



Essendon C of E (VC) Primary School

Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works

Headteacher's Annual Report to the Parish Council

April 2019

The year that was...

It's been another fantastic year filled with so many highlights, it's hard to know which to pick out!

We've built on the good work which was recognised by Ofsted and the school continues to go from strength to strength. We have an amazing new teacher in our Early Years class who is well loved by pupils and parents alike. The staffing in other classes remains stable and excellent and the Headteacher continually counts her blessings to have such wonderful colleagues.

70th Birthday Celebrations

As many of you will know, because you were part of it, we spent the Autumn term studying 1940's Britain to ensure we could get the most out of our 70th Birthday celebrations in December. The whole school enjoyed a trip to the Lincolnsfield Centre in Watford where we went back in time and spent a day experiencing what it would have been like to be an evacuee. The highlight of the Autumn term was, of course, the 70th birthday party. It was wonderful to welcome Bishop Alan, Lady Salisbury and the Mayoress for a special act of collective worship. Bishop Alan, who visits many primary schools every year told us how impressed he was with what he saw. His very words were "this is what a church school should look like". It was a real treat to be able to welcome back lots of former pupils including recreating a little history with our very own 1948 posy girl, the first pupil to set foot in the school there to pass on the baton to one of our current pupils who, in turn, presented a posy to Lady Salisbury. There wasn't a dry eye in the house when the pupils put on a traditional 1940s style nativity for their families, complete with a rendition of Away in a Manger and the obligatory tea towels on their heads!

Thank you to everyone who joined us to make the celebrations so special and thanks for all the lovely messages of support and encouragement we received.

Premises

The school's premises continue to be both one of our greatest assets, at the same time as being one of our greatest liabilities! The Grade II listing means that building works are never easy or cheap and the extensive grounds are difficult, expensive and time-consuming to keep up. This year we have been plagued by disasters: we returned from the summer break to find that the 1940's foundations had given way under the corner of one of the classrooms and we have a long term project to repair the damage to the school from the subsidence. As you will imagine, this doesn't come cheap.

We then also received the dreadful news in January that our 1940s kitchen no longer complied with current best practice for the safe use of gas ovens in schools and, without warning, we were unable to use our kitchen for nearly two months. However, in true Essendon spirit, we haven't let either of these setbacks get to us. Our fantastic catering team managed with a combination of borrowed slow cookers, microwaves, table top hobs and some ingenuity to keep up production of a wide range of delicious and healthy school lunches. We've managed to cobble together enough money to afford new canopies to be fitted over the ovens. The works were completed and the gas safety certificate issued on Saturday 23rd March and we have enjoyed two weeks of amazing lunches. We are looking forward to finally being able to invite our neighbours from the village into school to enjoy a meal with the children on a weekly basis now the kitchen is back up and running.

Lots of you will have seen that we have also managed to tend to our poor sad and neglected woodland, clearing out the deadwood, pruning and enabling some of our beautiful native trees to flourish. We have built an outdoor classroom carefully round the woods enabling the pupils to learn outside in all weathers and to spend more time enjoying nature and the great outdoors. We've already had some spectacular collaborative projects – the mud creatures was the favourite so far! Do stop and say "hello" when you see us out in the woods. Some residents were concerned when they saw works going on that we might be planning to clear the woods to make space for buildings. Please rest assured that we love our woodland and wouldn't do anything to jeopardise it. We have had a tree survey conducted and there is one dead tree which poses a risk of falling towards the road. If you see tree surgeons with a chain saw, please don't be alarmed. We are only removing the dead tree as we'd hate it to fall on any of you!

We've been fortunate to have some keen gardeners volunteer many hours of their time and they have worked really hard to get our allotment plot up to scratch. We are aiming to be able to grow our own fruit and veg to use in the school kitchen. It's early days but planting has begun and the pupils are beyond excited at the prospect of growing their own.

Our next project is replacing our school's toilet blocks which are very old and tired and not at all welcoming for the children. Lots of people have been shocked when we've told them we're fund raising for this but, sadly, with funding for schools being slashed year on year major projects like this are now a luxury and we are very fortunate to have an active PTA who support us with such projects. If anyone knows of either a company who might be interested in conducting the works at favourable rates or in sponsoring our new toilet blocks, we'd love to hear from you.

Shaun Childs

We saw the end of an era in February when Shaun hung up his big bunch of keys and stepped down from his role as Site Manager. Shaun joined the staff as Caretaker in 1993 when Mrs McCarthy was the Headteacher. Since then, he has worked with three Headteachers, Rod Woodhouse, Barbara Young and the current Headteacher. They have all been impressed by Shaun's amazing skills, in woodwork particularly, as well as his unwavering commitment to the school. Before he was employed at the school, he was involved as a committed member of the ESA team (as a parent). What a legacy!

Of course, it's not really goodbye as he's been back several times already to help us out with odd jobs (and to gloat about how much he's enjoying not having to come to work every day!)

Results

The school has risen to the challenge of increasingly high academic expectations for all pupils. We were delighted during a recent local authority inspection to have confirmed what we already knew – our teaching of maths and English is excellent and the pupils' outcomes prove it. The work in their books demonstrates their understanding, deep thinking and the progress they have made.

We are on track to have excellent end of year results in all year group this year. Watch this space ...

School Roll

We are beginning to reap the benefits of all our hard work to make the school an inviting and welcoming destination. Our reputation across the county is improving all the time. External agencies regularly comment favourably on the work of the school and the support given to its pupils. The speech and language team have asked to use our resources as an example of best practice to share with other schools.

Our Infants is now completely full from Nursery through to the end of Year 2. We still have a legacy of empty spaces in the Juniors which dates back to the drop in pupil numbers across the whole school prior to the arrival of the current Headteacher. However, as the school fills up from the bottom, we hope it won't be long before we are absolutely full for the first time in the school's history!

Next steps

Our amazing PTA are busy planning our May Fayre. We look forward to seeing you all at school on Sunday 19th May.

We will be holding our Sports Day up at the Cricket Club in July again if you would like to join us, you will be very welcome to come and enjoy a drink, barbeque and cheer the children on.

You may have heard that our current Headteacher is going to be leaving us before too long and she and her family re-locate to Cumbria. She is working closely with staff and governors to find a fantastic replacement and we are fortunate that her flexibility means that we have plenty of time to hold out for the right person. The school is in a strong position and the succession planning and development of the Headteacher's colleagues means that the school is well placed to continue to go from strength to strength following her departure.

Although she couldn't be here this evening she remains as committed and dedicated to the school as ever. If you would like to contact her, she would (as always) love to hear from you. You can get in touch by email or by calling the school office. All contact details are on the school's website.

Finally, she has asked me to pass on her thanks to all of you for everything you do for this village and our school.