punishment (in the presence of the head teacher), by arguing it would

lead to great improvement in the discipline of the classes...[It] would have the result of preventing occasional irregularities and would make the position of the young teacher much more satisfying than it is at present.<sup>57</sup>

Corporal punishment could be framed as a form of necessary suffering in elementary classrooms, because it forced children to focus on their teacher, leading to more disciplined scholars. If the cane could be seen to produce a well ordered classroom, then it could be seen to be in the 'welfare of ... the school.'<sup>58</sup> Welfare, therefore, was not just understood in terms of the developmental effects of care on an individual, but also in terms of an institution's ability to construct a disciplined environment.

The LCC agreed with the LTA that corporal punishment was necessary in schools, they also considered, however, that just like the child of Powis Street school, corporal

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<sup>55</sup> Children Bill 1908, cl.11

<sup>56</sup> Quoted in LCCEMOP Apr-June 1913, p. 617

<sup>57</sup> LCCEMOP Nov-Dec 1913, p.698

<sup>58</sup> LCCEMOP April-June 1913, p.617

punishment was not 'compatible with the welfare' of children under seven.<sup>59</sup> As a result in 1907 the LCC compelled schools to confine the use of the cane to those in Standard One and above. In response the LTA argued in vain that

Many little children under seven, boys especially, have mischievous and often vicious tendencies which are more easily corrected by judicious punishment at this early stage than if left until later, when bad habits have become fixed. No complaints have been made to irregular or excessive punishment of infants and the Committee regret the Council have taken away the right to use the cane for infants; as it is of very little use to punish boys with a slap.<sup>60</sup>

For the LTA, the cane was not excessive but a way to ensure healthy moral development. Moreover they stated no complaints had been made when their members had administered the cane to infants. Part II of the Children Act accepted the earlier proviso set out in the Prevention of Cruelty and Protection of Child Act 1889 that:

Nothing in this part of the Act shall be constructed to take away or affect the right of any parent, teacher or other person having the lawful control or charge of a child or young person to administer punishment to such child or young person.<sup>61</sup>

Was the lack of apparent complaints mentioned by the LTA a sign that the Children Act reflected local opinion that chastisement was not only a teacher's right but a necessity in preventing 'bad habits'?<sup>62</sup>

In 1913, at Maryon Park Elementary Infants School, the mother of Charles Maggs accused her son's teacher, Mr Gates, of pushing him, having claimed to have found a bruise on her son's arm. When the Infants' head mistress investigated, however, Charles and his sister Rose said their mother had beaten him for having 'stayed in the street until about 11pm,' instead of going home.<sup>63</sup> No further action was taken; the mother's beating was not reported. To have chastised the child to the point of bruising, evidently Mrs Maggs agreed with the LTA that 'it is of very little use to punish boys with a slap.' So why complain? To falsely accuse the teacher of unnecessary force, it

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid

<sup>60</sup> LCCECMOP Jan-Feb 1908, p.574

<sup>61</sup> Prevention of Cruelty and Protection of Child Act 1889, quoted in Harry Hendrick, *Child Welfare in England 1872-1989*, (Routledge, 1994) p.55

<sup>62</sup> LCCECMOP Jan-Feb 1908, p. 574

<sup>63</sup> EO/DIV6/MAY/LB/8, Maryon Park Infants Logbook 1896-1913, 19 June 1913, p.328

suggests that the use of chastisement in schools was seen by some opportunistic parents as a way to portray themselves as fastidious guardians, who would never be seen to let their child be harmed by a teacher or indeed lax parenting. Could it be that Mrs Maggs used corporal punishment to hide her own 'bad habits'?<sup>64</sup>

Under Section VII, Article 102 of the 1908 Provisional School Management Code, all teachers had to first gain approval from the head teacher to inflict corporal punishment. They would then be issued with a cane and a punishment book in which the details of the case had to be entered and initialled by the head teacher.<sup>65</sup> This ritualised process in which a teacher's wish to inflict corporal punishment had to be approved, administered and typically witnessed by the school's head teacher meant the LCCEC and parents had a shared framework with which to judge a teacher's actions by. The head teacher had become a local judge of necessary and unnecessary suffering. It reinforced an image of the school as an institution which shared the values of the wider community; none of the three schools discussed in this paper, for example, ever received complaints about corporal punishment which had been approved by the head teacher and was why when Mrs Maggs accused her son's teacher of hitting him, she complained to the head teacher and not to Mr Gates.<sup>66</sup>

