

Well, we have survived our first full week back - and Woodlands is most definitely back at full speed!

After the excitement of those first few days last week, this week has been about settling properly into routines, welcoming new colleagues, getting learning underway and making sure that all the many systems behind the scenes are doing exactly what they should be doing. As ever, the diary gives only a tiny glimpse of what happens in a school each week, but it has already been a remarkably busy start to the year.

Our children have certainly hit the ground running. Year 3 enjoyed their first judo sessions on Wednesday, whilst yesterday morning pupils in Years 3–6 were introduced to another musical opportunity through our Front Row Music ukulele assembly. Today brought more music, with Year 3 violin lessons, while Year 4 are back in the pool for swimming and Year 5 headed to Hope Farm Library. It is lovely to see our wider curriculum and enrichment opportunities springing back into life so quickly.

Lots Happening Behind the Scenes

Much of my own week has involved considerably less judo and ukulele and rather more policy reading!

Just before the summer, schools received a significant amount of new and updated legislation, statutory guidance and policy, so a considerable amount of work has been taking place throughout the summer and has continued this week. I have been working closely with our Early Years, administration and inclusion teams, reviewing policies and procedures and making sure that Woodlands remains completely up to date.

This has included completing our latest safeguarding audit, as well as detailed work this week around our Allergy Policy – which I know the office team have emailed you about and you should ALL have a link that requires your attention over the coming fortnight. None of this is particularly glamorous, and I doubt anybody became a Headteacher because of an overwhelming desire to spend hours cross-referencing statutory guidance, but it is incredibly important. Policies should never simply sit on a website; they have to translate into safe, consistent practice for the children and adults in our school and be understood by all of you.

Our inclusion work has also continued at pace. This week alone has included Speech and Language support, SPOTTS involvement, hearing screening, EHCP reviews, a Child in Need and TAF meetings, alongside emotional coaching for pupils. These are the things parents may rarely see, but they demonstrate the network of professionals and staff working around individual children to make sure they receive the right support, from day one.

We have also spent time inducting our new staff, including colleagues joining Hedgehogs and Squirrels and our new lunchtime team. A very warm welcome to everyone who has joined us - although after a full week at Woodlands, the word induction may already feel like a distant memory! Induction is also crucial for health and safety and safeguarding reasons but also so that anyone new to us knows how we work and the way we do things. As a team, an ever-expanding team, it is important that the people who join us very quickly accustomise themselves with our ethos.

I have spent time this week with Jackie Stilling, our brand-new School Improvement Partner, reflecting on our priorities and plans for the year ahead. We have a great deal planned for 2026–27 and, as regular readers of the blog will know, standing still has never really been our style!

Our Hospice Ambassadors Are Back!

One of the loveliest things to get underway this week has been the work of our Hospice Ambassadors, who have already been busily planning how Woodlands can continue supporting our local hospice this year.

They have come up with a brilliant programme of fundraising events, and there is definitely something for everyone. We will begin in October with Name the Pumpkin, followed by a Crazy Hair Day in November - and yes, staff are included, although I suspect some of us may be able to participate in crazy hair day simply by arriving at work as normal! January brings a PJ Day, when children and staff can come to school in their pyjamas and we will finish the day with teachers reading stories to their classes. Before Easter there will be a Guess the Sweets in the Jar competition, and on 28 April (National Superhero Day) children can dress as a superhero or someone they consider

to be their idol. We will also be joining in either the festive Christmas Fun Run or Easter Hop so keep your eyes peeled for these opportunities to support the ideas of our children and also a good local cause close to many of our hearts. Most activities will cost just £1 to participate, with all of the money supporting the hospice. I particularly love that these ideas have come from our ambassadors themselves: it gives our children a very real experience of service, leadership and social responsibility, while supporting an organisation that does extraordinary work within our community. We will, of course, send proper reminders and details nearer each event - nobody needs to start planning their Crazy Hair Day quite yet!

😞 On a different note, and with a degree of disappointment....

I am slightly incredulous that, only a week into term, I am once again writing about cars, driving and general behaviour of some parents outside school. We spend a great deal of time teaching our children about citizenship, responsibility and the world they will inherit - including climate change and the choices all of us can make to reduce our environmental impact. Against that backdrop, it is particularly frustrating to see families who live within perfectly reasonable walking distance choosing to drive to school, only then to park on double yellow lines, obstruct residents' driveways or double park and create absolute mayhem around hundreds of children arriving on foot. Our neighbours are already sending us photographs and complaints (we have been back just over a week!). Please, if you can walk, walk; if you genuinely need to drive, park legally and considerately and walk the final part of the journey. Convenience cannot come before children's safety or our neighbours' right to access their own homes. We continue to look forward very much to the arrival of the School Streets enforcement cameras!

I also want to address something rather more serious. We have received calls from a small number of parents saying that they do not want their children attending our forthcoming synagogue visit, apparently because of concerns about the possibility of protests or incidents. I absolutely understand that parents want their children to be safe - so do we, and every educational visit is appropriately risk assessed. However, we cannot educate children on the basis that a *possible* incident somewhere should prevent them experiencing the world around them. Risk exists everywhere: in school, on a coach, on a family holiday and in our own homes. Our responsibility is to identify and manage it proportionately, not to remove children from valuable experiences because something *might* happen. Visiting places of worship and meeting people whose faith or life experience may differ from our own is an important part of helping children understand modern Britain. We teach our pupils mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs, challenge prejudice and give children the knowledge that helps prevent fear of difference taking root. These are not optional values for Woodlands; they sit at the heart of our approach to inclusion, RE, SMSC and safeguarding. Government guidance similarly identifies mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs as a fundamental British value, while Prevent guidance (as explained last week in depth) expects schools to build children's resilience in an age-appropriate way. I leave that with you all to consider.

🌱 And We're Off...

It has been a very full first week, but an extremely positive one. Children are settling into their new classes, new staff are finding their feet, clubs and enrichment are beginning again and our teams are already working hard on the priorities that will take Woodlands forward this year.

There is plenty ahead of us - some of it exciting, some of it challenging and, judging by the amount of government guidance currently sitting on my desk, some of it requiring an industrial quantity of coffee, but it is wonderful to have (almost) everyone back. Thank you for a really positive start to the year and, as always, for your continued support.

Have a lovely weekend one and all.

Dr Carr
Headteacher
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