

Summer 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 we approach the end of the year I would like to use this term's letter to share staffing information for September 2017. The children will be informed this afternoon (3.7.17) who their teacher will be next year. The children will be meeting their new teacher on Thursday 6th July.

Firstly I would like to share with you the staffing changes for September:

Miss Maunder, who has completed her first year as a teacher at Amherst, has sadly decided to leave at the end of this academic year and return to her previous profession of digital marketing. Miss Maunder has been an excellent teacher and contributed to Amherst in many ways. We will be sad to lose her from Amherst but also from the profession. She hopes to return in a few years!

I am pleased to be able to welcome two excellent additions to our teaching team:

Mr Tom Barratt, as you already know, has been appointed to our teaching team. He has completed his Schools Direct PGCE teacher training programme at Amherst this year. Mr Barratt will be in a strong position to develop as a teacher during his NQT year as he already understands the ethos, culture and expectations of Amherst. It has been particularly satisfying to be directly involved in Mr Barratt's training and then enable him to begin his teaching career at Amherst.

Miss Rebecca Steptowe will be an NQT and will join Year 3 in September. Miss Steptowe has completed her teacher training at Canterbury Christ Church University with placements at Ide Hill School and Speldhurst CE Primary School. She attended Loughborough University studying Geography and Sports Science. Previous to that, she attended Tunbridge Wells Girls' Grammar School. She is a keen sportswoman having been a junior county tennis and cricket player. She is also a current England Stoolball player. We look forward to welcoming her to our team.

We also have some internal movement between year groups for next year. Mr Clarke is to move (yet again!) from Year 6 to Year 4. This will enable him to become Year Group Leader and a member of the Senior Leadership Team. We are also delighted to welcome Miss Laura Apps, who will be completing her PGCE training (same programme as Mr Barratt last year) with us next year and we look forward to developing her as a teacher.

Staffing structure for 2017/18

Year 3

Miss Apps - Year Group Leader – teaching Horse Chestnut Class

Mrs Wheeler – teaching Sycamore Class

Miss Steptowe – teaching Spruce Class

Year 4

Mr Clarke - Year Group Leader - teaching 3A

Miss Foinette and Mrs Fox – teaching 3M

Miss Holland – teaching 3W

Year 5

Mrs Barratt - Year Group Leader – teaching 4H

Miss Jones (Assistant Headteacher) – teaching 4AH

Miss Wonnacott – teaching 4F

Year 6

Miss Parish (and also Miss Laura Apps) - Year Group Leader – teaching 5W

Miss Huntley – teaching 5B

Mr Barratt – teaching 5J

I am pleased to be able to inform you that Mrs Lester will be returning from maternity leave in September. She will continue to provide two days a week PPA cover. Congratulations to Mrs Wisdom who is expecting her second child. She will be beginning her maternity leave after the October half term. Although not mentioned in the staffing structure there are many other people that contribute to your child's learning and experience at Amherst. We have a team of sixteen teaching assistants (line managed by Mrs Holmes our Inclusion Manager) who provide 1:1 support, group support and support within the classrooms. We are fortunate to have such a skilled and committed team and their efforts must not go unnoticed. An excellent teacher working with an excellent teaching assistant is a very powerful combination. Beyond the classroom we have other adults that are all contributing to your child's development, on a daily basis, in many other ways. These include: Midday Supervisors, the School Kitchen team, the Office/Admin team, Mr Hucks and the Site Management team, Mrs Turner crossing patrol, our IT support team, Breakfast Club and After School Club and the governing body. It is a pleasure to be able to lead over sixty committed individuals each day that care deeply about our children and feel proud to work at Amherst. Your child's four year journey is a team effort.

The Finnish education system is regarded as one which other nations can learn much from. I recently read an article that highlighted some of the key strengths:

Schedule brain breaks Let children disconnect from their work
Learn on the move Children should stand up or walk round in class
Recharge after school Keep homework to a minimum
Connect with nature Open windows. Let in natural light. Go outside.
Play with your children Join their games rather than leading your own.
Let children celebrate their learning Presenting your work to others fosters pride.
Pursue a class dream Collectively choose a shared project.
Buddy up Team up older and younger children for activities
Offer choices Let children pick a short learning task, or give open-ended assignments
Plan with your children Give them a voice and use their feedback.
Demand responsibility Children thrive when trusted to succeed alone.
Teach the essentials Prioritise the basics
Prove the learning Get children to justify their answers to difficult, open-ended questions.
Don't forget joy Remember it and prioritise it.

When these elements are written as a list, with all the theory taken away, many of them are quite basic and obvious but get forgotten. I can see many of those elements already present at Amherst such as: Year 3 and 6 Buddies, Challenge by Choice approach to differentiation, trusting children and giving them responsibility, teaching the essentials, increased focus on mathematical reasoning, growth mindset approach to learning and finally joy! Other elements on that list can equally be applied to home as well as the school setting such as: connect with nature, recharge after school, demand responsibility, play with your children and don't forget joy.

It was also interesting to read in the article that in Finland there is no private education system so every child attends their local state primary school. This results in the local school being supported by every member of the community as everyone needs the school to succeed. I feel fortunate at Amherst that we have a wide range of families attending our school providing superb parental support. This is through supporting your child's learning, parent volunteers and also contributing financially through the PTA and school fund.

Sadly those financial contributions are much needed. Like all schools, we are now struggling to operate effectively within the current budget allocation. The introduction of the Breakfast and After Schools Clubs this year has been done to serve two purposes: support working parents and subsidise our school budget. The school's focus is to generate income rather than begin reducing the quality of provision. If you are in a position to make a donation to our school in addition to your contribution to the school fund please contact the school office.

Rather than finishing on a gloomy financial note, I would like to share one of my favourite memories of this year. When coming to the end of teaching 5B on a Friday morning, I offered the children the chance to ask me any questions. These ranged from favourite food to 'do you enjoy being a headteacher?' etc. Then one child (who shall remain nameless) asked 'has your hair always been that colour?' I replied 'no, it started blonde, then went brown and is now grey!' That definitely provided some joy and humour to my morning!

I wish you all a wonderful summer break when it arrives and hope to see many of you at the performances of 'Peter Pan', 'The Summer BBQ' and Sports Day.

Mr Reid