

It has been one heck of a month here at Woodlands! Where to begin?

We started the year in trepidation, our lovely Admin Lead, Sue, fractured a vertebra during the summer holidays and we knew she would not be back in school. However, very quickly we all settled in, and that was in large part due to the admin team who are, as I have said before, amazing! All of them stepped into the breach and worked tirelessly to ensure that all new reception children were added into the system, the new nursery pupils were added and their funding from the Government sorted, children were moved up a year, medical information was updated, the toddler group was established, snack ordering was put onto the online system, new parents were shown around, in-year-transfers were welcomed, attendance and absence protocols were followed as per Government expectations, lunches were billed, orders were made/receipted/paid, staff were inducted, student teachers were inducted, contracts were reviewed and renewed etc etc etc. the list is never ending and all of that whilst answering the phones and dealing with bumped heads and bruised knees and staff illness and so on. I commend them and am so thankful that Sue has recovered enough to stand at her desk with a supported frame and come back! We all missed her and it is good to have the team complete again (poor old Sue must now clear a backlog of tasks and I am trying not to pester her!)

After only a week, our lovely Deputy, Mrs Liversey, broke her ankle quite badly and we have limped along (!) since as we miss her sunny presence – not least on the gate where she is always ready to smile at everyone. In the coming weeks we hope she is in less pain and able to re-join the team under some strict rules (I won't be allowing her to stand on the gate, even when she is back, until after Christmas!), particularly as we are both December babies and LOVE Christmas! She has been dialling in each week for a TEAMS with each of our teaching teams and they have loved explaining to her the plans for the coming week in terms of learning, as much as she has enjoyed asking them how they are getting on.

We have also missed Bill, one of our site maintenance team, and therefore many of you will have laughed at me coming in on a Saturday to clean windows, chop back hedges with my son's hedge trimmer, or sweep up slippery husks and leaves from autumnal trees to help Pete. As a team, we have all worked together to ensure that school has kept running and I have been reminded how lucky I am to work with so many dedicated staff.

This week I have conducted the annual teaching staff performance management and appraisal meetings, during which I simply love to congratulate them in person for their work and efforts of last year, and set them new targets which not only build towards their individual professional development and success but that of our school – all working towards our main effort. I love this exercise as much as I do reading the school reports of your children each summer and feel a real sense of pride and collective achievement when I do so. The Spring term is when I get to do the same for our support staff, and it means that throughout the year I get to top up my own well of positivity by reflecting that positivity onto different members of our school community. It is a source of deep joy to establish such high performing teams and then observe them thriving and I am lucky to be able to do just this.

Saplings, our amazing toddler group, has literally blown all of our minds! We could never have predicted how successful this endeavour could be and to observe the growth of this project, from the tiny seed of an idea in the spring to now, has been remarkable. I have the team to thank for this, most notably Mrs Donaghue and Miss Clay for their input prior to the summer to plan, and source resources; and the rest of the EYFS team for taking turns in running it for a few hours each morning. I enjoyed my time over there, making tea and coffee, chatting to carers, holding babies whilst people had tours and celebrating all the brilliant things that go on in our infant site. I think the farthest flung visitor to this group was a soldier based in Elgin who was down visiting her sister in Chester! Amazing!

In the coming weeks we host our very quick 'settling in' parents evening, having listened to parents we decided to maintain the online parents evening to reduce child care and logistical issues for you in the evenings and also facilitate working parents attending from work in their break. Although this obviously has huge advantages, it doesn't permit the warm face-to-face welcome we like to give or the personalised touch. So, rest assured, having conducted all baseline testing across school now, and launched ourselves into the full curriculum, we will want to show case the work of the pupils and will be looking forward to welcoming you in on an informal basis on a number of occasions over the coming weeks (I am especially looking forward to minced pies, Nativity plays and carols but there will more...).

One of the random ideas I have had recently is offering a parent a month the chance to shadow me for a day so you could write a guest blog, 'A Day In The Life Of...' which I think could offer a real 'fly-on-the-wall' opportunity for someone to have a behind the scenes look at what we do... if you would be keen to do this, please contact me 😊

One of our biggest worries at the start of this term was the budget. You will all have seen the news about the cost of living crisis (my 17 year old is even anxious about this as she studies politics and they are examining the success - or lack thereof - of the 'Trickle Down Economy' model....), and the cost of fuel crisis in our country. Schools are no different. In addition to 300% increase in fuel costs, the Government have announced pay rises for support and teaching staff which must also come from the budget with the same expectations of standards and curriculum recovery post-Covid19. Having rectified the £500,000 deficit I inherited, whilst simultaneously investing in the building, capital restructure, resources for children, the learning environment, IT equipment and so on and so forth, we were looking at a £300,000 projected deficit in 3 years time. Naturally, this impacts on our ability to do any projects, to plan for any improvements and to invest in any enrichment activities for children and I wanted to be really upfront about this. Between us, Mrs Moss and I have managed to reduce the projected deficit to £140,000 in our budget meeting, and we will continue to work hard on reducing this, but whilst we have strict ratios of staff-per-pupil, and also the reality that huge classes do not necessarily successful learners make, you can imagine that we are extremely concerned about the future.

Success stories of the month have been in music, Mrs Barrett ensured that our children access high quality enriching music and therefore we have been awarded the Music Award! Miss Roberts got herself a Distinction in her recent MA submission, Mrs Dutton has been recognised for her work in literacy by our school being selected for Exemplification by TLC (The Literacy Company) and we successfully completed the Government baseline in Reception.

As many of you will know, we are still struggling with the perpetual issue of the parking nightmare outside school and this has resulted in some angry parents (who have then been spoken to by the police for public order offences) and also, and perhaps more importantly, some very dangerous situations for our children. I have reported 2 incidents to the police and they have been dealt with, the PCSOs have also issued fines. The definitive line is this: along Eddisbury Road the parking restrictions are in place at key times. They mean that you cannot park. If you have a 'Blue Badge' YOU must be the person exiting the car with a child and entering the school with that child – if not, then you are parked illegally. Parking on, or driving on, the pavement when there are children around is not acceptable, nor is shouting or swearing. I will simply report these events to the police and allow them to deal with them in future as school staff have neither the time, nor the capacity, to deal with parking infringements and want only to keep everyone safe.

October sees us plan for Harvest for Year 1 where we welcome parents in, and support the needy in our community; and we will also be thinking about Black History Month where we consider diversity and inclusion. We will welcome the LA into school on Thursday to really scrutinise our EYFS setting so we can find any areas that we may want to enhance in our practice by using an external eye – I embrace this and only see it as another opportunity to build on what we already do

well. We will have the ASIA back for Geography scrutiny in a couple of weeks and an awful lot more besides! 😊