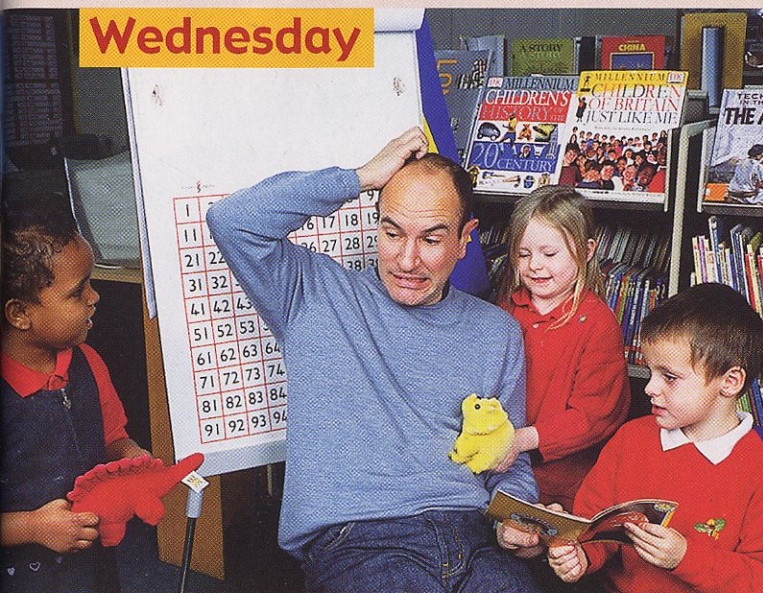
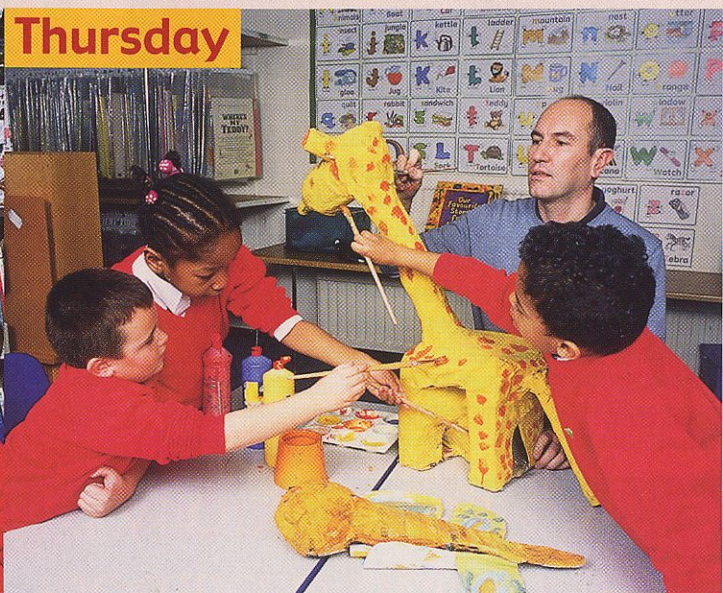


Wednesday



Monday: Robert faces mountains of marking in the staff room.
Tuesday: 'Miss' answers a question in the playground.
Wednesday: 29 six-year-olds can be demanding.
Thursday: Michael, Aisha and Bilal get stuck in with the paints.
Friday (overleaf): at the end of a long week Robert gets to sit down with a well-earned cup of coffee.

Thursday



called Blue Table and not Bottom Table, or Table That Drives Me Up The Wall. However, even young children are aware that some groups are set more difficult work than others, and that they each have personal targets to work towards. The need to differentiate – to teach all ranges of ability in the classroom – is one of the key challenges faced by teachers.

Another major challenge is the Inspector. As well as undergoing Ofsted inspections every few years, most teachers will be observed once a term by an inspector from the LEA (Local Education Authority – but you knew that). Today it's my turn. Although the majority of inspectors are supportive of teachers and offer constructive advice, given the choice we'd rather they stayed in bed all day. But this inspector isn't in bed, he's in my classroom and, what's worse, he's making his way to Bottom – I mean, Blue Table. Please don't sit next to Joshua Brown. Please don't sit next to Joshua Brown. Please don't sit – damn.

Inspectors have a cunning way of singling out the child most likely to give the impression that his teacher has spent the past six months teaching him absolutely nothing. I hope for the best as Joshua watches the inspector making notes on my performance:

Joshua: (peering at inspector's notes) Do you know how to spell your name?

