

## WOODLANDS PRIMARY SCHOOL

### HEADTEACHER'S BLOG – 11/09/20

So this week's news is a bit mixed really... lots of people have been in the process of writing to Amanda Spielman, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, Ofsted to express collective disappointment at the inspectorate's proposed autumn term visits to schools.

This follows Ofsted releasing further details on the 'visits' inspectors will be carrying out in 'around 1200' schools across England during the autumn term. Ofsted have insisted these visits are not in any way designed to inspect schools, and "aim to tell parents, government and the public about how schools are managing the return to full education of their pupils". But inevitably this will exert extra pressure on schools at a time when we are focussed on many other things and to be honest, parents know exactly how we have managed the return to school and don't need Ofsted to tell them!

The one-day visits will be based around a series of "open-ended questions that allow inspectors to understand the current position of the school". While not an 'inspection', the visit will result in a published 'outcome letter' outlining what inspectors have found (so, an inspection under a different name). While the visits will not result in a graded judgement, or have any impact on the school's current Ofsted grade, they come at a time when schools are trying to focus on managing endless and often contradictory safety controls (which impact directly on you!), identifying learning gaps across the age ranges, and providing pupils with appropriate support with what is limited funding in real life. I am not alone in being extremely disappointed that Ofsted chose not to take up the suggestions of professional bodies in treating these visits as purely research visits which might have provided intelligence to the government (without the need for a letter at all), but what can we do? I am fully expecting a visit, as I was fully expecting an inspection, so our work will continue regardless but I thought I should let you all know the state of play.

Illustrative of my point above, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have announced they will be carrying out spot checks in schools commencing 07 September 2020.

The main points they will be checking are:

- review the measures taken by schools for reopening, to minimise spread of the virus causing COVID-19.
- evaluate dutyholders' knowledge and awareness of the relevant government guidance - [DfE Guidance for full opening - School-](#) and the control measures required under health and safety legislation.
- **inspectors will check that the school has carried out a suitable and sufficient risk assessment and put in place measures to make the school COVID-secure in line with the latest government guidance.**

I know that in the main you have all been extremely supportive of what must look like ridiculous measures we have had to implement, given the fact that you can shop and socialise yet not be on the school yard, and I am grateful that you have helped us to be able to adhere to the guidance and therefore protect the members of our school community. We monitored this for a week, as you know, and I made the decision to modify the system and the Risk Assessment and the way in which we manage the school grounds as I felt, reinforced with the evidence, that there was greater risk to life and immediate danger given the volume of people on the pavements either side of school, with cars travelling quickly, drivers on their mobiles, parking on pavements, across driveways and general dangerous behaviour than if we maintain the staggered start but allow parents to stand on the yard with their child in a socially distanced way.

Again, I am thankful for your understanding and support as we navigate this situation in continually shifting waters and to that end, can I respectfully remind everyone about 2 things: parking on the yellow lines and not to congregate at the junior car park exit...

Our teachers have, alongside working in different ways, been keen to share your child's work online on the class Twitter pages – if you haven't already, please do open an account, even if it is only for now, and follow your child's class to see the work being done. It is a definite conduit for information and celebration and may be one of our only ways of doing this for quite some time!

My views on education are no secret. I was asked if I have a long term plan this week and the answer is, yep! My long term plan is to ensure that every child I come across, and that means in our school and beyond, makes progress and achieves to the best of their ability, realising their potential no matter what. I had a short piece based on what we could do from now on published if you are interested to read it:

<https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/post-covid-19-a-brave-new-world>

If you are a podcast fan, I have been asked to record a few all about our school and my take on leadership in the last half year, the most recent is here and again, in it I celebrate our school:

<https://www.leadershipaidbare.co.uk/episode/real-leadership-with-dr-victoria-carr>

I know that some people have wondered about how my commitments to my school, education and also to the Army Reserves could co-exist. I hope that the fact that I am still supporting colleagues on the 'MA in Educational Leadership' journey at Hope Uni, challenging educational doctrine and policy through a range of media, doing research, leading our amazing team here and still smiling at you all each morning and afternoon on the gate proves that it is possible. What I am coming to realise in my 5<sup>th</sup> decade of life is that **anything** is possible – we are never too old. I spent the summer learning new skills, assimilating new knowledge, taking myself well out of my comfort zone, reacquainting myself with how it feels to fail, persevere and eventually succeed, experiencing alien environments and the feeling of being continually tested and assessed and I now know that for our young children in school it can feel the way I felt during my almost 4 week Army basic training where relentless lessons from 7am-10pm were the norm 7 days a week. It has made me even more empathetic than I was before and made me even more humble. I think it is over 2 decades since I felt as challenged as I did just with one tiny aspect of it all in learning weapon handling drills, and this in itself is a life lesson for me. I actually spoke about my views on leadership and being a Headteacher during our 'Pass Off Parade' when the Inspecting Colonel spoke to me. I meant what I said when I said I am perhaps an 'unconventional boss' and that my job is about 'caring for people' – genuinely, it is. 1 hour 6 minutes (or so) in, if you are interested to hear what I said first hand, and want a laugh at me in uniform.

