

Autumn 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.

Now in my fifth 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.

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. The Buddy system in Year 3 continues to be a success and helped aid transition into Year 3, especially on the first morning. We are also trying to ensure that the Buddy system continues beyond just the first day. Each Year 3 and Year 6 class are paired to hopefully facilitate the classes working together when appropriate. I have already noticed some really positive relationships developing between Buddies and it is interesting to note that the current Year 6 are the first Year 6 cohort who had Buddies themselves when they started at Amherst. I'm sure this makes them highly motivated to be a good Buddy as they can remember what their Buddy meant to them.

Each year part of the school's performance is judged by the Year 6 SATs results. These are the tests the children sit in May of Year 6. Last year's Year 6 pupils have performed significantly above the national average in all areas. Writing continues to be assessed by teachers in each individual school rather than a written exam. For a child to be at the Expected Standard they needed to score 100 + with the maximum score being 120. For a child to be assessed as achieving a High Score they needed to score 110+. I am particularly pleased this year with our progress measures for Reading, Writing and Maths. This is the measure from Year 2 (SATs results from Riverhead) to Year 6. Our progress measures in Reading and Maths place us in the top 20% of schools nationally. Our progress measure in Writing places us the same as the national average. Well done and thank you to all the children and teaching team for their hard work and commitment to high standards.

Subject		School	National
Reading, Writing & Maths %	Expected Standard	85	61
	Higher standard	33	9
Reading %	Expected Standard+	95	71
	High score (110+)	64	25
Writing %	Expected Standard+	90	76
	Greater Depth	39	18
Grammar Punctuation and Spelling %	Expected Standard+	93	77
	High score (110+)	67	31
Maths %	Expected Standard+	92	75
	High score (110+)	67	23
Reading average Scaled score		111	104
GPS average scaled score		112	106
Maths average scaled score		111	104

Kent Test

Eighty-one Year 6 children sat the Kent Test (11+) on Thursday 7th September. Fifty-six (58% of all Year 6 children) passed the test. 19% of children in Kent passed the test. This increases to 32% when looking at just West Kent. 58% is an incredibly high pass rate for Amherst and congratulations must be awarded to 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.

As part of our commitment to develop well rounded children we want every child to develop a passion and expertise for something beyond English and maths. This is the reason for our extensive extra-curricular opportunities and our broad and balanced curriculum. It is so important that children be recognised for their talents. High self-esteem is the key to all learning and ensuring children have positive emotional well-being.

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:

1. To introduce and implement a new values led Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) curriculum, which will contribute to developing a positive culture of behaviour and high self-esteem.
2. To use Paired Teaching approach to provide teachers the opportunity to pupil conference and meet the needs of all their pupils.
3. To recruit, grow and retain outstanding teachers.

Recruitment and retention of excellent staff is at the heart of what makes a school successful. Recruitment is currently challenging in education. This is why we have become involved in teacher training through the Schools Direct programme, which Mr Barratt was a product of. Having worked with a teacher for a year of their training provides low risk recruitment if a job opportunity arises and if they are the right candidate. We have another student teacher this year, Miss Laura Apps, working with Miss Parish in 6P.

Retention is an interesting factor as it is potentially more within our control. Teachers will always leave schools as their lives change such as a new relationship or moving to a new area. I hope we can help retain our current fantastic staff by creating a culture within our school where they are trusted to teach and have the opportunity to work alongside like-minded professionals. We also do all we can to offer leadership opportunities when appropriate, and enable teachers to pursue learning projects within school that stimulate their own intellectual curiosity. These projects also then have a positive impact on our pupils as they influence our current and future teaching and learning strategies. I also believe we need to recognise and encourage teacher's own interests and talents. We are fortunate to have incredibly talented staff who are high achievers in their personal lives as well as professionally. Interestingly, high achieving people also tend to have a strong work ethic and are passionately driven to do well. Those attributes are what we want our teachers to have to enable them to be highly effective members of our team. As with many careers, or the beginning of family life, your personal interests and hobbies can start to diminish. I enjoy the opportunity to encourage our staff to continue to have interests outside of school however busy school life can feel.

For me, it is playing hockey at the weekend, much to Mrs Reid's despair! I know how excited and motivated I still feel before a match which almost has a childlike quality to it. That feeling often gets lost as you get older and I believe it is key that teachers still remember what it is like to feel those emotions. It helps us empathise with children and not belittle their excitement or enthusiasm. For example, we should not underestimate the positive impact on a child of running a competition at playtime and raising £22.40 for a charity such as Year 5 girls Zara, Fran, Isabel, Anna and Lucy did last week. Small events have a big impact on children's lives.

I continue to try to teach a different class each Friday morning. It enables me to get to know the children better (at least learn their names!) and also get a feel for how their class is progressing. The children get to know me as a teacher and a person, which helps develop positive relationships. It also ensures that any whole school strategies and initiatives are firmly rooted in improving teaching and learning. Finally, remember this term's value is Kindness!

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 and Carol Service.

Best Wishes

Andrew Reid