The accusation made against Mr Gates was not the only complaint received at Maryon Park Elementary School. Between 1910 and 1916 there were eight complaints from relatives about teachers' treatment of children. All eight entries suggest that the teachers' actions had *not* been witnessed by the head, for example:

Mrs Bonner, mother of Ellen Bonner made a complaint that her child had been struck by her teacher Miss Cormack with a ruler. The head teacher investigated the case, and found that the punishment had been inflicted on the afternoon of May 4<sup>th</sup>...and that a slight bruise had resulted.<sup>67</sup>

For the parents who complained at Maryon Park, it was not necessarily the chastisement itself which was disputed but rather the teacher's authority. While national legislation granted a right to inflict punishment, at a local level the teacher

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<sup>64</sup> LCCECMOP Jan-Feb 1908, p.574

<sup>65</sup> See Article 102 of the Provisional School Management Code quoted in LCCECMOP Jan-Feb 1908, p.366

<sup>66</sup> For further comparison see Jennifer Davis, 'A Poor Man's System of Justice: The London Police Courts in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century' in *Historical Journal* 27 (1984) 309-35

<sup>67</sup> EO/DIV6/MAY/LB/4, Maryon Park Girls Logbook 1913-1921, 5 May 1916, p.184

needed the approval of the head teacher and therefore local parents. Furthermore, the majority of Maryon Park's children were the sons and daughters of labourers, watermen, seamen and travellers, living in housing where 'all the events of life and death take place in one room.'<sup>68</sup> In 1908 the Local Government Committee argued, that it was 'in the interests not only of [such] children, but also of the good government of London' that they be 'rescued' from their 'poorer quarters' and placed in 'more beneficial surroundings.'<sup>69</sup> Did such attitudes towards a child's family and their surroundings - articulated in the debates surrounding the Children Bill and administered through LCC policy - affect parental trust in a child's teacher?

Bloomfield Road School, in contrast to Maryon Park Elementary School, had an intake made up of more comfortable working class and middle class children, whose fathers were teachers, policemen and foremen.<sup>70</sup> Families continued to send their child to the school past the age of twelve and although not from the upper middle classes, many of Bloomfield's parents came from households which separated the sleeping and living arrangements of adults and children, aspiring to a world where servants and governesses took care of their child's world.<sup>71</sup> The lack of complaints amongst Bloomfield's parents, therefore, may not mean children did not receive unregulated punishment, but rather that parents did not question, like they had done at Maryon Park, the teacher's legislative right to administer it.

## **5 Questioning the School's Authority**

The relationship between teacher and parent fluctuated during the First World War, with the authority of many schools being increasingly tested by parents and many teachers accepting parental opinion. Yet such changes were dependent on existing attitudes towards parental and educational environments. During air raids on the 13 and 14 June 1917, the headmistress noted at Bloomfield Road that, 'several parents came to see children' and 'waited quietly on the staircase,'<sup>72</sup> similarly in the Boys'

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<sup>68</sup> LCCECMOP, April-June 1914 p. 866. See X/095/035 Maryon Park Boys Admission and Discharge p. 2 for fathers occupations

<sup>69</sup> LCCECMOP Mar-April 1908, p.1365

<sup>70</sup> See X/095/301, Bloomfield Road Girls Admission Register p.12

<sup>71</sup> See Duckworth, 'Walk 78' p.289; also Paul Thompson, *The Edwardians* (Wiedenfield and Nicolson, 1975) pp.56-57 in which he argues the habitual use of servants in upper middle class households encouraged parents to consider their child's education the formal responsibility of a nanny or governor.

