

Autumn Term 2020

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 eighth year as Headteacher of Amherst it is a chance to reflect on the achievements of last year and 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 despite all the protective measures and new systems.

I could list all the challenges this term that have been created by COVID but it would be a rather boring and gloomy letter. All schools and families have been coping with high levels of disruption. Our approach throughout this period has been to consider what we can do within the restrictions of protective measures rather than what we cannot.

The children's enthusiasm and enjoyment of being back at school has been a strong motivator for us all. We are acutely aware that children do not get each year again. We want to do all we can to enable this year to still be one full of exciting learning opportunities.

What has been wonderful to experience has been the flexibility of the whole school community to adapt. I have been so impressed (but not surprised) by the high levels of dedication and hard work that all school staff have demonstrated. Not having a full staff team for any week since the beginning of September has required immense flexibility and staff good will.

The ability to recruit and retain outstanding individuals has always been a core principle of my leadership. During a time of crisis, the value of that principle becomes increasingly evident. Our team of capable honest hard working individuals have enabled Amherst to continue to thrive and flourish despite the challenges faced.

All staff are in great need of a rest over the holidays and a chance to build up their capacity to go again in January. Learning to tolerate doubt and uncertainty on a daily basis can feel overwhelming and exhausting.

Thank you to the PTA for demonstrating what is possible virtually. They have embraced the opportunities presented to run events in a different way. It is incredible what they have achieved. Funds have continued to be raised for our Grand Designs building project and a sense of community has been maintained. The culmination of their hard work on Saturday for the virtual bazaar was amazing. I never thought the school hall could be turned into an Amazon warehouse, which would run so efficiently. Thank you to the office team Christmas elves that covered over 6km each arranging and collecting orders!

Normally at this time of year, I use this letter to report on the Year 6 achievements in their end of year SATs tests. These tests were unable to take place last year due to school closure. I hope our current Year 6 will get the opportunity to show how much they have learned during their school journey.

Eighty-two Year 6 children sat the Kent Test (11+) in October and sixty-one passed. This equates to 63% of all Year 6 children. This year involved much disruption so well done to all 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 ensure any gaps in children's learning caused by school closure are identified and support provided.
- To provide high quality remote learning when needed.

- To ensure expected level of progress in writing is the same or above the national average.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed by purchasing items off the Toy Pod Amazon wish list. Items are now arriving and we are set to have all the Toy Pods in place at the beginning of Term 3. It will be an exciting addition to children's playground experience in January. I think all of us could do with a little boost returning after Christmas.

Finally, I always feel it is important to recognise and value the small pleasures that life can create. We often need to let ourselves stop and identify the good things as they happen. One of my weekly moments of happiness is the delivery of a newspaper on Saturday morning. I am amazed that after many years the novelty and pleasure of a newspaper coming through the letterbox to begin the weekend has not worn off!

An article last weekend caught my eye, written by Esther Walker that listed 16 tiny things that are making her happy. I would like to share some with you as I identified with many and it made me smile.

My first cup of tea of the day

Witnessing my children being nice to each other

Opening the dishwasher to find that someone else has unloaded it

Going outside

My second cup of tea of the day

Waking up after eight unbroken hours

Waking up to find that I actually did the children's lunchboxes the night before

Taking delivery of a piece of technology that is easy to set up and actually works

Being struck with the clarity and brilliance of the completely perfect Christmas gift for someone

I hope you all have a wonderful Christmas break and the chance to escape from some of the current daily challenges.

Best Wishes

Andrew Reid