

WOODLANDS PRIMARY SCHOOL: HEADTEACHER'S BLOG – 16/10/20

Well, we have survived another week, and unscathed other than a few dark circles and eye bags, a few tears of sadness and a few of joy! I was grateful to all of the people who reached out after Thursday's apology to tell our team what a good job we were doing in such difficult times – everyone in school appreciated it. Ms Bell from the infant office had a favourite line from one of the emails, "people need to remember that you are not part of some faceless corporation (where complaints may or may not be noticed) but our community, and our extended family, and deserve to be treated as such..." but I particularly appreciated the email that said the following:

"I wish to take this opportunity to offer my support and express my gratitude to you as the Headteacher of Woodlands and the methods you are using to communicate with parents.

Over the last few years, for various reasons, Woodlands has not had the best reputation as a school and it was not my first choice (or even my second or third) to send my daughter. However, the way that the school has handled the COVID crisis, and the way in which you are visible in the school, throwing you support behind the issues that you see in front of you in the interest of improving the education and wellbeing of the children has been nothing short of inspiring. There are a lot of emails coming out from the school at the moment, but I feel most people will appreciate that they are necessary, and sometimes you need to make messages stand out. I rejoice when I see you are tackling issues head on, calling out inappropriate behaviour. I have felt your passion and your frustrations through the emails you send and find them to be firm but very fair.

I have 2 older stepsons who I saw through their primary years, so I can make comparisons between schools as a result and can confirm that too much communication is better than no communication at all; a Headteacher can never be too visible.

My daughter...gives me the opportunity to reflect on the type of young woman I want to raise. I want her to be kind but fearless, thoughtful but strong willed, considerate but determined and the most important thing to me is that she is surrounded by good female (and male) role models to guide and inspire her. I am proud that my daughter is in a school that is being led by the type of person I want her to look up to. I follow you on twitter and have watched the video of your TED talk - you very quickly cast any doubts I had about the school I had been 'lumped' with to the side.

Thank you to you and the staff for everything you are doing to make Woodlands a better place for our children. I am the daughter of two teachers myself, so I have seen first-hand how much hard work and passion goes into the job you do. It isn't always recognised in the way that it should be."

The main reason I was so grateful to this parent was in relation to my TEDx talk, something that took me years to agree to, and which took every ounce of courage to actually stand and do – evidenced by the quivering voice and breathlessness that I embarrassingly demonstrate in the video clip. I am no longer a frightened child, however, and plucked up the courage to speak about how it is possible to overcome early childhood trauma and be successful – as I was asked to do by someone who read some research I had done on trauma and attachment disorder. I am desperately sorry for the parent/s who feel that my 'tolerance' for 'poor behaviour' is as a result of my 'poor upbringing' and wanted to be really clear.

The fact that I had adverse childhood experiences is nothing spectacular – lots of people have them, lots of children are suffering from them. I was one of the lucky ones because someone saw a spark in me and fanned it into a flame. I take nothing for granted and live my life to the full as a result, always giving back in recognition of the fact that I have received so much. I live my life to serve, and do so without question and with 100% of my energy – whether that is my own children, my family, my school family, my army family, those colleagues seeking to develop themselves who I work with at university, or those in need who I help through charity work. I am not to be pitied, or judged, I am actually very lucky and in fact feel blessed. My upbringing wasn't 'poor', I was terrified but was raised with morals, to live with integrity, to be resilient and strong, and as a result, my siblings and I have been able to make my mother, grandparents, and aunt very proud of our achievements and moreover of the human beings we have become.

I am very firm but fair in our school, taking behaviour issues very seriously indeed, because it is my job and absolutely what I am here to do. As first I seek to understand what the behaviour is telling me, because I am an emotionally intelligent and emotionally literate, experienced and compassionate professional – along with every

single member of my team. Once we have established the underlying cause of the behaviour, sometimes after days, weeks or months, we put things in place to support it. We are frank and transparent with parents, and this is never easy for anyone. Our children here are learning each day what being an active member of society is like, everyone is different and some differences are upsetting to see. We teach them how to cope and manage this in as healthy a way as possible and always with the notion that children are at the centre of our decisions. None of this is based on my childhood, and all of it is based on over 2 decades of experience around the world as an educator. I hope this clears up any misunderstanding about me, my values and beliefs and my professionalism. More so, I hope I don't let down the parent quoted, and the many others who have contacted me, who for some reason see what I class as the normal expectations of my day job, and simply me being 'me', as an inspiration.

On a different note, Thursday it was World Maths Day (who DOESN'T love maths???), and Miss Tyrer, our resident 'Math Champion', thought it would be brilliant to celebrate it as a whole school whilst linking it to TTRockstars! 🎸🎵🎶

In KS2, each year group focused on one rock band from around the world: Y6 - AC/DC (Australia), Y5 - Queen (England), Y4 - Foo Fighters (America), Y3 - U2 (Ireland)... If only I had been allowed into the bubble, I'd have been in Year 4.... On the day, there were loads of activities children did linking to the band.

In KS1 & EYFS, children looked at bands like 'The Beatles', look at how many number 1's they had etc. super day! 😊

Mrs Morphet and Mrs Cotton both attended a Zoom meeting a couple of weeks ago about something called 'Young Carers'. At Woodlands we are aware that some of our pupils are young carers (living with someone with an illness or disability) and have reached out to them individually already because we know that young carers may need a little extra support to enjoy and do well at school. We are committed to ensuring that all pupils who are young carers are identified, and supported effectively. So please take the time to look at the list below (all of whom are classed as 'young carers') to see if this could be your child.

Young Carers often engage in:

- Practical tasks (cooking, housework and shopping)
- Physical care (lifting or helping someone use the stairs)
- Personal care (dressing, washing, helping with toilet needs)
- Looking after younger siblings
- Helping someone communicate

If you think your child might be a young carer or could be affected by any of the issues we've highlighted, please let our Learning Mentor, Clare Cotton know (c.cotton@woodlands.cheshire.sch.uk).

I was chuffed to pieces to receive last week a letter and a journal from the National Waterways Museum Ellesmere Port, who are a wellbeing charity also! They have offered a wellbeing journal to each of our Y5/6 children and I gratefully received them. I think they could be very useful in the coming days and weeks as we navigate the remainder of this year. If you are keen to visit them: www.canalrivertrust.org.uk/nwm

Please can you have a read through our Online Learning Policy, it can be found here: <http://www.woodlands.cheshire.sch.uk/page/policies/3022>

It details all of our expectations with regard to a remote learning and needs to be digested fully in case we need to implement it – please contact us if you have any questions.

Next week we are excited to host our first ever virtual parents' evenings, and who knows? They may well be how we do things from now on...

My son called me on Thursday night, he has settled well and is loving it – thanks for the well wishes! A happy boy equals a happy mama! The house is quieter, but I notice we still have milk, bread, cereal and biscuits and it is Friday...

We have one more week to go.... one more! Let's all keep safe as we can, wear masks everywhere, wash hands 100 times a day, stay home unless we need to be out, track and trace like mad, isolate if we need to, and keep everyone in school and learning for another week....