<sup>72</sup> EO/DIV6/BLO/LB/6, Bloomfield Road School Diary/Logbook Girls 1913-1928, 13 June 1917 and 14 June 1917, p.238

Department, there was a sense of shared consciousness where, the 'air raid has proved a considerable strain on all concerned.'<sup>73</sup> By comparison, the head teachers of the Girls' and the Infants' departments of Maryon Park portrayed the parents, during the air raid, as a frightened rabble, which they brought to order:

The Girls entry for 14 June stated:

Enemy Air Raid 11.40 Children quite orderly and continued work as usual. Were dismissed between 1150 and 1155. Numbers of parents were coming up in a distraught condition demanding their children.<sup>74</sup>

The next day the Infants head teacher noted:

At 10.05am parents came up to say that another air raid had started I persuaded them to go home and leave the children in peace. They came again in ten minutes time and implored me to let them have their children. I told them that if they lined up in the playground and made no panic I would send the children.<sup>75</sup>

In both the Girls' and Infants' accounts Maryon Parks' head mistresses viewed the school as taking legitimate control of both parents and children. In peacetime many children 'so neglected at home that they have to be excluded,' were sent to LCC cleansing stations until they could enter the school with 'habits of cleanliness and order.'<sup>76</sup> Such cases resulted in parents complaining to the school that this went beyond their educational role, with the complaints invariably described by Maryon Park's head teachers as 'abusive.'<sup>77</sup> In the air raids while the children were now to be described by the headmistress as 'orderly' their uninvited parents were still described as 'demanding' and 'distraught.' Unlike their quiet counterparts at Bloomfield Road, Maryon Parks' parents acted as intrusive reminders of the world that encroached all too regularly on the clean and ordered environment of this school.<sup>78</sup> Yet despite these descriptions of parents and the fact the LCC had issued strict instructions to keep parents out and gates locked,<sup>79</sup> both Bloomfield Road and Maryon Park had allowed

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<sup>73</sup> EO/DIV6/BLO/LB/3, Bloomfield Road School Diary/Logbook Boys 1913-1928, 13 and 14 June 1917, p.239

<sup>74</sup> EO/DIV6/MAY/LB/4, Maryon Park Girls Logbook 1913-1921, 13 June 1917, p.187

<sup>75</sup> EO/DIV6/MAY/LB/9, Maryon Park Infants Logbook 1913-1930, 14 June 1917, p.230

<sup>76</sup> EO/PS/12/M21/25, London County Council Education Department, Copy of HM Inspector's Report, Woolwich, the Maryon Park LCC School, 1909

<sup>77</sup> See EO/DIV6/MAY/LB/2, Maryon Park Boys School Logbook 1910-1913, 22 Nov 1911, p.26 and EO/DIV6/MAY/LB/4, Maryon Park Girls Logbook 1913-1921, 25 June 1914, p.178

<sup>78</sup> EO/DIV6/MAY/LB/4, Maryon Park Girls Logbook 1913-1921, 13 June 1917, p.187

<sup>79</sup> EO/DIV6/MAY/LB/3, Maryon Park Boys Logbook 1913-1928, p. 239. For LCC instructions see R. Kennedy, *The Children's War: British Children's experience of the Great War*, unpublished thesis, University of London, 2006 p.128



parents into the school and (in the case of Maryon Park) had let parents leave with their children. It suggests that existing ideas about who could take charge of a child and when were being questioned. The LCC's view of parents during air raids was that they were outsiders threatening the 'normal character' of the classroom that schools were trying so desperately hard to maintain.<sup>80</sup> For local head teachers, however, faced with large groups of worried parents, it was difficult to disregard their concerns that children would be safer at home.

In the case of Powis Street Special School, whose intake came from across London - with scholars from many of the poorer boroughs such as Fulham and Hoxton - most air raids were met with a noticeable lack of attendance, Mrs Windle arguing, in a matter-of-fact manner, that the warnings had caused 'nervousness' amongst families.<sup>81</sup> Parental caution and children's absences had long been a feature of the history of Special Schools. In her 1903 Special Schools report to the LCC, Mrs Burgwin, commented that:

Indulgent parents frequently desired nothing more for an afflicted child than that it should remain at home petted and spoiled, whilst the debased and degraded parents saw no shame in trading on a child's infirmity.

