

So school these days is easy? Think again.

People and politicians complain that school is getting easier. Damian Whitworth, a 35-year-old journalist, decided to see for himself. He spent a week as a pupil at a British secondary school, Brentwood County High School. It's a large state school and has about 1,800 pupils, girls and boys, aged between 11 and 18.

French

My first lesson is French. I am in a class of thirteen year olds. Outside the classroom some girls start interrogating me. ¹ *Are you really in our class?* 'How old are you?' 'How old do you think I am?' I reply. 'Well... you're not 13!'

First we have a listening test which I find difficult. I get 14 out of 20. Not bad. Then we make revision lists on the computer. ² _____. Now every pupil has one.

Maths

As we wait outside the maths classroom a teacher tells me to do up the top button of my shirt. The maths teacher uses an interactive whiteboard which has graphics and video, but the pupils don't look very interested in the lesson. A mobile rings and the owner hurries to switch it off. ³ _____

History

Mr Fishleigh is the history teacher. He doesn't have any problems controlling the noise level (other teachers do). ⁴ _____. He talks to them as if they were adults and gets their attention in return.

Lunch

In the canteen we can choose between traditional and fast food. Burger and chips is the most popular meal. ⁵ _____

Information and communication technology

We are designing spreadsheets for mobile phone sales and I cannot imagine a more boring lesson. ⁶ _____

Most children have Internet access at home and the school has a website where parents can see what homework their children have and when they have to give it in.

Religious education

The teacher introduces us to meditation. We sit cross-legged on our desks and try to fill our minds with blackness and think positively about people who we have been thinking negatively about. For 15 minutes the children sit, eyes closed, in total silence. When they leave the class they are slightly dazed: 'Incredible!' 'Amazing!' 'We should do this in maths!' ⁷ _____

The bell goes. End of school for the day.

As we leave there is a fight at the school gates. ⁸ _____ 'If anyone hits anyone, I'll call the police,' says a teacher.



3 READING

- b Read the introduction. Why did Damian Whitworth go back to school? What kind of school did he go to?
- c Read Damian's diary for one of the days he spent back at school. Does he think school is easier or harder now?
- d Read the text again and put the phrases A-H in the correct places.
 - A A crowd of pupils are watching.
 - B However, the pupils are totally involved.
 - C He's friendly with the pupils but not too friendly.
 - D When I was the same age as these children I had never used a computer.
 - E It's a magical moment and the most effective class I have seen.
 - F 'Are you really in our class?'
 - G One boy says he has chips every day.
 - H Phones that ring in class are confiscated until the end of the week.

So has school got easier?

It's difficult to say if lessons are harder or easier since I was a child because teaching methods have changed so much. All I can say is that during my working life I have had many tiring experiences. Being back at school for a week was as tiring as any of them. Being a pupil today is very, very hard work.