

THE HILL WEST HERALD

theherald@hillwest.bham.sch.uk

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Message from the Headteacher

Dr Beth Clarke



As I write this we are in the second day of National Adoption Week; a nationwide campaign to raise awareness of the power of adoption and the possibilities it holds for children and for families. Many of you will know that adoption is very close to my heart having adopted my daughter just over four years ago. In England around 2,000 children are waiting for loving adoptive parents. These children are a range of ages, from a variety of backgrounds. What they have in common is a difficult start in life which means they can no longer be brought up by their birth families. All of these children need loving, stable homes. They need parents who will stick by them through the good times and the bad. They need support and love to help them overcome their often troubled starts in life, making sense of who they are so that they grow up to be safe and secure. They need excellent schools too.

In England alone, schools are educating more than 42,500 children known to have left care as a result of an Adoption Order, a Special Guardianship Order or a Child Arrangement Order. Every one of these children has suffered the loss of their first family. The majority of them have been removed into care because of abuse or neglect. The impact of repeated traumatic experiences, of disrupted attachments, and of life-changing transitions from home to home is not simply wiped away when a child settles with a permanent family. Years later, we see this played out in school in the form of significantly lower attainment, higher levels of social, emotional and mental health need and a permanent exclusion rate a shocking 20 times higher than their peers. Schools can be a tremendous positive force in the life of a child who has experienced trauma and loss, and there are schools that are doing exemplary work around inclusion, and attachment and trauma awareness. We also know that all previously looked-after children are different, and some will thrive at school. Yet a significant number of children who have already had a terribly unfair start to life struggle to cope in an education system that too often does not recognise the true nature of the challenges they face. This prevents the foundations of knowledge and accomplishment being built, exacerbating social and emotional problems and diminishing life chances.

Adoption UK has recently published a 'Bridging the Gap' report that focuses on giving adopted children *an equal chance in school*. Their research highlighted four gaps that should be bridged if adopted (previously looked after) children are to have an equal chance in school: **The Understanding Gap:** a history of abuse, neglect and trauma impacts a child in myriad ways. A full understanding of this impact is the necessary starting point for meeting the needs of adopted and previously looked-after children in school. **How to bridge the understanding gap:** a programme of continuing professional development specifically tailored to supporting pupils who have experienced early childhood trauma, for all education professionals. **The Empathy Gap:** traumatised children can react to everyday events in surprising ways, which impacts on their relationships with adults and peers. Approaching such children with empathy helps school staff to respond in a way that will support emotional wellbeing. **How to bridge the empathy gap:** reduce the pressure for academic achievement at all costs and prioritise emotional and social literacy in schools, giving staff and students the time and space to develop meaningful, supportive relationships. **The Resources Gap:** schools are under financial pressure with resources stretched thinly in all areas, but investing in the social and emotional wellbeing of adopted and previously looked-after children will pay great dividends, both in enabling them to reach their potential academically, and in wider benefits to school life and society at large. **How to bridge the resources gap:** end the postcode lottery to ensure that there is parity of funding and provision of specialist support regardless of where in the UK previously looked-after children attend school. **The Attainment Gap:** we do not have enough government data to get a full picture of the attainment of adopted and previously looked-after children but, where data is collected, it shows that they lag significantly behind their peers. **How to bridge the attainment gap:** lay the foundations by collecting and analysing educational outcomes data for previously looked-after children and close the gaps in understanding, empathy and resources. Children who have been removed from their birth families, who have experienced abuse, neglect, trauma and loss, and who have sometimes experienced years of uncertainty before settling with their permanent families, have not had an equal start to life. We must ensure that we redress the balance by giving them an equal chance in school.

Children who have been removed from their birth families due to abuse or neglect are thankfully a minority in our classrooms, but nearly half of all children will experience at least one Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) during their formative years. The cost of failing to understand and meet their needs falls upon us all. We owe it to them, and to all of us, to give them the very best education we can offer.

