

A **KUMON!** **A**

A PART-TIME MATHS ⁽⁹⁾ $12 + 1 = 13$ **A**

TEACHER REPORTS ⁽¹⁰⁾ $14 + 1 = 15$

FROM THE NEWLY ⁽¹¹⁾ $17 + 1 = 18$

EMERGING PRIVATE ⁽¹²⁾ $16 + 1 = 17$

SECTOR IN MASS ⁽¹³⁾ $20 + 1 = 21$

EDUCATION ⁽¹⁴⁾ $19 + 1 = 2$ **A**

BRIAN

MICKLETHWAIT

Some time last year I was on Scott Chisholm's Talk Radio show and the talk turned to what "we" ought to be doing about maths teaching. To upstage the platitudinously statist think tanker I was on with, I spared the listeners the usual drivel about how our nation's maths policy or policies might be improved by this or that national maths initiative or national maths hour or national change of heart among our national politicians, and instead blurted out that I was myself thinking of becoming a part-time maths teacher. Which I was. And which I now am. I think I must have boasted about this radio performance to my friend Mariana Bell and that this was when she said she was busy opening something called a Kumon Centre, in Tooting Bec, South West London, which is a short tube ride from my home. The Centre opened for a couple of sessions a week. Would I like to help? Yes I would.

In the *Kumon Instruction Manual*,¹ we read:

Chapter 1: General Code of Instruction

- 1) The Kumon Method of Education is a home-based education system that aims to develop children's academic ability in order for them to become capable members of society; and to increase their self-learning ability, thereby making them more independent.
- 2) The materials used in the Kumon Method were created with the aim of producing the greatest learning effect in the shortest possible amount of time. To do this, the worksheets were not designed as a review of school work. Instead, they were designed to contain only the elements essential for mastering advanced secondary school mathematics and beyond.
- 3) The Kumon Method materials have been created to allow children to progress naturally and without overexerting themselves. By checking children's mastery of a learning focus, and applying repetition accordingly, the Kumon Method can be used to adjust their progress. Therefore, the materials are an ideal way of maximising each child's academic abilities.
- 4) We aim to give as many students as possible the opportunity to learn by using our materials. Moreover, the more students whom instructors encounter, the more their instructional skills will improve. When instructors strengthen their conviction and self confidence, they will come to be

able to develop their students to the maximum — in line with each one's ability and talents.

- 5) We must discover the full potential of children in order for them to improve further. ...

Fine words, but is any of this really happening? A recent advertisement for management trainees (*Guardian*, 3/8/99), went thus:

Kumon is the largest private educational company in the world, teaching Mathematics and English to over 2 million children worldwide. We are now undertaking a programme of planned expansion into areas throughout the UK.

The English teaching is only now getting going in Britain. It's the maths that Kumon is now famous for here, and all my experience is of the maths side.

In Britain, the price for Kumon maths is £38 per pupil per month. For this the children get one or two supervised sessions per week, whichever their parents prefer, at their local Kumon Centre, and enough homework at each visit to carry them through to their next one. You do Kumon for about twenty minutes each day. In exchange for a bigish slice out of that £38, the central Kumon organisation supplies all the piles of paperwork and guidance that is the Kumon system, Mariana getting the rest. I'll maybe get paid more than some pocket money when the numbers have grown more. What follows is absolutely not an official Kumon pronouncement, the Kumon organisation having neither seen this nor approved it.²

MASTERY

My opinion so far is that the Kumon method is excellent. It cuts elegantly through the usual British educational debates between progressives and traditionalists, offering the best of both and chucking out the rubbish.

As claimed in *The Guardian*, Kumon is big. It was first developed nearly half a century ago by a Mr Toru Kumon of Japan, who was worried about his son's fitful progress in school maths, and decided to do something about it himself. He slowly perfected his system, which since then has spread and spread. I don't know what Kumon's worldwide annual turnover now is, but it is big. This is an international mega-organisation, tightly structured and carefully supervised. The Kumon system is supported by an elaborate apparatus of back-up analysis, to tell you exactly how long each child ought to be taking to do each clutch of sheets before moving on, and what kind of progress you can expect over a period of months or years. Kumon instructors do things the Kumon way. Kumon is a global brand.³

But, just like the original Kumon enterprise in Japan all those years ago, each new Kumon Centre starts small and at first grows only quite slowly. Our Centre began with only a tiny handful of children. At the time of me finishing the writing of this, in August 1999, we have about thirty children, with never more than a dozen being present at the Centre at any one time. I say "Centre", but this is no big new Kumon building with a huge sign on it like a Macdonalds. We are now based at nice new Community Centre attached to a housing estate, not far from Balham tube station, having previously been in two other less satisfactory places in Tooting.