<https://youtu.be/AGJ-uaknQ0E>

I know that prior to the summer I told you all that we would be having the dilapidated mobile classroom removed and an accessible medical room installed in school. Due to funding issues at LA level, this did not happen. I am naturally disappointed but not thwarted as I know the need for the Medical room is there so I will not give up on this plan. I have asked Justin Madders to support us by asking parliament if there is a pot of money school can access to ensure that our school is fully inclusive and accessible to every child irrespective of need, and I await more information so that I can keep you updated on progress.

I wrote to you earlier in the week to begin to explain the government expectations for online learning and to that end we will be introducing online homework just as soon as we have ironed out the systems for our school. Meanwhile, homework will be on the website on year group pages from TODAY to trial how we can do remote homework and give feedback.

It is Roald Dahl Day on Sunday 13th September! The children can log onto <https://www.roalddahl.com/home/kids> to play games, read about different characters in his books or complete *Dahlicious* activities (too much?). The children will have a class based assembly next week to learn about the man himself and how he became the much loved author, I for one remember reading both volumes of his autobiography and being fascinated by his life so I am sure there is something about him that will appeal to everyone. Mrs Dutton is keen to see any and all work produced as she has a display in school all about him – he is our September ‘Author of the Month’ 😊

We are on the brink of having sorted the packed lunches! A big thanks to the parent who emailed in and brought that to my attention – I confessed that as Edsential deal with catering, it was something that I had given little attention to whilst focussing on other things. I am only as good as the information I have to hand, and that you guys bring to my attention, so please keep doing as you are doing and keeping me informed. On the topic of food, can you help us out and try to remember to balance the healthy snacks? Some children have been bringing 3/4 packets of crisps or biscuits for a single snack ... we are working on changing lunch to make them healthier so we need to work on the snacks now too 😊 Birthdays are such lovely occasions and I know it is sad not to be able to celebrate as we may like to, but that is just how it is right now: to that end, no sweets, or treats to come in and be shared. Fruit is back on for snack (I signed the order this Tuesday as it arrived) and we have carefully thought about how we can distribute it safely within the guidelines.

We think we have found a way to work with @AmaSing to allow our children to do choir in these weird and not-so-wonderful times, more information will follow from Miss Hallmark. You all know I love singing (and give little regard to how good or not I may be!).

And finally, Mrs Morphet and Mrs Cotton are working around the clock to follow up on all of the agencies that we work with to support and assess children as there is now a significant backlog due to C-19 cancellations. They are setting up safe ways of doing internal programmes such as IDL and ELSA etc so continue to keep them informed and they will do the same with information out to you as it arrives.

I know you all know this, but Covid is dominating our working days from morning until night, as we try to find our way through it all. Please be assured that if you hear on social media that a child is going for a test, it is in no way certain that they will be suffering C-19. We will continue to put the measures in place that we have been told to by PHE, government and also HSE. School will not be closed for the sake of a child or staff member going for a precautionary test. We have limited time to respond to queries related to this from outside, as it is sucking up most of the hours in the day without it, the information you need is on our risk assessment on the website or through the government agencies.

We all know that C-19 is going nowhere and the important decision makers in our country have chosen the route we must all take, from the start of this right up until today. I cannot comment on the right and wrong of children being in school, nor can the office staff. The 1<sup>st</sup> aiders are dealing with normal day-to-day bumps, C-19 isolations, collecting data for the 48 hours prior to every child and staff member who presents with symptoms going for a test, submitting data to the LA and government, answering phones, information sharing with you about routine things, taking forgotten lunch and water etc. If the phones are busy it is because they are also almost permanently on to PHE for advice on a scenario that has presented in school. Please, please, continue to be patient and kind as we walk this rocky road!

Have a great weekend and please do adhere to the local warnings – Wirral for certain has emailed me to say we are at risk of a local lockdown if numbers continue to rise and I do not want that, it has impacted enough on everyone, so I will be pretty much steering clear of people, staying home as much as possible and doing my bit, as sad as it is! 😊