

Headteacher Blog - Week Beginning 12 October 2026

Another week at Woodlands, and another reminder that the work of a primary school extends far beyond what happens in classrooms between 9am and 3.15pm!

This week has been a particularly good example of the different ways in which we try to help our children grow into thoughtful, confident, capable and compassionate young people. From learning about homelessness and supporting local charities to developing children's understanding of democracy, online safety and individual liberty, there is a strong thread running through much of what we are doing: helping children understand the world around them and their responsibilities towards other people.

Alongside all of that, we have our usual enormous range of specialist support, staff training, clubs, sport, music and curriculum development. And, of course, school photographs - which always seem to involve an extraordinary amount of organisation for something that takes approximately three seconds per child!

Chester Aid for the Homeless - A Community That Cares

On Monday, our Key Stage 2 children welcomed Ian Percival from Chester Aid for the Homeless, who delivered a fascinating and thought-provoking assembly about homelessness and the challenges faced by people who do not have somewhere safe and secure to live. As we approach the colder winter months, Ian explained that the charity is in particular need of warm socks, hats, gloves and adult coats to help people experiencing homelessness. I would love Woodlands to come together to support this appeal.

We spend a great deal of time talking to children about empathy, compassion, citizenship and the importance of helping others. Opportunities like this allow children to see what those values look like in practice. Homelessness can seem a distant or complicated issue to a child, but understanding that something as simple as a warm pair of socks or a coat can make a real difference to another human being is an incredibly valuable lesson. We are therefore asking families who are able to donate any of the following items to please help: warm socks, hats, gloves and adult coats. Items may be new or second-hand, provided they are clean and in good condition.

We will collect donations in school and bring them together after half-term, before passing them to Chester Aid for the Homeless. Further details have already been shared through Seesaw and email.

Please don't feel under any pressure to purchase anything new. If you have an adult coat that is no longer worn, or warm accessories that could be put to good use, they would be enormously appreciated. One of the things I love about Woodlands is the way our community responds when somebody needs help. I hope we can make a meaningful contribution to this wonderful local charity.

Pupil Parliament - Giving Children a Voice

I am also delighted that our Pupil Parliament will be launching next week, with Kris Fisher, a local councillor, joining us to help introduce it to the children. This is something I am particularly enthusiastic about because I want our children to understand that being part of a community means having both a voice and a responsibility to contribute positively.

Our Pupil Parliament will provide opportunities for children to share ideas, represent the views of their peers, discuss matters affecting school life and understand how decisions are made. It is not simply about children suggesting what they would like adults to do for them! It is about helping them understand consultation, representation, discussion, compromise and collective responsibility.

Last month, I introduced our weekly British Values focus, beginning with democracy. The launch of Pupil Parliament is a lovely example of how we can move beyond teaching children about democracy to giving them meaningful opportunities to experience democratic participation.

I look forward to sharing more about the Parliament, its representatives and the work they undertake as it becomes established.

Online Safety - Investing in Staff Knowledge

Online safety remains one of the most important safeguarding challenges facing schools and families. We are therefore arranging for all staff to undertake essential online safety training provided by SWGfL and the NSPCC. This will support colleagues in keeping their knowledge current and understanding the changing risks children may encounter online.

The digital world our children inhabit is very different from the one many adults grew up in. Children can encounter content, contact and online behaviours which they are not yet emotionally or developmentally equipped to manage. This includes inappropriate material, online bullying, harmful challenges, manipulation, misinformation and pressure from other users. Schools have an important responsibility to educate children about these risks, but online safety cannot be managed by schools alone. Parents and carers have a vital role in knowing which apps, games and platforms their children use, understanding who they communicate with and ensuring that appropriate boundaries and supervision are in place.

We will continue to teach children how to make safer choices, recognise concerns and seek help, while making sure our staff have the knowledge and confidence to respond appropriately. As ever, the most effective safeguarding happens when home and school work together.

We Want Your Views - RSHE and Behaviour for Learning

Over the coming weeks, we will also be contacting parents and carers to invite feedback on two important school policies: our Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) Policy and our Behaviour for Learning Policy. Both are important aspects of children's experience at Woodlands.

Our RSHE curriculum helps children develop age-appropriate understanding of healthy relationships, physical and emotional wellbeing, personal safety, respect and the changes they experience as they grow. Our Behaviour for Learning Policy establishes the expectations, routines and approaches that enable children to learn successfully, feel safe and understand the importance of personal responsibility. At Woodlands, our expectations remain rooted in three simple principles: Ready, Respectful and Safe.

These policies are informed by statutory requirements, professional knowledge and our understanding of the children we serve. However, we also value constructive parental engagement, and we want families to have the opportunity to understand the policies and contribute their views. We will share details of the consultation arrangements shortly and hope parents will take the time to engage thoughtfully with them.