Inspector: Yes, I do.

Joshua: Do you know how to use capital letters and full stops?

Inspector: Yes, I do.

Joshua: Do you do joined-up writing?

Inspector: Yes, I do.

these abbreviations?), and is regretting missing the lecture at teacher training college that warned her that her social life was soon to be officially and indefinitely put on hold. 'I was marking work until 10pm last night,' she complains, 'and back in school by 8am.'

I am tempted to wonder how closely her four-year-old pupils monitor the comments she writes in each of their books, but feel it may be indelicate to raise the issue. For inexperienced teachers, marking can be overwhelming, but like many aspects of the job, it's something that becomes more manageable with experience.

It is true, however, that successful teaching requires careful preparation. This is an issue that finally seems to be understood by the government – primary teachers have recently been promised a day out of the classroom every two weeks in order that they can plan more effectively for their classes – a welcome initiative. And let's not forget the 12 weeks a year we get for our 'ollydeez...

Wednesday

11:15 the Year 1 classroom. Blue Table, to be precise. We like to think that pupils are unaware of the way we group them by ability in the classroom – that's why Blue Table is

I'm making a difference to children's lives.
 And I get to boss them around all day

Education

Joshua: Then you're sitting at the wrong table. You should be on Red Table.
For once, the Inspector is left speechless. Nice one, Joshua.

Thursday

1pm the staff room. I know teaching is stressful, but I never anticipated that one of the most difficult tasks facing me would be compiling my Christmas card list: the number of staff working here has doubled in the past three years. People sometimes wonder where the government has put all the money they've spent on education. I know where they've put it. They've spent it all on employing staff for my school, possibly as part of a cunning plan to keep afloat the greetings card industry. The high level of staffing is, of course, a good thing. Many children with special

The first casualty of becoming a primary school teacher is your image. You Will Never Be Cool Again

educational needs receive 1:1 support, others attend extra classes in literacy and numeracy and, most importantly, every class teacher now has a classroom assistant.

The classroom assistants in our school are encouraged to take responsibility for a wide range of tasks, as few people gain job satisfaction from spending the day slaving over a hot photocopier. Many classroom assistants are flattered that the government expects them to take on higher levels of responsibility, but there are concerns that they may not receive recognition of this in their pay.

One or two, in fact, are now leaving to train as teachers; I'm glad to see that they see a career teaching as being rewarding, as the public image of teaching is often negative. It can be tough but, like many teachers, I love my job and couldn't contemplate the thought of being deskbound in an office: without wishing to sound like an advert, it's a job where I can see I'm making a difference to children's lives. And I get to boss them around all day.

Friday

2:45 The Frog and Parrot, Old Brompton Road. (Don't worry: I can explain everything). Teaching in the capital has its problems: the extra allowance London teachers get is barely enough to cover our fares to work, and few young teachers can afford to get on the property ladder. One advantage, however, is that the world's greatest museums and galleries are on our doorsteps, and most schools organise regular day trips. Free travel on buses and tubes for school trips has recently been introduced, which is why



an hour ago we came to find ourselves upstairs on the number 74, stuck in the South Kensington traffic.

Much of our day at the Science Museum has been spent counting to 29: constantly checking that each child is present and correct: 'Make sure you bring them all back!' my head teacher had joked with me as we left.

'Miss...' Daniel is sat behind me, squirming up and down. 'Miss, I need the toilet.'

I turn towards him. 'I'm sorry, Daniel,' gesturing around the bus, 'but there's no toilet here. You'll have to wait until we get back to school.'

'But I really need the toilet,' he insists. 'Can't you ask the driver to stop?' I explain that, thanks to the chaos that ensued when the class boarded the bus, we are probably not in the driver's good books and a suggested pause in the journey may be viewed unsympathetically. Each time the bus stops I can hear Daniel muttering under his breath: 'Come on, driver, come on...' I have a picture in my head. The bus driver is angry. He is pointing at a puddle and he is handing me a mop and bucket. It's decision time.

I call my head teacher from outside the gents' in the Frog and Parrot. 'What's happened? What's the problem?'

'Everything's fine - just to let you know I'm - um - in a pub - don't worry - I can - explain everything...hello?'

Finally - and safely - back at school, I find Miss Henderson in the staff room, stretched out across two armchairs, fast asleep. I'd better wake her up. Doesn't she know you have to work here for 10 years before you're entitled to two armchairs?