In either case it resulted in a 'loss of training which would make the child alert and self-reliant.'<sup>82</sup> For Burgwin the child was failed when kept at home, encouraging dependence; but for many parents, placing their defected child in a special school did more harm than good for their child's welfare. For example, Powis Street School dealt with 'several objections' and two formal complaints when children's teeth were extracted without parental consent following the introduction of medical examinations.<sup>83</sup> Just as parents at Maryon Park felt their authority had been undermined by unauthorised punishment or cleansing regulations, institutional intervention left parents at Powis Street feeling helpless in preventing further bodily trauma to their already 'defective' child. Consequently the only way parents had been able to protect their child before and during the war was to keep them at home. In June 1914, for example, the mother of Donald Macpherson 'came from Fulham and insisted on taking him home, as

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<sup>80</sup> LCC, quoted in Kennedy, *Children's War*, pp.127-128. See Stefan Goebel, 'Schools,' pp.188-134 in Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert, *Capital Cities at War Paris, London, Berlin 1914-1919 Volume 2 A Cultural History* (Cambridge University Press, 2007) p.224 for Board of Education air raid guidelines

<sup>81</sup> EO/DIV6/POW/LB/02, Powis School Logbook MD 1913-1921, 10 Sept 1915, p.238

<sup>82</sup> SC/PPS/063/061 Annual Report for 1903

<sup>83</sup> EO/DIV6/POW/LB/02, Powis School Logbook MD 1913-1921, 8 Oct 1909, pp.161; 30-31 Sept 1915, p.239

she 'could not bear to be separated from him,'<sup>84</sup> Unsurprisingly therefore air raids caused a 'small attendance' amongst the school's scholars.<sup>85</sup> It was not just parents, however, who felt the home provided protection from the school and the wider world, spontaneous truancing suggests some children at Powis Street felt similarly.<sup>86</sup>

## **6 Understanding the Child's Experience**

Harry Woodhouse, of Class ii, was boarding out in 1915 when the first air raids occurred. Harry was considered 'a hard worker,' but by November, following a year long intermittent bombing campaign, he, and his fellow boarding friend James Davy, 'played truant – went home alone to Hoxton,' a walk that would have taken well over three hours. By April 1916 Harry was described as 'a mass of nerves. This state of mind seems to have become worse since the zeppelin raids.'<sup>87</sup> While Powis Street's approach to discipline, as discussed above, suggests they had always tended to consider the physiological welfare of their scholars, the air raids seem to have made the psychology of the child more acute throughout London schools.

The psychological impact air raids had on children was not noted at Maryon Park or Bloomfield Road until June 1917 when the schools themselves became directly affected by air raids, bringing parents to the gates.<sup>88</sup> It suggests that unless the established relationships between parent, child and teacher were not upset then the individual responses of children were less likely to be discussed. For example, it was only following an air raid in October 1917, which closed the school and destroyed the homes of many of Maryon Park's students, that the Girls' headmistress visited one of her affected scholars, Ivy Sailik [sic] and described her as 'suffering from shell shock.'<sup>89</sup> The difference between Powis Street and its larger mainstream counterparts was that the individuality of the 'special' child had always been emphasised, it was its unique vulnerability which had brought it to the school in the first place. To describe children as a 'mass of nerves' as early as 1915, suggests that Powis street school was perhaps more attuned to describing their scholar's psychological fragility.

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 3 June 1914, p.232

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 15 June 1917, p.247

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 4 Oct 1916, p.242

<sup>87</sup> EO/DIV6/POW/LB/02, Powis School Logbook MD 1913-1921, 10 Sept 1915, p.240; 9 November 1915, p.240; first air raid entry, 4 Oct 1916; p.242, truancing.

<sup>88</sup> It is worth noting that on 13 June 1917 a school in Poplar was directly hit, killing 18 children. See Goebel, 'Schools,' p.226

<sup>89</sup> EO/DIV6/MAY/LB/4, Maryon Park Girls Logbook 1913-1921, 8 Oct 1917, p.188

