

Welcome to the December 2018 Newsletter



This month we have a photograph sent from Crosthwaite Church of England Primary School, Lyth Valley.

Crosthwaite Church of England Primary school is a small, successful, very rural primary school that is situated in the Lyth Valley, just outside the towns of Kendal and Windermere. It has a large geographical catchment area and a wide range of children that attend the school - mixed backgrounds, mostly living within catchment (around 80%) and an extremely wide range of educational needs. The issues of rural deprivation and social isolation (no bus service, for example) are huge problems that the school is constantly working – very successfully - to improve.

The school was considered for closure around 2005, with around 20 children at the school, but the last 5 years has seen a large increase in numbers and huge efforts to maintain the fantastically high quality of teaching and learning, alongside the superb range of extra-curricular activities and curriculum enhancements that the school has always provided.

In addition to consistently high results and increased numbers we have also been an extremely proactive school in terms of developing the school environment – doubling the floor space size by adding a new classroom and a superb school hall. This is in addition to numerous other enhancements to school life, such as the school minibus and farm (Sheep, lambs, Chickens, Ducks, Bees and Alpacas – all of which the children help manage as part of a normal school week, selling produce as available). Much of this has been made possible by fundraising and through sourcing grants – I am a firm believer that the school staff, governors, parents and community should (and do!) constantly strive to provide the very best possible environment for the children and the £400,000 that school has managed to raise through fundraisers and grant applications has allowed to do this – though we always have plans to improve further!

Our Ofsted inspection of 2017 was a validation of all we knew and constantly strive to better, with numerous quotes we could use that make us all extremely proud – please take the time to read our report, which I have attached. Having said all this, the superb environment, excellent results, growing numbers and other achievements are the most pleasing things – the children at our school work fantastically hard, are amazingly enthusiastic about all aspects of school life, determined to help others as much as they can and are a credit to the school, church, community and their families – we are very, very proud of them.



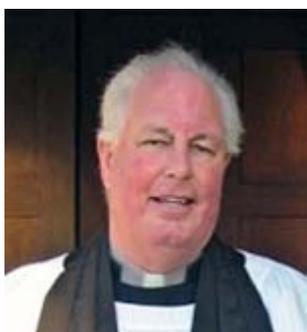
Mayan Day

When years 3/4 celebrated and enjoyed all things Mayan, including making costumes of golden, adorned collars, feather headdresses as well as making pyramids and temples with card or Lego. The day finished with traditional food making and tasting: guacamole, salsa corn crisps and tortilla served alongside corn on the cob and chocolate!!



Ethos Day: Truth and Honesty

Following a whole school assembly on one of the key school values, **Truth and Honesty**, led by the Ethos Group the children divided into school teams to work on art, drama and sport activities to further develop their understanding of this value.



Meet the Trustees: The Reverend Canon Roger Hamblin

Formerly a teacher in a London Grammar School, teaching Physics & Divinity. Retired Church of England clergyman in Blackburn Diocese, Lancashire, in which I have served all of my ministry, mostly in rural areas.

For some years a Diocesan Schools Inspector / Bishop's Visitor.

As Vicar, actively supported Church/Village Schools for thirty-nine years; including leading weekly assemblies, engaging with staff and as a School Governor, for many years as Chairman. Involved in fighting proposed small school closures by the LEA (in the 1980's) and saving the schools, which are still open!

Connected with NASS from 1984 and a Committee member for the past thirty-one years.



The benefits of a business mentor

I am writing this as from personal experience I found having business mentors an excellent way to help future proof our small school and bring in new ideas and perspectives.

I was the Headteacher of Chelsea Open Air Nursery School (COANS) for 17 years. This small but highly diverse maintained nursery school is just off the cosmopolitan King's Road. Its intake varied from young children from comfortably off families, a few whose parents were celebrities, politicians etc, to local children living in council and rented flats as well

as highly vulnerable children whose families were refugees, asylum seekers or on the 'at risk register'. The number of languages spoken, the range of religions and ethnicities creates diversity where everyone, adult or child is truly an individual and this helped me develop the culture of a community raising children like the African proverb of the whole village raising a child.

I took up the mentoring offer as I was keen to avoid complacency in school improvement and also felt that I would

benefit from some dedicated time and space to reflect on this. Cyrus gave me just that - an hour a month to really talk through and discuss the issues facing the school and gain a completely different perspective as well as some free advice.

It also allowed me to consider the following:

- Clarifying ideas, improving problem-solving and decision-making
- Enhanced confidence and wellbeing
- Better communication skills and productivity
- A more positive attitude to my own career development and self-worth.

