



LIFE MAGAZINES

MONTHLY A5 LOCAL LIFESTYLE MAGAZINES

OPINION - Location, Location, Location

I see articles in the press with monotonous regularity about people being followed around by MI5 agents, checking that they are not telling fibs in order to get their kids into a good school. In fact, this kind of thing has become so prevalent that it's been announced that, in future, local councils will not be able to use anti terrorist legislation to snoop on people to ensure that they really do live at 17 Acacia Avenue and not at number 47. The significance of this is, of course, that number 17 is in the catchment area for the St Top of the Holy League Table's School for the Children of Affluent Middle Class Parents, whereas number 47 is not.

I find this whole situation surprising and puzzling. This is not because I wouldn't expect a local council to resort to such extraordinary lengths to stop catchment cheats; I would put nothing past any government department at any level, regardless of who runs it, when it comes to squandering taxpayer's money. No, what puzzles me is, firstly, that there should be such a stratospheric gulf between two schools in the same area and, secondly, that parents will risk a hefty fine, public humiliation and a lifetime ban from the school of their choice, all in order to get their child into a school that is a few places further up the league table than their local one. What really astonishes me is that in most of these cases we are talking about a primary school. I decided to do a bit of research.

In the leafy market town of Southwell, where I live, there are two primary schools. The main one can proudly boast to have achieved Grade 1 (outstanding) in every aspect of its most recent Ofsted report while the other one has managed a mixture of Grades 1 and 2 (Good.) Travel a mile up the road and there is another primary school of a similar standard. I looked at West Bridgford,

which is a tad more urban, and it is a similar story; three primary schools, all with a pleasing mixture of outstanding and good in their Ofsted reports. This would all seem to support my theory that schools in the same area tend to be of a similar standard.

But, you will doubtless wonder, are all these schools hopelessly oversubscribed? Well, I can't speak for West Bridgford but I do know about the schools in Southwell. The main primary school is, it's fair to say, bulging at the seams but I haven't heard any stories of children that live in the catchment area being turned away. The other school in the town has places and the village school up the road is running at less than 90% of capacity. So, should someone falsely claiming to live in the town be given a place, it is highly unlikely that they will be denying a legitimate resident a school place for their child. There you have it then; in this area at least there is not a major problem with unscrupulous parents nicking "good" school places. Those local councils, and ours isn't one of them, that like to spend their time hiring PIs to follow hapless families about could perhaps better spend their money on making their "bad" schools that bit better.

Parents, if it is absolutely essential that you get your child into a school that has scaled the very heights of the league tables or if every school within a five mile radius is unremittingly hopeless, may I make a suggestion. Why not send them to a private school? It's not against the law (as yet,) costs less than you might think and is a lot less hassle than selling up and moving to a place where the SATs results are better and the house prices correspondingly higher. In years to come your little angel could even become a cabinet minister.

Howard Clemmow