

Headteacher Blog - Week Beginning 10th November 2025

It's not only been Anti-Bullying Week, and the theme couldn't have been more fitting: 'Make a Noise About Bullying', but yesterday was also national kindness day! Around school, that's exactly what we've been doing - celebrating kindness, standing up for each other, and learning how small acts of compassion can ripple into big change. As ever, our pupils have risen to the occasion beautifully. There's something genuinely heart-warming about watching children speak with such conviction about fairness, respect and friendship and although we always have the odd one or two who slip, for whatever reason, and behave in an inappropriate way, we implement our behaviour for learning policy and liaise with parents at the earliest opportunity in the hope that we can work together to rectify the behaviour issues and make reparations.

Monday and Tuesday were filled with Stay and Learn sessions in Years 3 and 4, where parents joined their children for some Maths magic in the Junior Hall. I suspect a few parents left muttering about long division and fractions, but it was wonderful to see so many smiles and lightbulb moments. Thank you to everyone who came along - your enthusiasm and involvement make these sessions so special. Miss Shepherd has been inspirational for us all and quite literally revolutionised how we collect feedback from parents about these sessions - you're all QR ninjas (if you're not, you will be before long!) and as a result have been giving us some useful and heart-warming views that will help shape future stay and learn sessions.

On the topic of feedback, it is exciting that we have started a period of review and gathering feedback from each area in school. We have started with our nursery and preschool parents and been blown away by the responses! Next up will be parents from our Resourced Provisions and also clubs later on. After Christmas we will invite the mainstream school to offer feedback and we look forward to hearing what you all have to say.

Midweek saw us welcome our newest governor in to do her DBS and also discuss her skill set to ensure harnessing her wider experience to best effect in school. It really enthused me and I feel sure we will hugely benefit. It also saw our SLT deep in discussion (fuelled, of course, by strong coffee and even stronger determination), while our EYFS and RP staff took part in music training - filling the corridors with bursts of rhythm and laughter. It's always uplifting to see staff learning together, not sure anyone will have heard staff enthusiastically shaking maracas down the corridor, but it was definitely professional development and not a spontaneous conga line! Our foundation subjects are just as important as our core subjects and, led by Miss Hughes, staff have been really engaged with teaching music and building from EYFS in this skill. Mrs Liversey, our resident data geek, has also been developing her skills today as she attends INSIGHT training to support our staff in their tracking and assessments. In the past this was a job I did and I know the value of encouraging staff to see the benefits of data (and its pitfalls!).

On the subject of data, yesterday the DFE announced that from the start of the 2026-2027 academic year, schools will receive something called an 'Attendance Baseline Improvement Expectation' (ABIE). They have, however, very kindly set us an indicative ABIE for *this* academic year, which has been set at 95.4% - an increase of 0.4% on last year's data. This is the minimum expectation of attendance improvement that the DFE is looking for, from us, as a school, this academic year. The ABIE is brand new. From the start of the 2026 to 2027 academic year, in September 2026, all mainstream schools will receive an ABIE. This sets out the minimum improvement the government expect over the academic year, depending on the school's context. If a school fails to meet its ABIE for more than one year or misses it substantially, the school may be offered 'further support' to help to get back on track. You can appreciate that this elevated layer of accountability means that our ability to authorise absence is ever diminishing and we also know that the complex reasons for pupil absence remain. In addition to this layer of accountability there is also now an element in safeguarding training called Educational Neglect. In the UK, educational neglect is the failure to ensure a child receives an appropriate education, which can include not ensuring they attend school, not

providing suitable education at home, or not providing them with educational resources. Safeguarding training covers how to recognise this form of neglect and its potential impact, as a persistent failure to provide education is a clear sign of potential abuse or neglect and can be a cause for concern. Educational neglect can present as 'persistent absence from school'. This is a primary indicator, especially if a child's attendance is below 90%. It can also look like a lack of home education for children not in school, it's basically a failure to provide a suitable education at home. It can look like 'absence of resources'. This can include a lack of a stimulating home environment, not having basic educational materials, or not being supported with homework or reading at home. It looks like chronic absenteeism; this means having a persistent and unexplained absence from school. It can be linked to other forms of neglect or abuse, such as emotional neglect or exploitation. Educational neglect can lead to a child not reaching their full academic potential and can cause significant harm to their health or development. Please keep liaising with us if there are issues in your child's attendance so we can support you.

Thursday was another busy one, with our Year 6 pupils visiting Crucial Crew at Dale Barracks - an invaluable day helping them prepare for real-world safety and responsibility. We also welcomed visitors for Early Navigator drop-ins and a range of training sessions for staff, proving once again that there's never such a thing as a 'quiet' day at Woodlands.

We've also been lucky to welcome some wonderful visitors into EYFS this week, as part of our ongoing work helping children understand the world around them. Parents have been sharing their careers and experiences: from a beautician explaining how to care for our skin, to a handwashing and hygiene nurse teaching the importance of keeping those busy little hands clean, and even a mental health nurse helping the children think about feelings and kindness. The children were absolutely fascinated (and I suspect a few are now planning future careers involving sparkly nails or stethoscopes!).

We'd love to open this opportunity up across the school - if you're a parent or carer who could spare just half an hour to come in and talk about your job, passion, or area of expertise, please let your child's class teacher or the school office know. The children gain so much from hearing about the real world of work - and we promise not to make you sit on the tiny chairs for too long!

And then today arrived, bringing one of the most cheerful dates in the school calendar: Children in Need - our SPOTacular Day! The sea of spots, stripes, and silly accessories was something to behold. Thank you to everyone who donated, dressed up, and joined in. It's always a joy to see our pupils showing such big hearts for such an important cause.

We also said a fond farewell to Miss Tyrer, as she heads off on maternity leave - we can't wait to see some baby photos soon! There's a definite sense of excitement and baby anticipation in the air, and we wish her all the very best in the weeks ahead.

As I write this, the coughs and colds are still lingering (I'm blaming the British weather), but spirits are high. We've had another week of learning, laughter, and togetherness - and that, truly, is what makes Woodlands such a special place.