This advice ranged from small practical ideas such as adding an executive summary at the start of my termly headteacher's report to encourage governors to read the document and come better prepared to meetings. More major ideas were helping me to realise the potential marketing possibilities of COANS, which in a very small school was a real-life saver. When I asked Cyrus why he had chosen the smallest school, his response really impressed me: *"Great oaks from little acorns grow - if you provide the best early on, you benefit throughout life."*

Two years later after another 'outstanding in all areas' Ofsted inspection I had the privilege of being offered a second business mentor. Caroline was the Managing Director of a 5* boutique hotel in Kensington High Street. She was very different to Cyrus but again we built a positive relationship very quickly as we both realised the similarities between a 5* hotel and a 5* school. I was fascinated and impressed at her attention to detail in that every day she personally inspected the cleanliness of bathrooms in each suite by sitting in her business clothes in the baths and standing in the showers etc. To this day, I can measure the quality of hotels and their leadership by the state of their bathrooms. Each guest at her hotel was asked about their personal preferences for bedding, fruit etc. That 5* attention to detail was certainly something I then maximised at COANS.

In this mentorship partnership I benefitted by learning about:

- Self-management, maximising self-learning and using new techniques
- How to work smarter and more productively
- 5* attention to detail really makes a difference
- The parallels between business and education and how the world of work can impact positively on the learning of young children

When I asked Caroline why she had chosen COANS she commented that the diversity and scale of the school mirrored that of the hotel and its staff. This comment I was to really understand when Caroline offered a small group of vulnerable children the chance to visit and explore the hotel. She cleverly introduced children to staff members who spoke their home languages to learn about their jobs. The tour of the hotel fascinated the children as it was far bigger than their own homes. They made the most of seeing everything from meeting the doorman to visiting and sitting in the lounges and dining rooms, chattering about the uniquely decorated and themed suites, to splashing water in the spa. Finally, in the kitchen, they met the chefs who had set up a taste challenge using real fruit flavoured vegetarian jelly, which they really enjoyed (and rose to the challenge of). Caroline and I are still in touch and a couple of years ago I had the joy of visiting her in her new post in Melbourne, Australia.

My advice to the headteachers of small schools; ask around and contact local businesses and see if someone in their senior leadership might spare some quality time, once a month for an hour just for you for free. After all, you have nothing to lose, but much to gain!

Kathryn Solly

Encounters Outdoors in the Early Years - part 2



For children to make the most of and gain all these advantages they need the following to be in place:

- Sensitive, outdoor loving adults who support outdoor play whatever the weather and limit restrictive rules.
- The right clothing and footwear for both children and adults
- A seamless transition between indoors and out simultaneously.
- Flexible and open-ended resources which are carefully managed, stored, accessed and equally valued to those indoors
- A child-friendly layout and design allowing a multitude of unique opportunities, responses and possibilities.
- Chances to play alone and in various sized groups of their own choosing
- A rich opportunity to experience awe and wonder as well as extending natural curiosity.



Supporting staff

No matter how rich and varied the outdoor environment is, it is the quality of the adults who lead and manage it, which has the greatest influence upon the children's learning. There needs to be:

- Shared vision and understanding as to policy, procedure, audits, risk and risk benefit assessment
- Genuine parental involvement and engagement with the philosophy and policy to avoid criticism and potential litigation
- Having realistically high expectations of what children need and can achieve providing the best support outdoors as they discover the safest means to achieve their desired outcomes
- The use of supportive language to allow children to be both safe and yet not lose their spirit of adventure



Play

Play should be everywhere and a crucial foundation to young children's learning outdoors and inside. This requires a balanced equality approach to factors such as gender and inclusion. Staff need to be aware of their own personal preferences as body language, over involvement or neglect of certain experiences or roles will convey to children messages which can affect their lifelong learning. Meaningful learning through play occurs when the adults approach outdoors professionally and employ practices in a similar fashion to indoors.

This is based upon quality interactions which nurture sustained shared and higher order thinking through reflective consideration of basic planning before and evaluation afterwards. Interactions should be sensitive and appropriate by scaffolding rather than interfering. These roles include 'co-constructing knowledge with children' (Waller, 2007) by:

Developing relationships and encouraging communication

- Providing rich opportunities for child-initiated play
- Entering children's worlds and scaffolding play
- Supporting risk and challenge
- Helping children to negotiate
- Modelling inclusion
- Teaching about the natural world and caring for the environment
- Providing varied environmental experiences for physical development
- Working in genuine partnership with parents, children and community.