Learning Partnership News; Dr Clarke



As you know, we have been part of the Arthur Terry Learning Partnership now since 2012 informally and 2013 formally as a multi-academy trust. The ATLP is a growing multi-academy trust of six primary schools, three secondary schools and one teaching school, based in Birmingham, North Warwickshire and Staffordshire, with more than 5,000 students and over 800 staff. All of the academies in our trust are quite distinctive and separate schools, serving different communities and phases; but all either are, or have the capacity to become outstanding schools in their own right.

Since 2012, ATLP schools have been working together to raise education standards and achievements and to enhance the life chances of all children by improving teaching, mentoring staff and sharing best practice. The academies in the partnership include: Us - Hill West, Brookvale, Mere Green, Scotch Orchard, William McGregor and Slade primary schools, and the Arthur Terry, Coleshill and Stockland Green secondary schools. Each school is based in the heart of its local area and all strive to provide clear community benefits.

The ATLP academies are led by exceptionally able head teachers who have the highest expectations and standards. The partnership provides a model of education support and delivery that reflects the needs and goals of its partner schools. At the centre of this is a vision of ensuring each academy is a centre of excellence, where each headteacher, leadership team and local governing body has something unique to share with the other academies. The work of the partnership is underpinned by the National Teaching School, which offers a range of leadership programmes and training and development opportunities for staff across the schools.

Most recently, I have taken on the role of Senior Headteacher with the clear remit of supporting one of our other partner primary schools—Brookvale. Brookvale is a one-form entry primary school in Erdington that serves a diverse community. Following the successful promotion at the end of the Summer term 2018 of Mr Jon Smart, the then Headteacher, Brookvale appointed an Acting Associate Headteacher, Mrs Trigg (formally the Deputy Head). Together we have been tasked in moving the school forward on its journey to outstanding ensuring that everyone there, staff and children, aspire to greatness. It has been an absolute privilege to work alongside the Brookvale team since the start of the Autumn Term and I have really enjoyed getting to know the children and some of the families there. I continue to work closely with the leadership team at Hill West and we all appreciate that this is a great opportunity for us all. Working across schools brings many benefits but ultimately the children in both of our schools benefit from our shared experience.



These are exciting and challenging times. By working together, schools are better equipped to successfully stay at the forefront of educational change and to provide an outstanding learning community.

Reception—New Beginnings

Mrs Pardo and Miss Roberts

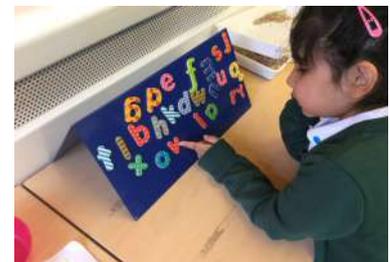
Reception is an exciting time for children here at Hill West; a time in which they begin their journey into education and are supported, through nurture, allowing them to have a happy start to their school careers. In Reception, we place emphasis on learning through play and exploration, where the well-being of our children is at the heart of everything we do, enabling our children to gain a deep level of mastery in their learning and development. Through an explorative, creative and investigative approach to play, our children are able to develop their self-confidence and self-esteem through high levels of involvement.

The Foundation Stage Curriculum is made up of seven areas of learning and development. These are divided into three prime areas and four specific areas. At Hill West, we ensure that the Prime Areas are incorporated into the children's learning throughout the year. The **Prime areas** are important because they lay the foundations for children's success in all other areas of learning and of life.

These are:

- **Personal, Social and Emotional Development**
- **Communication and Language**
- **& Physical Development**

Development in the Prime Areas enables our children to go on and master the skills within the Specific Areas, providing them with the essential skills and knowledge to participate successfully in society. Personal, Social and Emotional Development underpins all we do in Reception at Hill West. We support our children by helping them to interact effectively and develop positive beliefs in themselves and others. Children at Hill west are given many opportunities to speak and listen in a range of situations, and to develop their confidence and skills by expressing themselves. Our wonderful school grounds provide our Reception children with the opportunity to access daily learning in all curriculum areas outdoors, but particularly encourage both gross and fine motor physical development.



