

How the pupils reacted

ON MONDAY, third and fourth form pupils at Downs School, Compton, wrote of their reactions to the weekend's disastrous fire that gutted the school's science block.

Mrs. Diana Mottley head of the school's English Department, asked her pupils to set down their own feelings about the fire.

The comments, which formed part of the ad hoc teaching arrangements after the fire, are reproduced here. All the words and feelings are the children's, with only occasional spelling and punctuation correction by Mrs. Mottley.



Headmaster Mr. Phillip Bowden watches firemen battle the flames early on Saturday morning.

The night our school caught fire . . .

"MY FIRST reaction was of joy. The school has been burned down. No school on Monday.

"My mum said to me that there had been a fire at school. At first I did not believe her."

"I heard about the fire when I was walking to the bus. I heard people talking about it but they said it was only one room so I thought that wasn't too bad."

"I found out when my Dad came in from work. I had seen flashing lights going round my bedroom but I didn't know it was from the fire engine outside our gate."

"I watched the fire until about 5.30 a.m."

"I thought I would have laughed but I didn't. We all used to say I wish the school would burn down, but I was sorry, very sorry."

Our first reactions

"At first I didn't believe my Mum but when I saw the fire I felt really choked."

"I thought of all the damage caused by the fire and of the dangerous fumes that chemicals had let off into the air. Then about the animals that were in the science block."

"My first reaction was of joy, excitement and generally wishing the whole had burnt down. After the first few minutes I started to feel sorry for everybody who had books and things in lockers and classrooms."

"I thought about the gerbils getting roasted, but they didn't. Somebody takes them home at the weekend."

"When I saw the picture of the school I pretended to be happy when really it was a bit sad ... as the evening went on I started to think about what I had in my locker."

"My first reaction when I found out was of anger. I felt sorry for everybody. I felt like crying!"

"I thought it was a waste of time and money for it just to go up like that."

"I knew everything would be mixed up on Monday and classes would be squashed together."

"At first I was glad, but later felt sorry for the fifth years and also for my own year as our Science and Maths studies would be highly interrupted."

"In fact the first thing I thought of was the brand new trampoline and my P.E. kit. When we heard it on the news that evening it was difficult to believe that it was our school that the newsreader was on about."

"How did it start? By accident or on purpose? Which parts of the school were on fire and what was the extent of the damage?"

When we saw the damage

"I saw the mess on Saturday afternoon but I couldn't believe it had happened. I saw quite a few kids laughing about it. I could put them through a brick wall."

"When I came in this morning I was sorry for the staff whose classrooms got burned after they had got them just the way they wanted them."

"It gave me the creeps to think a few hours

"The air smelt terrible and everything was so quiet. It was as if the world had come to an end."

"When I came to school I felt nasty inside. It scared me to look at it."

"I sort of felt sorry for the Headmaster because the laboratories were quite modern."

"The Physics room, where I had been the previous Friday, was just a charred shell."

"I thought what a lot of work the fifth years would have to do before their 'O' levels and C.S.E.s, I also thought about the books that I had handed in which were burned."

"I thought about the good fun we had in the Biology room. I thought about Mr. Richards' new office and Mr. Closier and his new classroom. And about the amount of money spent on equipment."

"In our form room we were joking about it but I could not help feeling sorry."

"The Chemistry room is just a pile of rubble and you can see metal rafters over the Biology room all bent with the heat."

"I had never really seen a building straight after a fire apart from on telly. I was really disgusted ... all the tables, chairs, books, chemicals as well as people's experiments and all the fifth year exam projects."

"What had been there had now gone or most of it. I then thought that we would all stay in our form rooms and have the teachers come to us, but then I realized that there were no form rooms for some."

Reflections

"When you're playing around with your friends you say thing like you wish the school would burn down but you never really expect it to happen. At least, not to you."

"I doubt if the third year will see that rebuilt."

"The fireman who had been fighting the blaze since the early hours of the morning looked extremely tired and had bloodshot eyes."

"The person I felt really sorry for was Mr. Bowden. He had spent so much time and effort ensuring that we have all the right facilities and then a fire comes and destroys everything."

"Whilst in other lessons this morning we could look down onto the Maths block and Physics room. All around were books and equipment scattered everywhere, charred and black. I could see the weighing scales on the floor of the Physics room which Mr. Hall said cost around £75 quite a few years ago. The amount of damage looked incalculable from my point of view."

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8:10: A-A, a:1: A-A, A-A