



Mill Water School

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Headteacher's Newsletter – May 2016



Thank you to everybody who got in touch following last month's newsletter – I had some really positive comments which were very much appreciated. I hope that we'll continue in the right direction this month, and would welcome any feedback or comments you may have. We are beginning to collate positive feedback into a folder so that we have clear evidence for Ofsted or other inspectors of the work we are doing.

It has been another busy month here at Mill Water, and this month's newsletter includes updates on fundraising, events, visits, staff changes and school improvement. You can also always find news updates on the school's website, www.millwater.devon.sch.uk. If you need to contact me you can call the school on 01395 568890. If I am not available, please speak to my PA Amelia Tollerton who will be more than happy to assist you.

This will be the last newsletter before half-term, so I wish you all a very happy break – hopefully there will be some lovely warm weather to enjoy and summer will be in full swing when we come back in June! On that note, can I remind you to send in hats and sun cream as the weather gets warmer, so our pupils can fully enjoy the lovely outdoor spaces we have here.

Sarah Pickering, Headteacher



Apple blossom in the Sensory Orchard

Fundraising

We are continuing to build links with the local community, to find new opportunities for pupils and raise funds for valuable resources and equipment. Forthcoming events include a Skydive on Sunday 26th June at Dunkeswell Airfield. In a moment of madness I volunteered to do this, and now that I've raised the £500 minimum sponsorship there's no backing out! Fortunately there are seven others who are planning to join me on the day – five members of staff (Hayley, Cathrine, Charlotte, Roanna and Grace) plus two members of Penny Bain's family, who have all bravely volunteered to jump from 15,000 feet in aid of the school. You can find more information at <http://www.millwater.devon.sch.uk/news/skydive-challenge/>, by contacting Penny Bain on 07814 431490, or by emailing pennybain220@btinternet.com.

Another date for your diary is the school's Summer Fair which will take place on the morning of Friday 15th July. Following the success of the Christmas Fair, we will again be organising an enterprise challenge, where pupils will be working together to make all sorts of fabulous things for you to buy. The Friends of Mill Water will also be on hand with stalls and refreshments, and we are hoping to have displays, demonstrations and tours. Please keep the morning free if you can – it would be great to see as many people there as possible to support the school.



Our latest fundraising event was a table-top sale in Budleigh Salterton Public Hall on Saturday 14th May, organised by Penny Bain and The Friends of Mill Water. A fantastic £472 was raised, and it was great to see the hall bustling with people. Thank you to everyone who went along to support the event and of course to Penny for her enthusiasm and dedication. Huge thanks must also go to Kings Garden Centre, Exmouth, for plant donations, Rainbow Plants, Ottery St Mary, who allowed us to have sale or return plants at cost price, and Sarah Watts, who raised donations from friends. A really brilliant effort all round, and a great morning for everyone involved! As the event was such a success Penny has already provisionally booked the hall for two dates in 2017.

The Friends of Mill Water have also had great success with funding bids from local charitable trusts and organisations, including £400 from Viscount Amory's Charitable Trust, and £1000 from John Varley and Lord Clinton's Charitable Trust. We are extremely grateful to both Trusts, Clinton Devon Estates (three time winner of the Queen's Award), and John Varley (recipient of the prestigious Fellowship of the Royal Agricultural Societies) for thinking of Mill Water and choosing to support us. Huge thanks must also go to Maria Scholey for her time and efforts in contacting local trusts and charities – thank you Maria.

Thank you!

We were delighted to receive two free mud kitchens, generously donated by 'Mud Kitchens Devon', a small family company that makes a selection of bespoke outdoor play equipment based around their mud kitchen design. The mud kitchens were unveiled to Classes 1 and 2 with great excitement, and after the ribbon was cut they were used and enjoyed immediately! Tony from 'Mud Kitchens Devon' was there for the grand unveiling, and commented that it was a joy to see the kitchens in action. He said that he is normally asked to deliver to customers' homes after their children have

gone to bed so the kitchen can be a surprise birthday or Christmas present. Because of this he very rarely gets to see anyone playing with them, and found it an emotional and moving experience. The kitchens will offer both classes the chance to explore messy play and imaginative play at the same time, and have already been enjoyed hugely. We are now looking for any old utensils, pots, pans or mixing bowls that could be used with the mud kitchens – please send in anything that you no longer need.



Tony, Anna and Rowan from 'Mud Kitchens Devon'



More good news arrived with the delivery of new kitchen equipment, bought with funds raised from the Big Noise Chorus concert in Exeter in March. We received Kenwood hand mixers, Lakeland muffin tins and multi-purpose oven trays, three heavy duty anodised 3.5 litre saucepans, a Sage kinetic twist blender and a Sage Pro-scraper mixer. The Big Noise Chorus also gave us a lovely plaque, which is now on the wall in the kitchen, re-naming the room the Big Noisy Kitchen. Given the hustle and bustle of use that it gets every day, this seems a very appropriate name for the room!



The next meeting of the Friends of Mill Water School will be on Tuesday 21st June at 9.30am in school – all are welcome to attend. For more information you can contact Lyndsey Trimmer by emailing lyn.trimmer@sky.com

Wanted

Jules Edge, our school nurse, is looking for spare books and toys to help keep siblings entertained whilst clinics are taking place. If you have anything you can donate, please send them into school for the attention of Jules.

