

St Mary Redcliffe and Temple School

Martin Parr

I relish the challenge of interpreting a subject into a set of photos that somehow speak of my impressions and reading of a particular place. It is not easy to align these thoughts and ideas and discoveries into photographs.

The first job is to immerse oneself in the subject and take a position. Being granted the freedom to go into any lesson meant I could get to know the school very quickly. I was also able to watch and photograph during the breaks, especially lunch when the students had time to unwind. I noticed very early how relaxed they were with each other and enjoyed bundling, where they quite literally huddle together as groups. I tried to capture this with my camera, as I had never seen this played so affectionately in other schools I have photographed.

It was important to photograph the highlights of the academic year, so events like the first service for new students, sports day and the school ball for the leavers were entered into my diary. All these events, and others, set the scene for my portrait of the school. I also witnessed small acts of rebellion and individuality, like how loose your tie could be without it breaking school rules. I attended lessons in all the subjects, witnessed the comings and goings of these and saw how engaging teachers can be. Often the small details that can tell us as much as the bigger picture.

I always end up with too many images and then the editing process starts. There is a balance to be achieved between the information contained in an image and its strength as photo. It is like doing a jigsaw puzzle in which each component helps to articulate complex feelings and responses to my time at the school, but also to pass on basic information about the range of activities.

It was very exciting to document the school during such an important year – one in which it moved into the new building (funded as part of the Labour government's Building Schools for the Future initiative). Clearly, the students responded well to this vote of confidence in the school, the staff and the pupils. I feel very proud that such a positive and well run establishment can be part of the state education system run by Bristol City Council and I hope my photos do it justice by showing the momentum and heart of the school as well as describing this important year of change.

15.08.2011.