Part of the reason that Kumon Centres start small is that attendance is voluntary and it takes time for word to spread of what is being offered, and it takes time for the likes of Mariana and me to get the hang of the system. This is a great improvement on slamming five hundred screaming kids into a giant new building and then either turning it into a prison or else watching the children turn it into a slum, the procedures which so disfigure the state sector. When I started as a Kumon helper/teacher I wasn't hurled into an insane assylum of thirty adolescent prisoners whom I was expected to dazzle or terrorise into submission while their parents stood around jeering and demanding their rights. I was simply marking the work of one friendly little girl called Ruth. Ruth and her parents are on our side, and we're on theirs.

But what of Ruth? Did she choose Kumon? Well, I'd have to admit, no. Or only in the sense that she chooses to do what her

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parents want her to do, what with them looking after her, feeding her, keeping her warm in the winter, loving her and so forth. But the Kumon system does cause the children who do it to become enthusiastic. Ruth is making steady progress, seems very happy, and is now doing much better in her regular school maths classes.

I don't have any direct experience of the state system, but the problem with regular school maths teaching seems to be that children don't any longer practise the easy stuff enough until it becomes second nature. It's one thing to understand the *principle* of this or that mathematical notion, and be able laboriously to apply it. It's quite another to juggle numbers like a circus clown juggling plates, or as a child who speaks, reads and writes regularly learns to juggle letters, words and sentences. Kumon is not just about *understanding* maths; it is about *mastering* it. Once you *master* the easy stuff, you can go on to things like long division and quadratic equations, confident that the easier stuff on which the harder stuff depends won't slow you down.

When you start Kumon, you're given a "diagnostic test". Depending on how fast you did it and how many mistakes you made, you are then given your easy or not so easy first clutch of regular work. In regular maths, you get a small number of problems, and you are expected to get around 60% or 70% or thereabouts, and around 80% if you're really smart. With Kumon, you get lots of sums but they're easy, and you can get nearly 100% every time.

The symptom of mastery that we instructors wait for is not how many sums you're getting wrong, provided it's only a tiny few. We're waiting for perfection — as good as — that's *fast*. If you're taking twenty minutes to do sums that the Kumon system says you could be doing in five, then you haven't achieved *mastery*.

IT ALL MAKES SENSE

The children start out frightened and unhappy. Such was my lack of teaching experience that I at first thought they were frightened and unhappy children. Actually they were just frightened of *us*. As if their current work-load of stuff dreamed up by their ambitious parents wasn't enough (music, sport, etc.), here's yet another clutch of grown-ups wanting to pile yet more burdensome and incomprehensible nonsense on top of them. Who are these people? What is this place? Why this scary looking test? Oh misery.

But then something good happens. The children start to realise that nothing difficult or humiliating is going to be demanded of them. The sums are easy. Whenever things get any more complex, the new stuff is carefully explained — explained by the paperwork itself, that is, not by us — as many times as that's needed. Instead of finding about a third of everything they're doing incomprehensible and stressful, it all makes sense.

Each Kumon child starts his daily stint by noting his starting time, and then off he goes. (1) $3 + 1 =$ (2) $4 + 1 =$ (3) $5 + 1 =$ (4) $6 + 1 =$ (5) $8 + 1$ (6) $3 + 2 =$ (I've written them horizontally, but on the Kumon sheets, they're piled up vertically, and in suitably large writing.) Wow! I can do this! And you know what? It's actually quite *fun*. He does several dozen of these sums, none of them hard, and when he's finished, notes the time of that.

Provided Mariana has judged the difficulty and amount of the work about right, it probably took him about ten minutes. It is then marked. If he's on one of his visits to the Centre, he shoves what he's done in front of Mariana's assistant, yours truly, and I mark it. This is done by putting a big red circle on every page where everything is completely right, this procedure being the rule rather than the exception. But in the event of any mistakes — and markers have to be alert because there aren't that many, and quite often none at all — the number *of* the problem, so to speak, is circled in red. If the child fell into that little trap in the sums above and put (5) $8 + 1 = 8$, a red circle would go around the (5), with the entire page getting no circle. Mistakes, when they happen, often come in clumps, when confusion or stress or inattention happen to strike, and then, like a train heaving itself back onto the rails, 100% perfection is resumed. Marking doesn't take long, and for the harder sums there's an answer book to speed it up.