Once daylight air raids began affecting Bloomfield Road and Maryon Park the head teachers began to suggest it was 'a considerable strain on all concerned,'<sup>90</sup> and that visits should be made 'to see parents' living in damaged homes.<sup>91</sup> The war had exposed every Londoner to the potential horror of losing someone or something, it exposed them to the realisation that everyone was vulnerable.<sup>92</sup> The Children Act 1908 referred to a 'place of safety' for children, which the LCCEC positioned as London schools.<sup>93</sup> Yet the air raids of 1917 showed that classrooms and playgrounds could be vulnerable and even dangerous environments, they were no more safe than the homes found in the 'poor quarters' that had so long been the considered antithesis of the elementary classroom.<sup>94</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Between 1908 and 1918 perceptions of children and how best to protect and discipline them were often in dispute between on the one hand Parliament, the London County Council and local schools, and on the other, parents and children. In order to determine which children would need what level of care in the 1908 Children Bill, Parliament had welcomed the input of the country's largest local education authority, the LCC. The success of a school to balance the LCC's idea of the child, its protection and discipline, with the realities of their scholars, however, was highly dependent on the perceptions teachers' and parents' had of one another and the relationship this produced. Parents, teachers and the LCC did broadly agree in their approach to the discipline of the child. All agreed it was a necessity to chastise the strong and healthy child to prevent it developing bad habits. Yet while legislation embedded such chastisement as the

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<sup>90</sup> EO/DIV6/BLO/LB/3, Bloomfield Road School Diary/Logbook Boys 1913-1928, 13 June and 14 June 1917, p.239

<sup>91</sup> EO/DIV6/MAY/LB/4, Maryon Park Girls Logbook 1913-1921, 2 Oct 1917, p188. Home visits by teachers were not unheard of before the war, consider Mrs Burgwin who worked at the poverty-stricken school Orange Street in Southwark, PP 1887 Elementary Education Acts. Second report of the Royal Commission appointed to inquire into the working of the Elementary Education Acts, England and Wales C.5056, p.120. Or Clara Grant who regularly visited the homes of children who went to her Fern Street School and settlement in Bow, before and during the war, see Kate Bradley, *Poverty, Philanthropy and the State: Charities and the Working Classes in London* (Manchester University Press, 2009) especially ch.3. Generally though, the war did encourage schools to take a more active presence in the community, see LCCECMOP, Jan-June, 1915, p.268; EO/DIV6/BLO/LB/6, Bloomfield Road School Diary/Logbook Girls 1913-1928 22 Sept 1915, p.93; 15 Dec 1915, p.233.

<sup>92</sup> EO/DIV6/MAY/LB/4, Maryon Park Girls Logbook 1913-1921, 19 June 1917, p.187 'Miss Hyde ill – probably shock following last week's air raids – heart attack and fainting sent home in charge of Miss Stewart.' See also Goebel, 'Schools,' p.223 'The air raids on London created among teachers a sense of belonging to the community of those at risk of personal loss.'

<sup>93</sup> Children Bill 1908, cl. 17; LCCECMOP March-April 1908, p.1365

<sup>94</sup> LCCECMOP March-April 1908, p.1365

teacher's right, in practice this was granted by the head teacher, acting on behalf of local parents, not national legislation. Before the war the right of the teacher to protect and discipline the child was never notably questioned at Bloomfield school. In contrast Maryon Park and Powis Street both faced regular opposition, mainly from parents whose authority to determine their child's care had already been questioned either by LCC regulations (on child cleanliness and ability) or by a teacher's own flouting of regulations on corporal punishment. The problem was that both the LCC and teachers assumed that many poorer families were careless families, and that disability was encouraged by poor parenting. Whether it was a myopic boy being sent to blind school or a girl being sent home for having a dirty pinafore, the opinion of the parent from poor circumstances was at best humoured and at worse disregarded. When the LCC argued the child was 'a victim of circumstance' it only referred to those considered poor or verminous, the clean or middle class child was not mentioned. The LCC's discussions on rescuing poor or cleansing verminous children encouraged a division between schools and their poorer neighbourhoods. The First World War, however, made the dangers of what lay beyond the school gate pale in comparison with the dangers which were falling from the sky and destroying the homes of teacher and scholar alike. Air raids forced teachers to reassess their approach to protecting the child. It was no longer just the poor child who was a victim of circumstance, their poor families were too, indeed in an environment which was now exposed to indiscriminate bombing even teachers may have wanted to be rescued from such poor and dangerous circumstances.