

Autumn Term 2014

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.

As I begin my second 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.

The introduction of the Buddy system for Year 3 and Year 6 has been a real success. I was delighted and proud, to observe on the first day Year 6 children welcoming their Year 3 Buddy and leading them to their classroom. I do believe it enabled children in Year 3 to feel part of Amherst immediately and hopefully helped settle a few nerves, (parents and children!). Children's transition from any school to Amherst must be a positive experience and we will continue to develop strategies to achieve this. We have already begun to refine the Buddy system and have decided next year to ensure classes are paired together rather than across the whole year group. This will enable greater opportunities for the Buddies to work collaboratively and share their work. We want the Buddy system to go beyond just the first day and utilise its full potential. We have arranged a magic show on Monday 15th December for all the Buddies (Year 3 and Year 6) to celebrate their first term at Amherst. This will also provide another opportunity for the Buddies to be together and hopefully strengthen their relationship.

Each year part of the school's performance is judged by the Year 6 SATs results. The children are assessed in May of Year 6 in Reading, Writing, Maths, Science and Spelling Punctuation and Grammar. In all areas of attainment the school performed above the national average, and by a considerable amount in many areas. The children's progress is also assessed. This is a measure based on their KS1 SATs results (end of Year 2) and their KS2 SATs results (end of Year 6). The expectation is that children will make two levels progress such as Level 2 to Level 4 or Level 3 to Level 5. This was a key area that the school focused on last year and we were very pleased that in Reading there was an increase of 14.1% and in Writing an increase of 9.5%.

Attainment

	Level 4+			Level 5+		
	2013	2014	National	2013	2014	National
Combined Reading, Writing and Maths	88.4%	86.5%	79%	35.4%	39.6%	24%
Reading	94.8%	94.8%	89%	62.5%	81.3%	50%
Writing	86.5%	86%	85%	37.5%	44.8%	33%
Maths	92.7%	91.7%	86%	76%	72%	42%
Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar	88.5%	93.8%	76%	60.4%	75%	52%

Progress

	2013	2014	Local Authority
2+ Levels of Progress Reading	81.3%	95.4%	91%
2+ Levels of Progress Writing	76.9%	86.4%	93%
2+ Levels of Progress Maths	93.5%	90%	89%
3+ Levels of Progress Reading	18.7%	25.3%	34.1%
3+ Levels of Progress Writing	6.6%	17%	35.5%
3+ Levels of Progress Maths	49.5%	46.1%	35.7%

Thank to you to all the teaching staff for their hard work last year to enable the children to achieve so well.

At the beginning of every year schools write a school improvement plan. I would like to share with you the four key priorities on our school improvement plan for this year:

- To continue to accelerate the level of progress in writing.
- To introduce Reciprocal Reading to replace Guided Reading
- To ensure SEND and Pupil Premium pupils make the expected or better progress in reading, writing, maths and science.
- To ensure two levels of progress in maths is above the national average. (The new maths national curriculum provides a greater level of challenge which we welcome.)

There are fifteen objectives in total on the school improvement but three further objectives of particular interest to you as parents are:

- To improve the quality of the PE curriculum and delivery.
- To install touchscreen interactive whiteboards in every classroom to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. (A really exciting project and should be completed in the Christmas holidays. The proceeds from the Christmas Bazaar are going to help fund fifteen new touchscreens.)
- To ensure children have ownership and positive attitudes to their learning.

Staff and governors have worked closely together to ensure the key priorities reflect the needs of the school. I feel passionately that every child should be given the opportunity to achieve their full potential in all areas of the curriculum.

This is a period of much change in primary education with a new national curriculum and also changes to the way we assess children's progress. This year will be the last year levels are used to assess a child's attainment and progress at the end of Year 2 and Year 6. In 2016 there will be a new end of Key Stage test. The child's achievement will not be reported as a level. The DfE are yet to confirm what format will be used but it is likely that it will be a standardized score. In October the DfE released a consultation document which gave more information regarding the changes to the type of language used to judge children's achievement. The outcome of the KS2 test will judge whether a child has reached the 'National Standard'. This standard will have the expectation that the child is then academically well prepared for secondary school.

The challenge we face this year is to devise a system for tracking pupil progress in each year; to regularly inform parents whether their child is: above the expected level, at the expected level or below the expected level. I believe we must have a system that has the child's practical next steps for learning at the heart of the process and linked to teachers' feedback and marking. Useful information for both child and parent is an understanding of what a child needs to work on in the next two weeks rather than just an end of year judgment. As a parent you would also need to know whether your child is achieving the age related outcomes for each year group. I am determined to develop a system that is as simple as possible but has maximum effectiveness on enabling every child to make good progress. I will keep you informed as the year progresses; our new assessment procedures will need to be in place for September 2015.

As part of our focus on increasing the level of progress in writing we will repeat the writing competition which is to be completed over the Christmas holidays. It will be along the lines of Radio 2's 500 words story competition. Please see the coming newsletters for further details. To view last year's winning entries please click on the link below:

www.amherst.kent.sch.uk/whole-school/competitions-challenges

Thank you to all of you who completed the Parent Questionnaire. We are collating the results which we will share with you shortly. Thank you for the feedback, which we can use to help maintain good practice but also inform how we can improve.

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, to make an appointment.

I look forward to seeing many of you at the Christmas Bazaar, Christmas Production and Parents' Evening.

Mr Reid

