

Autumn Term 2018

This term in school...

Welcome to my Headteacher's Letter. Sent home termly it will let you know what's happening in school: at a leadership level, for the whole school and in the classroom.

Now in my sixth year as Headteacher of Amherst it is a chance to reflect on the achievements of last year and also focus on the development priorities for this year.

Firstly, welcome to all new children and families in Year 3 and other year groups. I hope your first months at Amherst have been a positive experience. The Buddy system in Year 3 continues to be a success and helped aid transition into Year 3, especially on the first morning. We are also trying to ensure that the Buddy system continues beyond just the first day. Each Year 3 and Year 6 class are paired to facilitate the classes working together when appropriate.

Each year part of the school's performance is judged by the Year 6 SATs results. The children sit these tests in May of Year 6. Last year's Year 6 pupils have performed significantly above the national average in all areas. Writing continues to be assessed by teachers in each individual school rather than a written exam. For a child to be at the Expected Standard they needed to score 100 + with the maximum score being 120. For a child to be assessed as achieving a High Score they needed to score 110+. Yet again, these are an excellent set of results. We are well above the national average in all areas. Well done and thank you to all the children and teaching team for their hard work and commitment to high standards.

Subject		School	National
Reading, Writing & Maths %	Expected Standard	86	64
	Higher standard	21	10
Reading %	Expected Standard+	92	75
	High score (110+)	51	28
Writing %	Expected Standard+	91	78
	Greater Depth	31	20
Grammar Punctuation and Spelling %	Expected Standard+	93	78
	High score (110+)	50	34
Maths %	Expected Standard+	93	76
	High score (110+)	54	24
Reading average Scaled score		110	105
GPS average scaled score		109	106
Maths average scaled score		109	104

The progress measure is an indicator to judge progress from end of Year 2 to the end of Year 6.

Reading Progress Measure 1.1
National Average

Writing Progress Measure -0.7
National Average

Mathematics Progress Measure 1.7
Above National Average

Kent Test

Eighty-six Year 6 children sat the Kent Test (11+) on Thursday 6th September. Fifty-three (55% of all Year 6 children) passed the test. 19% of children in Kent passed the test. This increases to 32% when looking at just West Kent. 55% is an incredibly high pass rate for Amherst and congratulations must be awarded to the children, teachers and parents. It is a team effort. As in previous years, I was a member of the Headteachers' Kent Test Appeal Panel. I find this is such a valuable experience as it gives me insight to the standards needed for an appeal to be successful. It also helps maintain good relationships with the secondary school headteachers.

At the beginning of every year schools write a School Improvement Plan. I would like to share with you the three key priorities on our Plan for this year:

- To continue to embed and improve the delivery and impact of whole school values based PSHE (Personal Social Health Education) curriculum.
- To create an outdoor play/learning area that enhances the children's experience at playtime and lunchtime.
- To ensure consistent approach to delivering whole class inputs that enable all children to be actively engaged and participating.

This academic year is highly significant for me as it is the beginning of my eleventh year of headship. I was a teacher for ten years previously, so I have officially been a headteacher longer than a teacher during my career in education. I still feel like a teacher, but have to now recognise I am a headteacher! At the end of last year, I wrote down many reflections on what I have learnt and experienced during ten years of headship across two different schools (five years at Goudhurst and Kilndown Primary School and five years at Amherst).

Many of the experiences are personal to me or particular to education, but others cross over into any area of leadership. A key element of leading a successful school is building and maintaining positive relationships with children, parents, staff and governors. In other words, everyone! Most of my day is spent interacting and moving between all the different groups of people within our school community. Different people need different responses but a core consistency and set of values is needed to underpin it all.

I would like to share some of those thoughts and reflections:

- Lead with kindness
- Understand yourself and what you believe in regarding education before you lead
- Learn to feel pride not just relief
- Good schools do not need to over promote. The high quality of their work with the children will spread by word of mouth and be backed up with academic results. Let others tell you how well the school is doing. When that moment happens, you know the shift towards a positive culture has begun.
- A little bit of competitiveness is not a bad thing.
- Effective schools manage their most vulnerable/challenging children well. Those children will test your values and systems. Those children will expose people's views. Invest in those children and be closely involved with the staff and parents who support those children. Work with your SENCO to support rather than delegating. Those children will give your school the greatest moments of pride but also cause the greatest level of challenge.
- Trust capable staff to teach.
- Don't ask staff to do anything you wouldn't do yourself.
- Your inter personal skills are everything. You need to master the ability to build positive relationships rapidly without compromising your values.
- When given a proposal by a member of staff or parent start by finding all the reasons to say yes rather than identifying all the reasons to say no.
- Schools will need different projects at different times. Try to go with the flow but ensure underpinning all the core decisions are your values. This provides a hidden consistency but still enables an exciting and diverse range of projects to happen.
- Natural momentum – do things just before they need to be done. This also applies to your own career. Learn the ability to look forward as well as operating in the present.
- Recruitment is a serious business. Be involved in every recruitment from midday supervisor to Deputy Headteacher. Never delegate recruitment. Every member of staff will reflect or not reflect the school's values. Parents trust you to create a team of adults that will care and nurture their children. The children deserve to have high quality adults to work with. They never get each academic year again.
- Strong academic outcomes give you freedom. Capable teachers trusted to teach generate strong academic outcomes. You need to be able to assess when less monitoring is needed to generate higher outcomes. You can only trust capable, honest hard working staff. Culture is everything.

There were many more on my list but I don't want to bore you with my inner thoughts! I have found it a fascinating but challenging journey being a headteacher for ten years. I feel immensely proud of what we have achieved. I have really started to enjoy and feel comfortable in the role during the last two years. This coincides with me attending headteacher coaching sessions but also my own family being older and gaining more sleep at home. Do not underestimate the impact of lack of quality sleep on your perception of how life is going!

I continue to try to teach a different class each Friday morning. It enables me to get to know the children better (at least learn their names!) and also get a feel for how their class is progressing. The children get to know me as a teacher and a person, which helps develop positive relationships. It also ensures that any whole school strategies and initiatives are firmly rooted in improving teaching and learning.

If you ever feel the need to come and speak to me, please don't hesitate to contact the office. If I am available, I am always happy to chat immediately and if not, make an appointment. I look forward to seeing many of you at the Christmas Bazaar and Carol Service.

Best Wishes

Andrew Reid