These **Prime Areas** are fundamental to a child's development. They are then supported by the **Specific Areas**. The Specific Areas strengthen the Prime Areas And include:

- **Literacy**
- **Mathematics**
- **Understanding the World**
- **Expressive Arts and Design**



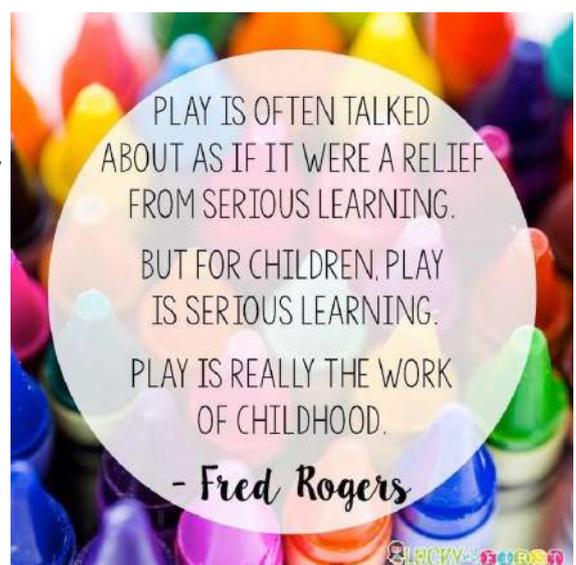
At Hill West, we provide a curriculum that is thematic and closely follows the children's interests through a combination of child led, child initiated and adult led activities. Our curriculum instils a love for learning as well as a hunger to explore and investigate, take risks and problem solve within a stimulating and happy learning environment, both indoors and outdoors.

Children have a plethora of opportunities to become independent learners, in all areas of the curriculum, through exciting, effective continuous provision, with the aim of continuing the learning process in the absence of an adult. Children are motivated and challenged by the resources that we provide for them. We want our children in Reception to be thinkers, negotiators and problem solvers – to apply the knowledge that they already have to enable them to explore new possibilities. Our well planned continuous provision raises attainment through active learning and high level engagement. Our experienced staff observe and play alongside the children, introducing new concepts and ideas, taking next steps into the children's play. Alongside this we teach daily phonics sessions, using 'Letters and Sounds'. Through many practical and fun games, which often incorporate the use of technology and the outside environment, our children make excellent progress in both reading and writing.

In Mathematics, our children have lots of practical opportunities for counting objects, ordering numbers, adding and subtracting, doubling and halving, sharing, investigating shape and patterns and using mathematical language. Skills are often developed through cooking, technology and craft activities, helping to deepen mathematical understanding.

Creative imaginations come to life both inside and outside our classrooms and within 'The Pod'. Our children have access to a wide range of resources and are encouraged to use their imaginations to create constructions, potions, models, collages and paintings where they will try out new skills or practise and refine skills already learned. Our children are encouraged to express themselves freely when experimenting with musical instruments, role play, music and dance.

Our Creative Curriculum provides many exciting opportunities for developing our children's understanding of the world around them. Our children are encouraged to be curious and to investigate their environment by asking questions and observing changes. This includes using age appropriate technology. Our children interact with and explore ipads, digital cameras, microscopes, interactive whiteboards and electronic toys.



Year 3— Visit to Herefordshire Beacon

“Our adventure in the wild!” Mrs Massey

On Friday 12th October, Year 3 braved the wild weather of the Malvern hills and went out on an adventure! We were very well prepared for the wind and rain thanks to our grown ups at home, who wrapped us up warm for our expedition. Some were even brave enough to come along for the fun! As well as excited children, enthusiastic teachers and brave parents, we also took along an expert climber named Mr Gould.



