

WOODLANDS PRIMARY SCHOOL

HEADTEACHER'S BLOG – 02/10/20

The best available evidence indicates that great teaching is the most important lever schools have to improve outcomes for their pupils. This was true before the Covid-19 pandemic and it will continue to be vital as schools plan for all pupils this academic year. Explicit instruction, scaffolding, flexible grouping and cognitive and metacognitive strategies are key components of high-quality teaching and learning for pupils, all of which we endeavour to put in place through our planning for face to face learning, and the possible blended approach we may have to adopt in the case of a lockdown or bubble isolation situation.

Our whole-school planning focuses on high-quality teaching and professional development, particularly for newly qualified and early career teachers, and also for things like effective remote teaching.

Evidence consistently shows the positive impact that targeted academic support can have, including how to link structured one to one or small group intervention to classroom teaching, which is something we have looked at after assessing the children across school in the past 4 weeks. Our interventions are being carried out by Ms Smith and Mr McLoughlin in KS2 so that delivery is consistent and Mrs Winder in KS1. We have also appointed several new support staff to help us with some of our vulnerable children so we are confident that everyone will begin to make rapid progress, with significant non-academic barriers to success, including behaviour and social and emotional issues and trauma, as well as academic success. These local needs and challenges will be different for every school community but our staff know you and your children very well and are therefore able to target support exactly where it is needed most.

Re-establishing the routines of the classroom, and of school, have proven beneficial for both our staff and our pupils. Some have settled more quickly than others, and for some, support needs have become even more evident since lockdown began, so our pastoral and SEND teams are working overtime to work simultaneously on helping parents come to terms with the specific needs of their children, supporting staff in strategies to assist children in accessing learning, and liaising with a plethora of outside agencies, many on partial opening, restricted service due to Covid-19, or working from home, in order to make sure each child in our school makes progress.

To that end, we are always thinking of how we can make sure we are a fully inclusive school and one of the barriers to this in the past has been the lack of facilities to accommodate our children with complex or specific physical needs. What we have at the moment is an accessible toilet. The planned work, funded in a large part by the LA, for the summer, was to have the toilet moved to the heart of the school, and to in fact upgrade this to a medical room which would include both a hoist, and a shower as well as the accessible toilet.

This would afford us the opportunity to welcome any child to our school who is able to access mainstream learning, but for whom physical disability is an issue. I know that several of you have talked to me about this since my arrival 2 years ago, and largely it was the driver in my request that the LA not only relocate the accessible toilet but support us in upgrading this so that we no longer have to separate siblings, here at Woodlands, we can accommodate children who for some reason become unwell or sustain a life changing event whilst in primary school, to remain here.

However, for reasons beyond our control, this project has stalled a little as the project pot, it transpires, is 20k short. I am asking for the help of anyone and everyone in our community, and I hope my call is heard! We need to crowd fund and raise money for a proper medical room in our school – and we need YOUR HELP!!!

I am bid writing to ask for national sources of funding, the PTA are also supporting this. Is there anyone who feels that they can lead a crowdfunding page for us to find the shortfall of 20k? If so, contact us through the admin office!

On the topic of toilets, can I ask you all, particularly those parents of pupils in Years 5 & 6 however, to remind your children that our risk assessments for Covid-19 are there for a reason. There are a number of boys in this phase who persistently find ever more innovative ways to wreak havoc in the toilets in very short spaces of time, despite adults waiting outside and accompanying them for their safety so they don't mix bubbles. The most common things is jamming taps so that they flood the toilets, which the boys may find funny, but I do not. If you could support us in this, and issue a reminder to all children across school that Covid-19 and their personal safety are paramount in our minds right now and lingering any longer than is absolutely necessary in the toilets is compromising our ability to do all we can for this aspect of life – before we get to vandalism and damaging school property! Thanks in advance.

We are aware that some parents and carers have been hesitant to send their children back to school, and this has also required sensitive, supportive action on our part. Staggered school returns have proven harder for us to manage than we hoped, due to volume, but we are getting there largely, and we do know how difficult for parents of several children to navigate this has been, also. While there isn't much high quality evidence to support specific strategies for improving this, it is clear that planning to support you all and the necessity for the ongoing support of, and communication with, parents and carers has proven vital. I know that tweets and emails and chatting on the gate meant that we were very quick indeed in taking up the 'masks on the way in and around school' initiative of last Thursday that the Government issued – we were way ahead of the curve. I know also that the online learning initiative is also progressing extremely well and many of you will have had an email yesterday really asking you to access your child's online learning so that in the likely event of a bubble closure or a local lockdown, we will be able to adhere to guidance about attendance monitoring, and productive, meaningful and effective learning taking place.

Next week, to build on this, I will be asking staff to take a final look at our online learning policy, to make sure it is fit for purpose and I have not overlooked anything, before sharing it with governors who will ratify it and then we will share it with you and put it on our website. Meanwhile, next week staff will also be having a crack at using Google Classroom to teach a lesson in school, to coach the children (and possibly themselves!) through the process. We are almost at the point when this will become seamless, in the next 2 weeks we will begin to use this approach so that it is as non-threatening and minimally distressing for children as possible should it become a necessity.

As the home reading charts are embedded fully now in every year group (even Reception!!) children are working hard to read 3 or 5 times a week. If they read 5 they get a sticker. I love this and see lots of children on the Twitter feeds doing this – which is fab! When they collect 10 stickers (in a few weeks' time), Mrs Dutton, our literacy champion, wanted a big reward for themwithout Covid-19, we would have had a hot chocolate and biscuit session as a reward but we can't obviously do this now... watch this space for the reward, but it will involve me in some way....

Victoria Carr