We now come to one of the secrets at the heart of Kumon. Very politely and non-judgementally, the child is asked to please correct all the mistakes. No "explanations" are supplied. No fuss is made. It's no big deal. The child worked hard and steadily, and concentrated well, despite the distractions of other children coming and going, us talking to parents, police cars screaming down Tooting Bec High Street, whatever. You got three sums wrong. Please cross out the wrong answers and put the right answers. Tick, tick, tick. Good work. (Only if the child gets the correction process itself repeatedly wrong are explanations supplied.) Mariana gathers in all the work done, at the Centre and at home, and on the basis of it works out what work to give the child next.

And so it goes. A bit each day, with lots of back-tracking and repetition to reinforce basic principles, and with new principles carefully explained. As the months go by, ever more abstruse mathematical concepts are first understood, and then practised and practised, until maths of the highest sort holds no fears at all.

We don't criticise; we do praise. The only thing you can get badly wrong if you are a Kumon child is if you don't do the work at all or if you skip doing several days of it and do a whole week's worth in one procrastinated lump just before coming to the Centre again. That's not how it works. You do a little bit of Kumon, every day, day after day after day. Do that, and you *will* get better at maths. A characteristic effect of Kumon — we're starting to hear things like this ourselves — is that "whereas she used to be near the bottom in maths classes, now she's near the top".

PARENTS

Whereas the children tend to start out anxious but then settle down and start to enjoy their Kumon, some of the parents can be more of a problem. Ambition for your children to get ahead educationally is no vice, but it can take the form of pressing your child to do complicated work when simpler procedures have not been fully absorbed. Some parents see (12) $6 + 2 =$, and say: my child's cleverer than that! Give him something more complicated.

But getting $6 + 2 = 8$ most of the time, with maybe an anxious look to an adult face to see if all is well, is a world away from *knowing* that $6 + 2$ is 8, with no doubts or hesitations or finger countings, and this difference is the essence of the difference that Kumon makes. Kumon maths is like doing physical exercises or musical scales. Do these exercises perfectly, again and again, a bit each day, and you'll get better. Skimp on them and insist on doing advanced gymnastics or complicated piano sonatas before you have the basic skills in your grip, and problems are inevitable.

If parents don't get or refuse to get this, because their child is too clever to be bothering with "easy" stuff day after day, or because they get impatient, there's a problem. Mariana tells me that if she senses that this is the sort of parent she's dealing with — unable or unwilling to grasp what Kumon is about — then she tries to warn them away. Because parents are essential to the system working. Kumon work must be done every day and be *marked* every day, which usually means marked by a parent. Part of the point of Kumon is to put parents back in touch with the intellectual development of their children, and this can't happen if parents aren't committed to the process. So parents who don't get it — who think that for their £38 a month they'll be getting a maths-fluent kid, with no further effort from their end to back up what the £38 is actually buying — have to be either "converted" or chased away.

Kumon is cheap enough for even quite poor families to buy, if they really want to, and we have children from families of very different levels of wealth at our Centre. We also have children of extremely varied intellectual abilities. All seem to be improving. All that is necessary is that you do it, and keep on doing it, and that someone marks it, and keeps on marking it.

IMPROVEMENT BEYOND MERE MATHS

While the Kumon Organisation urges patience with regard to the achievement and development of mathematical mastery, they make other more general claims about the benefits of Kumon that I am myself beginning to witness.

Consider all those children who “find it hard to concentrate”. What children actually find it hard to concentrate on is something that is either impossible or else dead easy. (You try concentrating on some problem that is completely beyond you, or on the fact that $2 + 2 = 4$, for twenty minutes, and then tell me how good *you* are at concentrating.) All that fidgeting and restlessness that kids are so often accused of melts away when they get stuck into doing Kumon maths, because Kumon maths is something they *can do*. If they can’t, that means we’ve given them the wrong stuff. Many parents — so the Kumon sales propaganda claims, and I’m starting to hear similar things myself — report that their child is psychologically transformed. That sense of mastery permeates their personalities! I can do things! I can get things right, lots of things! I can do *work*. I’m *not dumb*. Like I say, pretty soon they start to enjoy it. Some parents talk of Kumon as being an addiction.