After leaving the warmth of the coach, we began the steep ascent. The children kept us entertained along the way by singing all the songs they could think of that included references to rain. It turns out there are lots of songs about the weather: who knew?!

Under the canopy of the tall trees, the children talked about the way the mountain began to get steeper, then flattened out, then got steeper again and how it made sense now thinking about the topography maps we had investigated before our trip.

We're singing in the rain!



Can you see us?

We're actually walking inside a real cloud!

As the shelter of the trees disappeared, we got our first view out over the Malvern hills. The children could already see a difference in the altitude and couldn't believe how low the clouds were. Then, the mighty wind began to blow and blow and blow! We pulled our hoods down low and, just like the brave, high altitude climber Alan Hinkes from our topic, we ventured on. The children showed great team work and resilience and they motivated each other to carry on. Some were even entertaining us with jokes and we climbed!



At just over half way to the summit we had to make the unfortunate call that the wind was just too strong to continue any further. Therefore, for the safety of our intrepid adventures, we had to begin our descent.

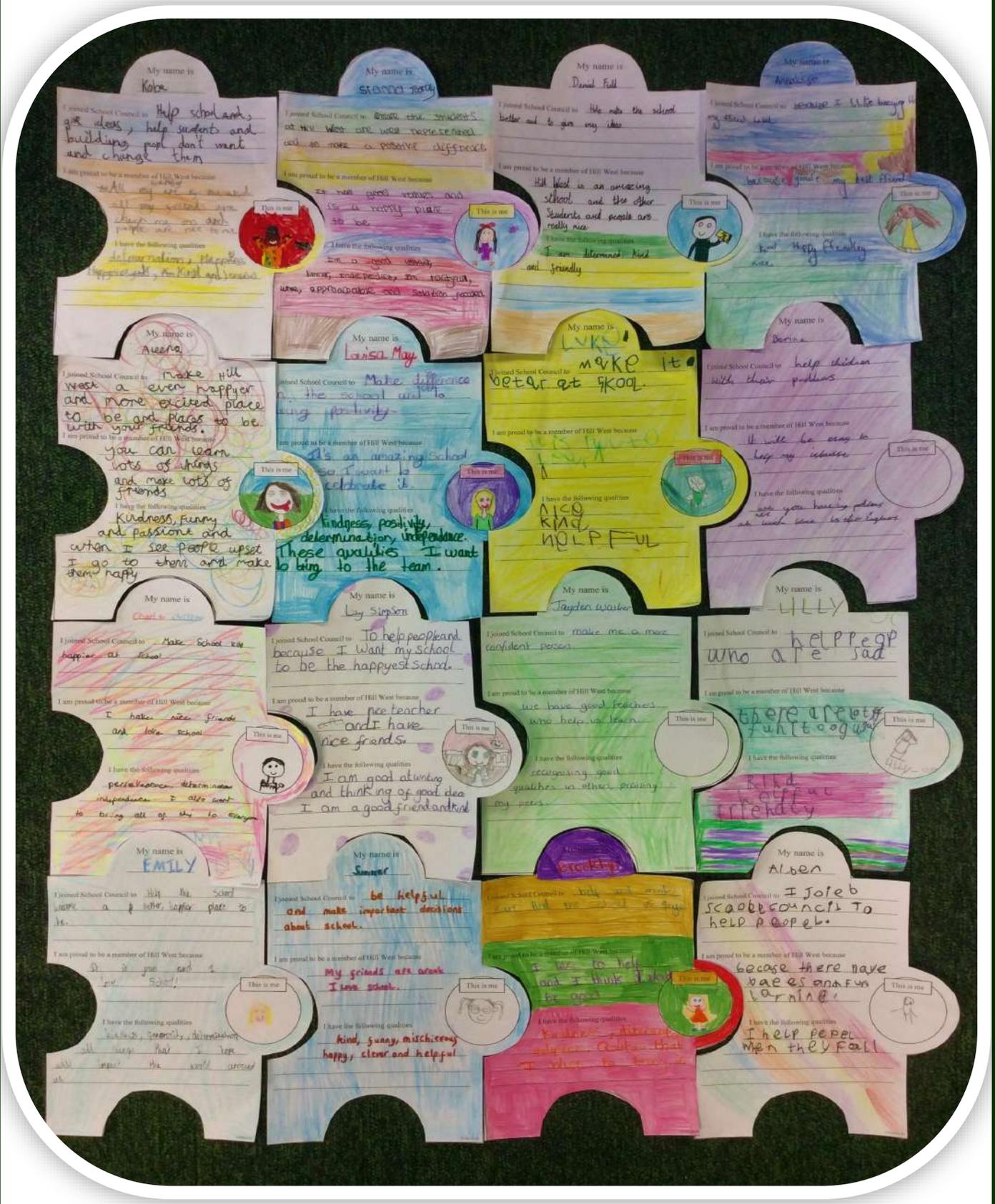
On the way down, however, in true Hill West spirit, our wild wanderers kept us entertained with marching chants and yet more funny jokes. Only pausing to share out their sweets and laugh at how wet they were.

