

## Spring Term 2022

### *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.*

I would like to start this term's letter with an update on the Grand Designs Project. The schedule is on track with the build hopefully being completed in May. If you are not aware, the new building will provide much needed additional teaching space during the day and a new home for our Breakfast and After School Clubs. It will allow for an expansion of our After School Club from 24 pupils to 40 pupils. If your child is on the waiting list or attending alternative after school provision, please begin to consider whether Amherst After School Club would be a good option for you in Terms 5 and 6. If interested, please contact the school office.



A recurring topic among headteachers is how we shift to a greater balance between operational vs strategic approaches. Due to Covid, schools had to shift to a predominant operational style of management. At some point all organisations need to transition from day to day management to a more measured approach ensuring long term plans and goals are set and achieved.

At Amherst, we have worked hard to ensure that that shift has taken place this year. I am fortunate to have a strong senior leadership team, well supported by subject leaders. One of the benefits of being a large three form entry school is we have Year Group Leaders that work alongside Subject Leaders to ensure we have a well sequenced curriculum. Curriculum review and development has been a key objective this year in all subjects.

We have always believed in the importance of all subjects, not just English and Maths. Children need a balanced curriculum that interests and inspires them. Children will experience a strong and stimulating English and Maths curriculum but the other subjects are needed to create broader knowledge and skills. High levels of excitement, enthusiasm and achievement are to be found in the broader curriculum enabling all children to develop their talents. This was very clear to me when watching Year 5 children last week during their tropical animal workshop as part of their Rainforest topic. It is not every day you get to handle a snake in your classroom! Much knowledge was gained regarding sustainability and the importance of maintaining the natural habitat for these animals. The children now have a deeper understanding due to their first-hand experience. I look forward to reading the work Year 5 produced following such a strong response.



As part of our curriculum review we have researched and invested in schemes of work to support the non-specialist in subjects such as PE, Music and French. One of the challenges of the primary state school model is that your child's class teacher is expected to be an expert in all subjects. All teachers will have strengths and weaknesses. From experience, the subjects listed can cause the most issues if a teacher is lacking subject knowledge and therefore confidence.

In PE we utilise GetSet4Pe, which has proved to be an excellent resource. It provides clear lesson plans and a wide range of other resources (there are particularly good demonstration videos) to support the class teacher. For many years at Amherst, we have enhanced our PE curriculum by employing high quality sports coaches in handball, hockey, tag rugby, football and cricket. Not only does this raise standards in PE but also provides excellent pathways into local sports clubs.

I firmly believe there is a sport for everybody and it is our duty as a school to expose the children to a wide range to help them discover their sport. This term's indoor curling lessons may inspire somebody to take up curling and end up at the Winter Olympics!

In music we are fortunate to have such an inspirational leader as Mr Clarke. However, not every classteacher has Mr Clarke's level of expertise in music. We utilise the Charanga scheme to support the non-specialist delivering the music curriculum. It is vital that all children receive a strong music curriculum and experience, not just the children from families where music is a high priority.

As a music graduate, I would encourage all children to learn an instrument alongside the school's music curriculum. So much can be gained from self-discipline to the pleasure of playing and performing. One of the downsides of the pandemic has been the stalling of children's progression in learning an instrument. Online lessons and a lack of opportunities to perform has had a negative impact. We are in the process of rebuilding the Amherst School Orchestra and look forward to showcasing the wide range of talent (not just the school orchestra) at our Music Festival, which will be on Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> March.

We continue to teach French in each year group and support is provided to the non-specialist teacher by use of the Rising Stars scheme of work. Mrs Archer (Modern Foreign Languages Leader) has done an excellent job over several years, first finding a scheme that is successful and then ensuring it is embedded across all year groups. An area of feedback from Year 7 ex Amherst pupils has been that they were not as well prepared regarding languages. I anticipate this to change over the coming years. We also supplement our languages curriculum with the option of children attending Mandarin Club who delivered an excellent assembly last week on Chinese New Year.

You may find as a family, like schools, you have become increasingly operational over the last two years. That is to be expected but I would encourage you to revisit your child's long term goals and ensure that some of the positive aspects of pre-pandemic life are reintroduced. Take time to reflect on the things you used to do that have stopped that could be restarted.

Finally, please find at the end of this letter the outcomes of the parent questionnaire from December 2021. Thank you to everyone who took the time and effort to complete it. We will use the information provided to help Amherst continue to improve and be the best school possible for every child.

I hope you all have a good half term.

Best Wishes

Andrew Reid

	Total Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Bullied/No Concerns raised
My child is happy at this school	170	117 (69%)	51 (30%)	2 (1%)		
My child feels safe at this school	170	131 (77%)	36 (21%)	3 (2%)		
The school makes sure its pupils are well behaved	170	93 (55%)	74 (43%)	3 (2%)		
My child has been bullied and the school dealt with the bullying quickly and effectively.	170	8	24	8	1	129 (76%)
The school makes me aware of what my child will learn during the year.	170	91 (54%)	75 (44%)	4 (2%)		
When I have raised concerns with the school they have been dealt with properly	170	60 (35%)	50 (29%)	8 (5%)		52 (31%)
The school has high expectations for my child	170	85 (50%)	78 (46%)	6 (4%)	1	
My child does well at this school.	170	99 (59%)	66 (39%)	5 (3%)		
The school lets me know how my child is doing	170	79 (46%)	85 (50%)	6 (4%)		
There is a good range of subjects available to my child at this school	170	99 (58%)	67 (39%)	4 (3%)		
My child can take part in clubs and activities at this school	117	62(53%)	49 (42%)	6 (5%)		
The school supports my child's wider personal development	170	87 (51%)	71 (42%)	10 (6%)	2 (1%)	
I would recommend this school to another parent.	170	166 (98%)		4 (2%)		
My child has SEND, and the school gives them the support they need to succeed.'	19	8 (42%)	10 (53%)	1 (5%)		