



HAMPSTEAD SCHOOL

Learning together Achieving together

Dame Tamsyn Imison - An Obituary

1 May 1937 – 18 September 2017



Dame Tamsyn Imison was headteacher of Hampstead School from 1984 – 2000.

The Dame Tamsyn Imison building, and our school motto, 'Learning Together, Achieving Together' are all part of her powerful legacy.

Tamsyn Imison was born on 1 May 1937. She was multi-talented, being gifted both in the arts and sciences. In 1958, Tamsyn initially started her university career as a student of Art at Somerville College, Oxford University. It was there that she met her future husband, Michael Imison. As young academics, Tamsyn and Michael fell in love and married. Oxford University responded by 'expelling' Tamsyn arguing that married women and mothers could not also be students. This was to profoundly influence the young Tamsyn. She vowed to champion young women's rights to an education and more generally, the fight for equality.

Tamsyn did not give up and relocated to Queen Mary's College London University and read Natural Sciences. She combined her artistic talent with her scientific expertise and started her working career as a scientific illustrator. In 1972, Tamsyn entered the profession as a science teacher. This was to be a 30 year passion and vocation.

Tamsyn and Michael had three children; Candace, Katharine and Thomas. Sadly, in 1984, Thomas died of a heart condition. He was only 17.



Tamsyn was appointed headteacher of Hampstead School in 1984. She was fiercely committed to comprehensive education. She actively believed that all children have the capacity to achieve and thus deserve the very best teachers and education. She advocated creativity in education, information technology in schools and the role of schools in fostering rights and justice. To this end she led campaigns, chaired government committees and contributed to key debates. Hampstead School became known nationally for an innovative curriculum and risk-taking initiatives.

Dame Tamsyn earned herself a reputation for being an educational strategist, specialising in school improvement and leadership. She negotiated a school-based Masters programme, in

partnership with the Institute of Education, whereby staff explored and implemented school improvement strategies. She co-wrote 'Managing ICT in the Secondary School' with Phil Taylor. In 1993, Tamsyn encouraged the establishment of a Hampstead School based charity 'Children of the Storm' to meet the needs of refugee and displaced children. Controversial at the time, the charity provided clothes, food, emotional and peer support. School-based volunteers were trained in the needs of the new students. Hampstead School became a centre of excellence, visited by schools from across the country and featured in government reports.

Tamsyn, along with her husband Michael was active within the arts and helped to established the Almeida Theatre in Islington. She championed the role of the performing arts in schools and established the National Playwrights Commission. This led to the writing and performance of the play 'The Siege' in schools across the UK. It is within this environment of creativity that ex-students such as Tobias Hill, Zadie Smith and Doc Brown gained creative inspiration

Throughout her time as headteacher, Tamsyn was active in SHA (now ASCL, the professional association and union for school leaders). She was at the forefront of school and education policy and was not scared to have public debates with politicians and academics.



In the Queen's New Year Honours list 1998 she was made a DBE for her services to education in. She was one of the first headteachers to be honoured for education services.

Dame Tamsyn Imison retired from teaching and Hampstead School in 2000. She continued to be a passionate advocate for comprehensive schooling and creativity in learning, becoming an Honorary Fellow of Somerville College, Oxford, Queen Mary College, University of London and the University College of London's Institute of Education. She was still developing educational thought, and her reflections on her time at Hampstead School are recounted in her book, 'Comprehensive Achievements: All Our Geese Are Swans' written alongside Ruth Heilbronn and Liz Williams

Dame Tamsyn was fun, creative and had a sense of mischief. She imbued the sense of risk-taking and fearless challenge in both students and staff. She endeavoured to appoint staff who reflected this vision.

In 2005, Tamsyn and Michael moved to the quiet Suffolk town of Halesworth. Here, Tamsyn used her organisational and leadership strengths to run 'Halesworth in Bloom'.. As recently as 2016, the town won awards. <http://www.halesworthinbloom.com/news>

Dame Tamsyn never stopped drawing and painting. She was a pivotal supporter of the local artists community.

Dame Tamsyn was diagnosed with myeloma earlier this year. She underwent intensive treatment in the summer. However in September, she was unable to endure the ravage of chemotherapy and decided to cease treatment and enjoy her end of life with Michael, her children, grandchildren and those she loved. Dame Tamsyn died on 18 September surrounded by her family. She was a committed Humanist and true to humanist traditions planned the



most beautiful farewell celebration of her multi-faceted life. At her memorial on 6 October human capacity and wisdom were stressed as well as projects to enrich and improve human lives were celebrated. Dame Tamsyn would want us to keep her campaigns alive: strengthening comprehensive schools, fighting for equality and looking after the environment.

Hampstead School was an important part of Dame Tamsyn's life and her legacy continues to be an important part of our vision.

Thank you, Dame Tamsyn Imison