Adult skills

Whilst there is a great deal of theory now about outdoor play and learning, ultimately it is the adult skills which matter. These are:

- Passion
- Sense of humour
- Stamina and energy
- Love of learning
- Creativity
- Genuineness
- Respect and moral value of children and their rights
- Flexibility
- Patience
- Pragmatism and the ability to compromise
- Perseverance
- A willingness to take risks

Conclusion

As Susan Isaacs rightly observed ***"The children themselves are the living aim and end of our teaching. It is their thought, their knowledge, their character and development which make the purpose of our existence as schools and teachers."*** (1932: 11)

We must to try to give children the keys to outdoors and resist the temptation to push them through the doors. Instead we can open the doors and invite them to walk or run through as and when they are ready.

Bibliography

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Balancing School Budgets



We appreciated the responses from headteachers and business managers telling us of the strategies they have used to try and balance their school budgets.

Most mentioned the following problems:

- Most of staff are at the top of their scale, are good teachers but expensive
- Demographics e.g. with Reception intakes being lower this year with a larger year 6 due to leave and the future impact on their budget - only 1 school commented on rising numbers
- Increases in pensions and teachers' salaries
- Resenting having to pay Apprenticeship levy when the school doesn't get any benefit from it.

These are the strategies they used:

- Using reserves to balance the budget for the present and coming year
- Having to cut back on teaching assistant hours by 10%
- Reducing non-teaching contracts by 10%
- Used to buy fruit for years 3-6 to supplement Key Stage 1 free provision, this has had to stop
- Cutting back on bought in services e.g. music and limiting the visits pupils made to enrich their curriculum
- Intending to replace teachers retiring with NQTs to cut salary costs
- Using fundraising to supplement budget.

Some schools referred to joining a MAT, Trust or Federation as a means of balancing next year's budget. Nearly all predicted being unable to manage in the third year if they were stand-alone schools. There were a number of schools, which couldn't produce a balanced budget for this year. The deficits ranged from a few thousand to £45,000.

The one response we had from an executive head of a Federation was that having 2 school budgets and one headteacher, along with drawing a lot of funding from many sources, meant the bulk of the budget is available for staffing.

Thank you again for your responses, which will provide valuable evidence in our continued discussions with the DfE.

Receiving comments from schools, stating they were contemplating joining federations etc as a means of balancing budgets, we would like to draw your attention to the following Notes from a Talk by Tim Brighouse.

In particular to 'Is there an arrangement for a divorce?' This because we have had schools contacting us because they are facing closure threat because of what has happened on joining a federation from which they seem to be unable to leave. As a result of joining with another school, the larger school has proceeded to make the smaller school unviable by:

- concentrating on their school, giving the governors information etc. enabling them to carry out their role, whilst failing to give such support to the smaller school so that the larger school gets a better Ofsted and therefore encourages parents to send their children there
- moving the older pupils in their final years to the main school

- altering the name of the smaller school so that it seems that both schools have the same name
- having one DfE number for both schools so that they no longer have their individual identity.

We are drawing your attention to what might happen, because although it happens rarely, being forewarned is forearmed.

The case of Ebrington School, where the local M.P. Mr Geoffrey Clifton- Brown invited Dr Ian H Jones to conduct an independent, detailed and rigorous review, is such a case, where only through his intervention that the school remains open.



Open Air Nursery Celebrates 90 Years

Chelsea Open Air Nursery School has a world- famous reputation and this year it celebrated its 90th Anniversary.

In 1928 a local American mother Natalie Davies, with involvement of the early years pioneer Dr. Susan Isaacs, set up an open- air nursery school to provide high quality early education. This was founded on outdoor learning experiences where children had free access to indoors and outdoors. From the outset the school attracted children from a diverse range of social, cultural and economic backgrounds found in the London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, including children with special needs. An environment was created where the children could play, experiment, discover, think and learn.

When Kathryn Solly became headteacher in the mid-1990s, the school building and the garden were in need of attention. In consultation with the children, their parents, the local community and the local authority; along with campaigning for new funds; she implemented her vision of ‘a garden for the imagination’. The new garden provides an environment which builds the children’s health, physical development and mental wellbeing. It offers different levels with nooks, crannies to play and hide in; whilst a variety of equipment to climb, balance, swing and slide on increases their co-ordination. The sandpit, vegetable garden and pond give opportunities for learning about nature whilst off cuts of trees are used in imaginary play. All these activities encourage the children’s imagination, competence and development of independent learning.

High quality, well trained staff, working in partnership with parents, continue to enrich and develop the learning environment for the children who attend the school for two years until they are five.

If you have any contributions for our newsletter please email us on info@smallschools.org.uk or write to us at:

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