

Spring Term 2017

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 a busy parent, like so many of you, juggling the demands of family life and work, I find that interactions with my children can be at an increasingly operational level. The stress of bath time (we still have very young children!) and getting everybody to bed successfully each night can hijack the opportunities for quality discussion.

Our children need us to be available for them emotionally, socially and academically. Homework does not always provide the best vehicle for positive academic interaction with your child. We sometimes resort to Mrs Reid taking my seven year old son to a coffee shop to complete homework at the weekend so they can both concentrate and avoid Edward (who is 20 months old) scribbling on James's work! It also provides crucial one to one time between parent and child. This was highlighted during a recent visit, by the fact that James was actively thinking of extra homework to prolong the stay at the coffee shop, as he was enjoying the time on his own with mum so much. What was clear, was that he didn't mind what he was doing, so long as he had some quality time with one of his parents. A chocolate brownie was an added incentive!

This then led me to reflect on how often we provide teachers in school the opportunity to spend time one to one with each child in their class to build a positive relationship. Sadly, the answer is not enough. Again, school can become very operational with teachers' interactions with children driven by the objectives that they need the children to learn. The relationship between teacher and child is vital. Teachers need time to understand what motivates and interests each child to quickly grasp what makes them tick. At Amherst we are fortunate that adults understand this and work hard to find opportunities to build meaningful relationships with the children they teach. But could we do more? Teachers will often tell me they know exactly what a child needs and if only they could spend a day with just that child, working one to one, they could help address any gaps in their learning or self-esteem.

Currently in Year 6 we are experimenting with using Miss Carver, who works Mon-Wed, in a different way. Previously she had completed the role that Mrs Lester had done by providing enrichment and booster classes across several year groups. Since February she has been 'team teaching' with each Year 6 teacher. This means she can lead a lesson and the class teacher has the opportunity to work one to one with a child or small group. Miss Carver may also work with a small group herself under the direction of the teacher. Children of all abilities have the opportunity to have their learning deepened and extended. Feedback by staff and pupils so far has been very positive. We are going to repeat this model across other year groups for the rest of this year and begin a more formal cycle in September. If funding wasn't an issue, we would provide a 'Miss Carver' for every year group all the time. The reality will be that we can assign her to a year group a term at a time. We are also going to introduce in September a formal process of pupil conferencing. This will enable class teachers to be released from teaching their class for 2-3 days and use it to spend 20-30mins with each child individually to discuss their learning and school life in general. I truly believe, this will build a far stronger relationship with every child, especially children who may be more reserved and

don't always have the confidence to share their ideas in front of the whole class. The teacher can then use this relationship/connection when back in the whole class setting to have a positive impact.

I hope that this new initiative will enable all teachers to motivate and support each child to achieve their full potential. Strong relationships between teachers and children is nothing new, and something that good teachers have always done. What has changed is the pressure teachers are now under to deliver an ever more demanding curriculum. I believe we can have high academic standards and maintain high levels of pupil happiness and enjoyment. Strong relationships and good communication between adults and children will ironically provide higher academic standards. Schools should ignore what makes each pupil tick at their peril!

I look forward to seeing you at Parents' Evening this week.

Best Wishes

Andrew Reid