We have plans for two new sand pits in the outdoor play areas. These will be a great new resource for our pupils to enjoy. We're now looking for sand toys so that our pupils can make the most of the sand pits – if you have anything you no longer need that you think would be suitable, please send them in.



Thank you to everyone who has donated books for our new book stall in Reception. We've received so many donations that we're now looking for a small, second hand bookcase or set of shelves – if you have one you no longer need and think it would be suitable, please call Amelia Tollerton at school or email atollerton@millwater.devon.sch.uk



Do you have any spare socks?

Somehow we always seem to have a shortage of clean, dry socks in school when we need them most!

If you have any spares that you could send in, we would be really grateful to receive them.

Resources

Many of Mill Water's pupils use PECS, and we can now make symbols at school for parents and carers to use at home. If you think this would be helpful please contact the school using the home/school book and we will make what you need and send them home.

Events

Mill Water has been working with Budleigh Salterton Decorative and Fine Arts Society and other local schools to produce artwork for a new adventure story, 'Burning Ivory', the third book in the Heroes of the Jurassic Coast series. Pupils from Class 8, with teacher Simon Winward, created a brilliant painting illustrating a scene from the book. It will be displayed alongside murals and poetry panels created by local secondary school pupils at St Peter's Church, Budleigh Salterton, on Monday 13th June from 4pm – 6pm.



Our assemblies this year have focused on British Values – democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. We have also paired with an Indian school to look at different ways of life in another part of the world. Have you ever visited India, or do you have any Indian artefacts we could look at in school? If you do, please contact Amelia Tollerton by emailing atollerton@millwater.devon.sch.uk

Visits

There have been lots of visits to Mill Water over the last few weeks, including professionals from Honeylands and other schools, educational psychologists, charitable organisations and students from Exeter and Plymouth Universities. Several visitors have commented on the warm welcome they received, how much they enjoyed observing and getting to know our pupils, and how much they enjoyed the experience. We also regularly take on work experience students from local schools and colleges – if you know a young person who might be interested, please contact the school and we'll see whether we can help them with a placement.

Staff Changes

Last week we interviewed for new Teaching Assistants and were delighted with the quality of applicants. There will be some new faces in school after half-term, and we look forward to introducing them when they start at Mill Water.

Leavers this month include Emily Coleman, who has been promoted to a new and exciting role elsewhere. We wish her the very best of fortune.

Jackie Willey also leaves us this month. Jackie has been a member of staff at Mill Water for many years and will be sorely missed by all the staff who knew her – we're very sorry to see her leave us.

We will soon have a vacancy for a new Clerk to Governors as our current Clerk Amanda is moving on to a different role elsewhere. The Clerk plays a vital role supporting the Governing Body and we are really keen to find a dedicated, high-calibre applicant to continue Amanda's good work. The Clerk works an average of around 6 hours per week at Grade D (£9.27 to 10.60 per hour), including evening working for governing body meetings. If you know anyone who might be interested they can contact Amelia Tollerton in the first instance, by calling 01395 568890 or emailing atollerton@millwater.devon.sch.uk



School Improvement

On 28th April we were visited by Andrew Redpath, a former Ofsted inspector who now does consultancy work for Babcock and Devon County Council. Andrew's visit was extremely positive, and he highlighted the progress made over the last few months and strengths in sixth-form, the governing body, safeguarding, early years and assessment. Below are a selection of Andrew's comments:

- *Considerable progress has been made in developing the sixth form since the last inspection.*
- *There is a strong emphasis on developing independence and applying skills in the local community.*
- *The governing body has been transformed with a new chair and five new members.*
- *Governors demonstrate a firm commitment to the school's future success.*
- *Individual governors bring a level of experience and skill which has enriched the governing body and helped it to have a firmer oversight of the school's work.*
- *Safeguarding was strong and judged good at the time of the last full inspection.*
- *The school has an appropriate approach to teaching children with complex needs. Structured activities are combined with child directed activities.*

- *A comprehensive system for setting targets and monitoring progress has been introduced.*
- *All staff are using the system which is helping to build a clear picture of pupils' progress over time. They record small gains in pupils' learning.*

Although there are areas for improvement, Andrew's overall conclusion was that there is clear evidence for the school to be judged good in all areas, and that due to strong leadership the school demonstrates the capacity to get even better.

National Picture and Governance

You may have seen the recent news story about a father who won a court case after taking his child out of school for a holiday during term time. Although this is an interesting development, we will continue to follow current policy which means that absences in term time will only be authorised in exceptional circumstances. Attendance, related to safeguarding, is a really high priority for the school and we thank all parents and carers for their ongoing support as we implement the school's policy on this.

You may also have read in the press about the government U-turn on academisation. We will monitor the situation closely, but as the possibility of academisation is still on the horizon we will continue to work in the best interests of the school and take our time to consider all the options.

We are continuing to develop close links with Exmouth Learning Community, and at our latest meeting I was extremely impressed with Debbie Clapshaw (Devon Governance Lead) who spoke with great clarity and insight on the picture of governance nationally.

I also recently attended the SWALSS conference (the Association for Leaders in Special Education), with Maggie Carter (Chair of Governors) and Andrew Gardner (Vice Chair). Thank you to both Maggie and Andrew for showing their dedication to Mill Water by giving up weekend time to attend the conference. I was particularly impressed with Victoria Hatton, Chair of Governors at Doubletree Special School and Associate at Browne-Jacobson Solicitors, who spoke about legal issues such as complaints, allegations, school policies and procedures.