And what is more, it really is maths that they’re addicted to, not to the merely incidental “fun” with which I assume many teachers try to jazz up their classroom teaching. Kumon materials are not lacking in fun. As well as straight sums, there are number boards and mazes in the shapes of dragons or aeroplanes. Nevertheless, the heart of what makes Kumon fun for children is that being able to do *maths itself* is deeply pleasurable. *Mastery* is fun. *Getting every sum right* is fun. I suspect that for some children Kumon maths is an oasis of calm and clarity — even joy — in an otherwise bewildering, confusing and unhappy world.

Kumon maths is, if you think about it, a splendid metaphor for the process of getting results in the world as a whole. To get things done, in life as in Kumon, you need your chosen task to consist not of one huge and incomprehensible lump, but to be broken down into lots of easy little tasks, which you can then proceed to do one by one, getting each one right because each one is easy.

Let me return to the point about how mistakes are not explained, merely identified. Here is another of the sleeping secrets of the Kumon system, because what this means is that — armed with a Kumon answer book — I can correct the work of a child who is *better at maths than I am*, and certainly far more quickly than it took him to do it. (Two of our current crop spring to mind at once.) All I need do is identify which sheet I’m marking, and check the answers in front of me with the answers in the book. I don’t need to explain everything, because the Kumon material explains itself to the children. I only need to be able to work through the occasional recalcitrant problem, which I can usually manage, and which, incidentally, improves my maths.

WHAT’S IN IT FOR ME

The other day one of the parents asked me why I was doing Kumon instructing. Fair enough. Most of the Kumon instructors are mothers. I’m not even a parent. I wanted to get into teaching, I told her, but I didn’t want to do it full time. And most of all, I wanted to do my teaching under the guidance of people who really did seem to be expert at it.

My fear about teaching maths is that, like so many other maths teachers in this mathematically deranged country, I would do harm, and instill not clarity but confusion, fear and neurosis rather than Kumon’s beloved mastery. I don’t believe that the problem is merely that “not enough good people” are involved in teaching maths. It’s either that maths *teaching* is simply not understood very well any more, or that the circumstances in which it is now attempted in most schools make good maths teaching impossible.

Maybe my prejudices about British state teacher training courses are wrong, and these courses are all models of pedagogical excellence, but frankly I now hesitate to risk all the time and money that such a course might involve, for the sake of maybe only learning that I had been wasting my time and money. To be able to write one savagely negative issue of Educational Notes would in such circumstances be little consolation.⁴

Besides which, I’m a clever fellow. I ought not to need months of preparation before starting to help kids do sums. But what sums? How many? How hard? How *exactly* do you teach long division?

What I needed was some hugely clever superiors to tell me exactly what work to supervise and how, so that I could start doing a bit of good right away. Kumon does this for me. It surrounds me with expert guidance and fills me with confidence that I am making the world a fractionally better place with every hour that I spend helping. I have read nothing like all the Kumon back-up literature for instructors, but every word of it that I *have* read makes sense to me and fits in with my own recollections of learning maths. It suggests people with a mass of world-wide experience, and great competence, kindness and decency. Okay I’m not doing *much* good, yet. Two afternoons a week helping to instruct a small handful of children is hardly going to crank out an entire nation of rocket scientists. But I’ve made a positive start. I’m making a small contribution to what seems like a fine enterprise, and I hope this piece of writing will be another such small contribution. If I really decide I like teaching and seem to be truly good at it, then I might go on a longer course and get really stuck in.

THE RIGHT AND WRONG KINDS OF INDIVIDUALISM

There is something very Japanese about Kumon. Indeed, I feel that being a Kumon helper has taught me more about Japanese culture than anything else I’ve ever read or done, given that I’ve never been nearer to Japan than the eastern end of Europe. There is the emphasis on getting everything right, and on parental involvement. There is the elaborate expertise, and the calm confidence with which it is explained to us underlings.

There is also the emphasis on the right kind of individualism and the avoidance of the wrong kind. Embedded in Kumon is an implied criticism both of the crass collectivism of “traditional” teaching methods — too fast for the slow ones and too slow for the fast ones — and the crass individualism of the over-ambitious and impatient teacher or parent, desperate for excellence but unwilling to do what is needed to get it and to allow the right methods to work their magic in their own time. Each child gets exactly the sums he or she should get. But don’t push your child too hard, and don’t compare child with child. What matters is that each child proceeds at the proper pace and gets better. Authority. Kindness. Perfection. Happiness. Patience. Mastery. These are not words that an Anglo-Saxon expects to find next to each other, yet in Kumon such apparent contradictions make perfect sense.