We are so proud of our little adventurers and their resilience and determination to reach the summit. Despite the grim weather, their spirits were high and their smiles were enormous! Thank you for an unforgettable trip, Year 3; we now can't wait for Woodlands!



Meet our Student Council

This year, we are delighted to introduce our brand new representatives of the Hill West Student Council. The student council plays an very important role in shaping the everyday practice of our school, by capturing the voice of our wonderful children and communicating improvements that can be made to enhance the educational experience with the school's leadership team. This year's council is the biggest we have ever had, with a staggering 24 representatives from across the whole school. We can't wait to see what the student council have in store for us in the coming months and know that they are already working hard on a number of upcoming charity events.



Macmillan Coffee Morning

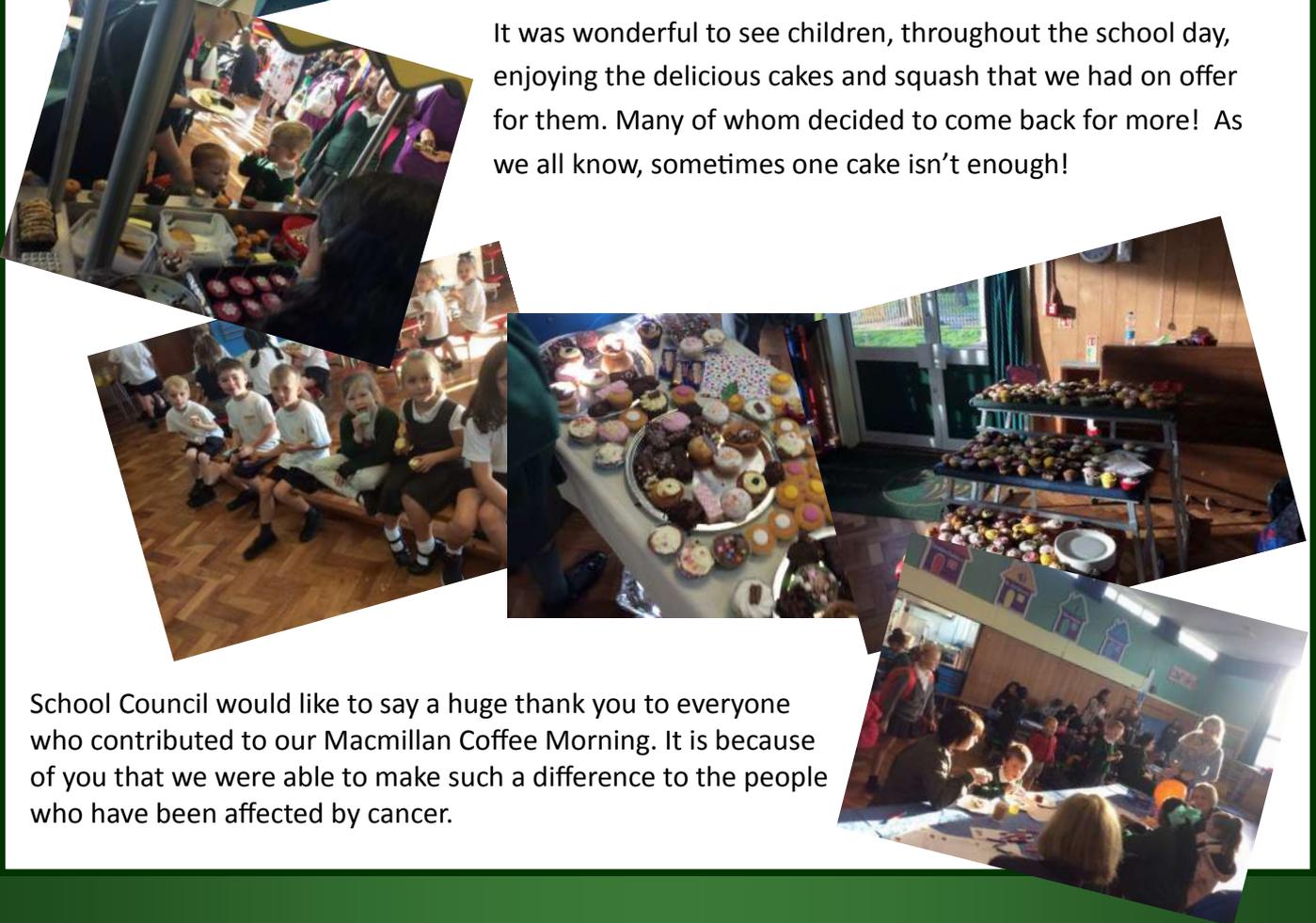
Miss Robinson



On Friday 28th September 2018, School Council held a 'Coffee Morning' in aid of Macmillan Cancer Support. The generosity and kindness of the Hill West community enabled us to raise a staggering £582 to improve the lives of everyone living with cancer. The event, run by School Council, saw a flurry of cakes entering the school building on Thursday 27th September, which meant that, by Friday we were ready to open our doors to the Hill West community. School Council, eager to make as much money as possible for this fantastic charity, arrived early to school on the Friday morning and quickly began decorating stands, making signs and blowing up balloons. The children who assisted with the event did a fantastic job in transforming the KS2 hall