

## Chapter 1

### Day One Samson Little

The entire staff of Samson Little Comprehensive (otherwise known as 'The Little School of Special Measures') had gathered in the main staff room for the morning briefing which preceded lessons each day. With almost 1,500 students on roll, Samson was a large comprehensive, meaning that most staff were forced to cease preparations for the day at hand at 8.20 and run the gauntlet of early rising hooligans across the sprawling site. Hence the morning briefing was more of an inconvenience to be endured than the informative social gathering it was intended to be.

Just as the students fell into distinctive categories: the nerds, the glee club, the bullies and bullied, the smokers, the skater boys and catwalk girls; so the staff could be divided (and not by anything as dull as their subject departments). First to arrive to briefings were the keenest of the keen (mostly student teachers or newly qualified with some idealism and enthusiasm still in tact). They always managed to get a seat and sat poised, pen and planner at the ready to note down anything of importance.

Next would come the socialites, they too preferred to sit through briefing, usually with a large helping of caffeine and possibly some fruit or organic yoghurt. The pre-briefing conversation amongst the socialites would often revolve around the latest superfood to bestow health upon its eater.

Then came the jaded masses, who had timed their playground dash to perfection to minimise waiting time, which in their book was wasted time. In fact the morning briefing was to the jaded a complete waste of time since they could never retain a single announcement given. If stopped leaving briefing by a colleague who hadn't made it in time for whatever reason, they would respond with, 'it's all in the weekly'. The weekly 'Newsflash' was a printed document given to all staff every Monday morning. It used to be known as The Bulletin, but the head had changed it to 'Newsflash' in a desperate attempt to sex up the dreary document, which was also now available online. It did indeed contain all important notices and most of each morning briefing was indeed a series of 'reminders', drawing the staff's attention to this or that notice. If the jaded ever had a moment or two to spare before the notices started, they might be heard surmising as to the repeated content of what was to

come or estimating the number of trees that were sacrificed each term to print out the online Newsflash on behalf of dinosaurs who refused to move with the times.

Last to arrive were always the stragglers. They chose to socialise outside of school, often into the small hours and seemed to be permanently in a state of heightened anxiety as a result of their hedonistic tendencies. The stragglers were mainly 30 something singles who, in all honesty, had never really outgrown their student days. They were completely ignorant of the daily disturbances they caused by opening the squeaky door and letting in the corridor clamour, and forcing the jaded (who always stood on the sidelines) into the backs of the sofas to make room for them.

The Senior Management team had of late taken to sometimes arriving after the stragglers. There were two possible reasons for this: they wanted the entire staff to have to wait for their big entrance, in the manner of a legendary rock band who don't take to the stage until 10pm; or they had ever more to discuss in their pre-briefing briefing, in these pre-Ofsted days.

On this particular dull, wet Monday in June, the Senior Management team (or the 'too many chiefs' as they were known to the rest of the staff) were obviously determined to make an entrance – they didn't arrive until 8.33. The jaded resented every second of that three minutes. Two of their number defiantly continued their conversation a little too loudly, "As if we've got nothing better to do than stand around waiting," said one.

"Yes, never mind if we're all late to tutor, ey?" Replied the other.

The silver haired Head, Ros Wren, glared in the direction of the dissenters and cleared her throat. Ros Wren had been head at Samson Little for almost 10 years (celebrations were being planned for her 'tin-iversary'). In her early days she'd coloured her hair a spectrum of colours from plum to auburn to honey blonde, perhaps in an attempt to seem more human. For the last few years though, she'd clearly decided to embrace her not-so-stainless steel superego and ditched the dye.

"OK crew," Ros began. She always referred to her workforce in this way; she was their Captain and the school was her ship. No one knew where this seafaring analogy originated.

"First of all could I ask all tutors to check their pigeon holes this morning, there's an updated letter to go out regarding the INSET on Armed Forces Day next Wednesday."

"They had it Friday," a heckler called out from the back somewhere.

"No, there was a mistake on that one." Ros clarified to much moaning and groaning.

"And could I just remind all Heads of Faculties –"

"*Departments!*" Interjected another heckler.

Ros smoothed her silver hair as if the heckle had landed there and continued, "that they must email me an outline for the INSET day before the end of the week please, I've only had a couple so far." It was testament to Ros's lack of people skills that she still called departments faculties, despite the fact that absolutely no one else in school used the Americanism. Academies had Principals and Faculties; schools had heads and Departments. And Samson Little was still a school. Just. In actual fact it was one of the ten remaining state schools in the country.

"And finally from me, allow me to introduce Ian Mosley from the LEA, he'll be with us for a couple of weeks, working mostly with the English *Faculty*–"

"*Department!*" Insisted the second heckler.

Ros made a mental note to put this heckling business at the top of her agenda for Tuesday's pre-briefing briefing. She sensed a mutiny. "So Ian will be based in English, helping them get up to speed for our next inspection."

"Unsatisfactory," coughed a third heckler.

Meanwhile, horrified glances shot across the staffroom. Mosley's name had become synonymous with failed inspections. Every school in the area had now taken Academy status. Starting with Boonhill, over a year ago, and most recently with All Saints. All the Saints couldn't save them. Ros had briefed the Head of English, Mark Mann, on how to proceed during Mosley's visit. English was the target area during the last Ofsted inspection, which resulted in a Notice to Improve (the school's 5<sup>th</sup> notice during Ros's headship). Despite its reputation, the school had never been in Special Measures. It just felt like they were destined to be there. It was only a matter of time; the jaded staff could often be heard saying.

After the 'Captain's' notices, Martin Hedges began bouncing on the balls of his feet – a clear signal he had something to say. Hedges had quickly climbed the slippery pole to Senior Management at Samson Little through his expertise in data management

and sycophancy that bordered on religious fervour. He was denied his ultimate goal of a headship by the age of 40 by none other than Ros, who he'd written off during the interviews due to her colourful exterior. "Morning Team Samson," he began, "may I just remind staff that if you wish to leave site during the INSET and visit Boonhill Park to support Armed Forces Day and see Harry, you'll need to make your hours up. And secondly, there are a few too many students walking round in trainers and pumps at the minute, I know it's getting near to the end of term, but we need to pull together as a team on this please. And lastly, thanks to all the staff who supported on the corridors at lunch time yesterday, it was a superb team effort and anyone who can spare 15 minutes today, it looks like being another wet one, if you can assist, just see me afterwards please."