Sticking with the non-Britishness of Kumon for a moment, it’s worth mentioning that our group of children reflects the cosmopolitan and multi-national nature of the Kumon enterprise. When working in a mixed race and mixed national origin environment the wisest procedure for avoiding offense is never to mention these facts, to the point where I almost forget that our Kumon group *is* multi-racial and multi-national. But it is, and this is no accident. Any parents with recent experience of other national education systems, such as in India or the West Indies, are liable to be particularly appalled by the more appalling sorts of English school, and to know from personal experience that education need not be this bad. Mariana herself is Romanian by birth and upbringing. The other helpers besides me are Indian ladies.⁵ One reason why the couple who look after the Community Centre have been so helpful to our efforts is that they are from Trinidad. (They already knew about Kumon.) The contrast between their attitude and that of their grotesque white trash predecessors, who did a bunk and left everything in confusion, could not be more extreme. Kumon is a classic example of the benefits of immigration.

COMPUTERS

There is also in Kumon what I think of as a very Japanese emphasis on the physical process of drawing the numbers and on physically handling the world generally. (Think of the Japanese fascination with hand-done graphics.) One of the ancillary games we get the children to play is simply placing numbers on a number board. This doesn’t just help them to understand numbers. It also helps them to get better at simply handling things, while thinking at the same time. As with so much of Kumon, doing the number board so that every number is where it should be is in principle very easy, so no child is humiliated by not being able to do it. But

doing it fast isn't so easy, so the cleverer ones are kept interested. (We also give the cleverer ones more complicated things, like "leave on the board only those numbers divisible by 3".)

This emphasis on the physical handling of the world also explains, I think, why the Kumon people are so reluctant to get involved with computers. To me, an Anglo-Saxon techno-nerd, Kumon absolutely shouts computers. Each child doing an individually selected clutch of repetitive problems. Relentless and potentially very tedious marking. Even more tedious analysis to tell you what each child should be doing next. A huge apparatus of collective, centralised analysis to see which methods work best and to tell the rest of the world. This is surely the sort of stuff that computers — and their recent combined offspring, the Internet — were invented to supervise. But I sense that the Kumon people resist such notions. There's so far been no mention of computers in any of the Kumon back-up or sales literature that I've seen. Computers, I hear them saying, would only complicate things. If pencil and paper will suffice, then why bother with sci-fi gizmos that would only make the system more expensive and cumbersome? Children need to learn to write with a pencil, not just to push buttons. And their parents need to be involved in their learning, not have their authority usurped by some barbaric robot. So, the machine that Kumon relies on absolutely is the printing press. Without computers, Kumon would flourish. Without printing — which makes it possible for as many children as want to do Kumon to do as many Kumon sums as they need to, as often as they need to do them — Kumon would still be a incurably obscure cottage industry in Japan run by Toru Kumon's friends and relatives.

So no "computers for kids". In this respect there is something very traditional about Kumon. This will appeal to any parents who (a) have been proudly shown the new "computer centre" in their child's regular school, bursting with under-used, over-priced and easy-to-steal jumped-up pocket calculators and/or dictionaries, but who (b) can't understand why that same child can't add up properly the way most children could in the past.

For good reasons, but perhaps also for their own Japanese reasons, the Kumon people are anxious to maintain the chain of command, to keep the parents involved, to keep you coming to the Kumon Centres and to keep track of how you're doing. But if your parents think it's all nonsense, either because they're Neanderthals and they just do, or because they don't see why they should pay extra when they've already paid for their kid's basic education out of their income tax and VAT — and why they should then, on top of all that, have to help administer the stuff themselves — then you're stuffed. £38 per month and twenty minutes a day is okay for committed parents who see the point of it all, but for a kid to find £38 a month out of his pocket money, forget it. £38 — or for that matter £138 or £238 — for a maths teaching *machine*, with software to sell the subject and its ever-more-complex complexities in the form of a succession of ever more elaborate computer games, and which from then on costs hardly any more per month and which only the kid need pay attention to, now you're talking!