into a scene that closely resembled 'The Great British Bake Off.' Although we all found it hard to resist the cakes while we set up the hall, we did our best and by 8.30am the doors were opened and all cakes remained on the tables ready for hungry parents, grandparents, children and toddlers.



It was wonderful to see children, throughout the school day, enjoying the delicious cakes and squash that we had on offer for them. Many of whom decided to come back for more! As we all know, sometimes one cake isn't enough!



School Council would like to say a huge thank you to everyone who contributed to our Macmillan Coffee Morning. It is because of you that we were able to make such a difference to the people who have been affected by cancer.

Year 5— Diwali Assembly

Mrs Grant

In the penultimate week of this half term, Hares and Badgers were delighted to present their Diwali performances to their families, loved ones and to the children of Hill West. Through their performance, people in the audience learnt about the background of the cultural celebration of Diwali, and the significance of the Festival of Lights to people of the Hindu, Sikh and Jain religions.

Although there was a lot to learn (off by heart!), the children enjoyed learning their lines and, by the final performance, were all performing with super expression, in character. The children worked together to create some wonderful props and costumes and we extend our heartfelt thanks to all those families who were able to support us by providing costumes for the different



characters in the play. The children gained a lot of confidence throughout the rehearsal process and enjoyed performing for each other as they were able to give positive feedback to their friends and support them to make improvements.