Inclusion - The Right Support at the Right Time

Our inclusion work continues throughout the week, with visits and assessments involving an Educational Psychologist, Occupational Therapist, Speech and Language Therapist and physiotherapist, alongside annual reviews, specialist provision discussions and meetings with families. Our Inclusion Link Governor, Andy Canham, and our Pupil Premium Link Governor, Tracey Sadler, also met with me this week.

I have written recently about our commitment to ensuring that all the spaces and expertise available at Woodlands are used intelligently and flexibly to meet children's needs. This means recognising that children in our Specialist Inclusion Bases should, where appropriate, be able to access mainstream learning and experiences, while children in mainstream classes may sometimes benefit from the specialist environments and approaches available within our inclusion provision. It also means recognising that children's developmental needs do not always fit neatly into the year group in which they happen to be taught.

We are continuing to develop this approach, including preparations for our new Burrow #2, which is planned for construction over half-term and will provide another purposeful space for regulation, assessment, support and readiness to learn. Our guiding principle remains simple: the spaces belong to Woodlands children; children do not belong to spaces. Inclusion is about understanding individual needs, removing barriers and helping every child participate as successfully as possible in school life.

Staff Development - Because Adults Must Keep Learning Too

Another substantial amount of professional development is taking place this week. Four colleagues completed two days of first-aid training, while other staff attended Early Years and Childcare Network meetings, maths leadership

development, Maths Hub training and Reception quality improvement sessions. Our English leaders also worked with colleagues across EYFS, the SIB and Years 1–6, with further input from Literacy Counts.

All of this takes time, organisation and financial investment. But the quality of children's education and care depends upon the knowledge, confidence and expertise of the adults working with them. I often remind staff that professional development isn't an optional extra; it is part of being a professional.

A Little More Green for Woodlands

On Wednesday, a small group of Year 4 children were involved in wildflower plug planting. It may seem like a relatively small activity in a very busy week, but I love opportunities like this. They give children a tangible connection with their environment and an opportunity to contribute something positive to the school community. There is something rather lovely about planting something now that will grow and develop long after the activity itself has finished. Our children also continues enjoying Year 3 judo, Year 4 swimming, Year 3 violin lessons, Year 5 library visits and dance clubs with Vara, alongside the many academic clubs that staff provide before and after school. Once again, the variety of opportunities on offer is a reminder that a rich education is about far more than what appears in an exercise book.

GB British Values at Woodlands - Individual Liberty

Over the past two weeks, we have explored Democracy and the Rule of Law. This week, our focus moves to the third of the Fundamental British Values: Individual Liberty.

What Does Individual Liberty Mean for Children?

At its simplest, individual liberty means that people have freedoms and rights, including the freedom to make choices about their own lives, within the law and while respecting the rights of others. For primary-aged children, this begins with understanding that they are individuals whose thoughts, feelings, interests, identities and choices matter. At Woodlands, we want children to feel confident expressing their ideas, exploring interests, developing independence and making decisions appropriate to their age and understanding. That might mean choosing a book, expressing an opinion, trying an unfamiliar activity, developing a personal interest or having the confidence to say that something makes them uncomfortable.

But individual liberty is not the same as being able to do whatever we want, whenever we want. Freedom comes with responsibility. My right to make a choice does not remove somebody else's right to feel safe, respected or included. Equally, my freedom to express an opinion does not mean I can treat somebody unkindly because they disagree with me. This is a particularly important lesson in the digital world, where children can sometimes encounter the idea that being able to post or say something means they should do so.

Our role is to help children develop the confidence and knowledge to exercise their freedoms safely, thoughtfully and responsibly. Of course, genuine individual liberty also means recognising that other people may make different choices, hold different beliefs or have different interests from our own. We don't all have to be the same to belong to the same community.

At Woodlands, we want every child to feel that they can be themselves while understanding their responsibility to respect and protect the same freedoms for others. Next week, we will explore Mutual Respect.

Parent Governor Notification

Parent governors have an important role in helping shape the strategic direction of Woodlands, providing constructive support and challenge and contributing to the governance of our school. I am delighted that Natalie Collins is going to be our new parent governor! 😊

Looking Ahead to Half-Term

With half-term approaching, there is still an enormous amount happening across Woodlands in the next 4 days.

Our Pupil Parliament begins next week, we are preparing to develop additional inclusion spaces, our policy consultations will shortly be shared with families, and our children are already thinking about how they can help

people experiencing homelessness as the weather becomes colder. There is a common theme here which I think captures much of what we are trying to achieve.

We want children to learn well, but we also want them to care about other people, understand the world they live in, have the confidence to contribute and recognise that their actions can make a difference. Sometimes that means achieving something academically. Sometimes it means trying a new sport, helping a friend, speaking up about something important or donating a warm coat to somebody who needs one.

All of those things matter.

Thank you, as always, to our staff for the extraordinary amount of work that goes into providing these opportunities, to our children for embracing them, and to our families for continuing to support us. Don't forget, if you have any warm socks, hats, gloves or adult coats that could help somebody through the winter, please do consider contributing to our Chester Aid for the Homeless collection.

Have a lovely weekend.