Being Japanese, the Kumon folks don't have a problem with *work*. Work is good. But to us Anglo-Saxons, and to millions of other anarchic savages elsewhere in the world, "work" is nasty. We only get seriously stuck into something if we have entirely re-arranged it, into a *game*. So computers *will* eventually address what seems to me the long-term limitation of Kumon, which is that you can't now do Kumon maths entirely on your own, that is, with just your own computer, your own Internet connection, and a bill that the average kid could pay out of pocket money. Kumon is fine as a defence mechanism for all those *families* who want their children's "traditional" education defended, so to speak, against the ills of the relentlessly deteriorating regular system. But the massive *improvement* in the educational level of the entire population that the modern economy and modern society now seem to be demanding won't happen until computers are fed into the system, and prices slashed from £38 per month to nearer £0 per month. In time, such machines will come. But deep down, I suspect that the Japanese will disapprove, even as they thrash out the hardware.

For before the doing of Kumon maths — or the doing of one of its rivals if Kumon itself refuses to have any truck with computers — can be computerised, there'll have to be much better hardware. There must be cheap and rugged objects like shining white breadboards that can act as "smart paper", at ten quid a throw. (Smaper?) Current computer screens, fragile, hideously bulky and expensive, are not nearly good enough. The Kumon folks are, for the time being, for the likes of me and Mariana Bell and our children in Tooting Bec, London, surely right to ignore computers. (And maybe, back in Tokyo, they aren't.)

One thing is certain. We *know* that the computerisation of education will continue to be an expensive shambles if we rely on our governments to supervise the process.

THE FREE MARKET IN EDUCATION IN BRITAIN

An atmosphere of self-help permeates the Kumon enterprise, certainly our little bit of it, but I don't know what the broader political agenda of Kumon is, if any. In other countries where they are longer established, such as the USA, Kumon works alongside regular schools to supply back-up maths teaching, and, instead of charging £38 per month or the equivalent to each parent, charges the school — i.e. presumably, often, the government — for the service. The Kumon folks are evidently more interested in education than they are in the free market in education that I desire, even if operating in such a market is what they now mostly do.

Nevertheless, you can surely see how being a Kumon instructor fits in with my general libertarian sentiments, and gets me into exactly that part of education that I most want to be in, the bit that is voluntary but well-organised, not paid for by the government but still reasonably cheap, and cheerful. That I'm not in this for any immediate big money just goes to show how voluntary and entrepreneurial activities are often hard to separate.

The fact that the free market in education in Britain tends to most people to mean Eton and Harrow and their many hideously expensive clones is no answer to anything; that's the problem. What's needed to get the free market working its magic in education, both in Britain and elsewhere, is the sort of stuff Kumon is doing, allied to the economies of price and scale that modern technology is now getting ever better at supplying.

NOTES

1. *Kumon Instruction Manual 1996*, published by the Kumon Institute of Education, Tokyo, for use in the UK, September 1st 1996. Kumon's British national helpline is: 0181 447 9010.
2. See also David W. Russell, *Every Child an Achiever — A Parent's Guide to the Kumon Method*, Intercultural Group, New York and Tokyo, 1993. This sounds and reads like the official Kumon version of what's going on, from someone very enthusiastic about it. I found it most persuasive.
3. Educational brands is a theme which James Tooley, Professor of Education Policy at Newcastle University, and head of the Institute of Economic Affairs Education Unit, has recently been emphasising. See *The Global Education Industry — Lessons from Private Education in Developing Countries*, Studies in Education No 7, IEA, London, 1999, and for a shorter treatment of similar territory, Tooley's *Should the Private Sector Profit from Education? The Seven Virtues of Highly Effective Markets*, Educational Notes No. 31, Libertarian Alliance, London, 1999.
4. For a more detailed and even more pessimistic take than mine on British state education, see Melanie Phillips, *All Must Have Prizes*, Little, Brown, London, 1996, now a Warner paperback, 1998. Although Phillips may be approximately right about Britain's educational problems, her simple prescription: re-establish old-fashioned state education, strikes me as deeply undesirable, but happily quite impossible. No libertarian she! There needs to be an intelligent synthesis between the old and the new, not a simple turning back of the clock. A free market in education will supply such a synthesis, preferably with a leaving age lowered to zero — which Phillips would choke at. For the foreseeable future the state education system will remain only an arena of ever more bad tempered conflict, of which Phillips will continue to be an example.
5. Correction. Mrs Patel *is* Indian. Rubina only looks Indian to me, the true story being more complicated and interesting, and involving most recently Kenya. Particular apologies to Rubina for having — other than in this footnote — ignored the contribution she is now making to our Centre, this piece having been largely done before she joined us. To show how things now are, when Mariana was recently away on holiday, it was Rubina who ran the show in Mariana's absence, not me (or Mrs Patel).