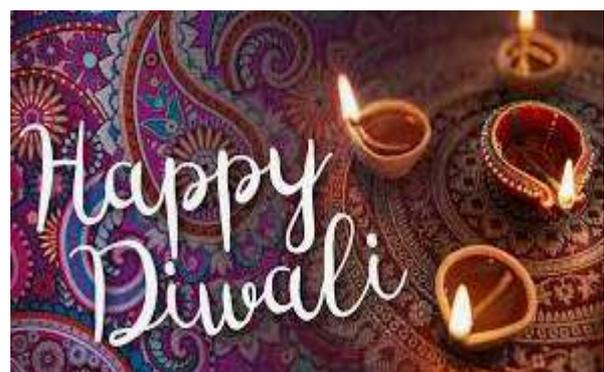
On the day of their assembly, the children did a fantastic job, producing an outstanding performance. The story of Diwali (the Festival of Lights) is the story of Ramayana, which is a sacred text dating back 5,000 years, originating from the ancient land of India. The text consisting of 24,000 verses, relates to how the Hindu festival of Diwali began. It is the story of Rama and Sita: of heroes and villains; of good and evil; of life, love and death.

Every child played their role well, speaking their lines clearly with intonation. The children loved every moment of their performance and were extremely proud of themselves, as were staff and parents. They told the story of Rama and Sita beautifully and members of the audience were able to recount key points from the story after the performance.



One of the highlights of the Diwali performances was when the children lit Rama and Sita's way home, using clay divas made with the help of their parents at the Year Five open morning! The children were extremely proud of their finished divas and it was the perfect way to represent the significance of light to those celebrating Diwali as well as symbolise the triumph of light over darkness!

Year Five would like to offer our thanks to all the family members that helped us practise our lines and gain confidence on the stage, along with a 'Diwali ki Shubhkamnayein' to all those celebrating this season. May your life be as colourful, shimmering and magical as the lights of the Diwali festival!



Year 6— Harvest Celebration Assembly

Miss Donegan

On Thursday 4th October, Foxes and Otters shared the story of Jack , Chloe and Megan with the children and families of Hill West in their annual Harvest Festival assembly. The children learnt about all the different kinds of food which are readily available in this country but which are not so freely available else where in the world.

As part of the assembly, we asked families to contribute food donations for the harvest display and were amazed at the variety and volume of kind contributions we received, proudly displaying these in the school hall on the morning of our assembly .

Following the wonderful performance by our talented Year 6, Mr Carroll and Mr Minto, with the support of some children, loaded all the provisions into our school mini-buss and delivered these to Four Oaks Methodist Church’s food bank.

“We really loved taking all of our donations to the church. It was nice to know we were helping other people.” Barney– Foxes.

“I enjoyed being part of the group of children that took the food to the church.” Mia– Otters

The Harvest assembly was a wonderful opportunity for our children to reflect on how truly blessed we are as a community and how we should be thoughtful and charitable towards people around the world who often don’t have enough food to survive. Children across the school really wanted to support with the food drive and the number of donations increased exponentially in the days after the assembly; a testament to how wonderful our wider school community is.

The children felt incredibly proud of the fact that their assembly not only sent a message to the other children in our school, but also helped others in the local community.



PTFA

Miss Arkinstall & Mrs Adamthwaite

The PTFA needs to constantly evolve in order to keep going.

We recognise that not everyone will be able to be as involved as others but the PTFA does not judge anyone's level of contribution and being involved is certainly nothing to feel daunted by. Getting involved can range from coming to meetings, sharing ideas, volunteering a couple of hours at an event or simply coming along to our events with family and friends. Having fun is always top of the list but if we can raise a funds as we go along then we're all winners - especially our children. A huge thank you to everyone who attends, donates and supports these events, it is greatly appreciated.

Our next event will be the Christmas fair on Friday 30th November

If you would like to get involved in any way, please get in touch.



THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT!

