

9 July 2010

Pre-Prep End of Year, Summer 2010

Dear Pre-Prep Children and Parents

Something New

This year we made a few changes to our usual programme of events and with great success. A real highlight of the year has to be our Pre-Prep Nativity in which all the children from two to seven years old were involved. The children did not fall off the stage or cry, we could hear them all and they performed confidently; we were very proud of them. One 'little star' lost his way, but was helped out by an older one; it is moments like that which are really special; there are very few Pre-Preps which have their Nursery children so closely immersed in the life of the school and such an advantage for the children enabling them to make an easy transition through the school. I am grateful to the staff for coming up with new ideas and challenges; it is a feature of our Pre-Prep that we hang on to our traditional events and what is good, but we are also not afraid to try new things and to 'ring the changes'. This feature is important in prompting improvement and informed change.

This year in particular has been marked by the huge amount of training undertaken by staff in Pre-Prep and it is not just the children that we are really proud of. Our assistants; Ms Jenny De Meza, Mrs Karen Stenton, Mrs Karen Walker, Ms Angelique Sander and Ms Annabel Newcomb have all either passed their National Vocational Qualifications in Children's Care, Education and Learning or are due to qualify shortly. Mrs Jackie Mills is especially pro-active in attending educational courses and I have trained as an ISI inspector for the Early Years, this takes me out of school approximately once each term. I feel it is really important in keeping in touch with what other schools are doing and in ensuring that the inspection team is relevant to the processes and I want to know that when we are inspected that team includes practicing Heads. In addition staff have been to ICT and other Early Years training which has qualified us for free ICT and creative resources. Mrs Lorraine Ford has undertaken three days of phonics training so that she can spearhead a new initiative in September which will help in teaching tricky irregular words as well as reinforcing our spelling program. These are just a few 'behind the scenes' examples of the training that staff undertake to keep up to date in order to improve what we offer to the children.

We have extended our support to the teaching profession as a whole; hosting events such as the Professional Association of Pre-Prep Heads and Under Fives Organisation. We are working closely with the University of Brighton in advising on the selection of undergraduates and mentoring students on teaching practice as well as continuing to provide training for pupils from Bexhill College.

Every year we plan ahead and develop initiatives in a cycle of school improvement. This year we have consolidated our class resources, including the introduction of new electrical circuits and we intend introducing a little oral French to the Reception children from September. Our handwriting is

well embedded and we have introduced Individual Learning Profiles for all the children. These profiles are valuable on transition and are constantly updated; they include information on the children's strengths and interests. If you have anything to add, do contact the class teachers at any point throughout the year.

We end the year with an ambitious proposal for the Nursery and Kindergarten outdoor area which we are keen to redevelop. Mrs Sue Norman, Mrs Pepper and the Early Years team plan to divide the tarmac space up into learning zones which will include areas for the children to focus on investigation, imagination, living and growing, role play and small world activities. We are grateful to our Friends who are funding a wooden structure to provide a shade area.

Judo was added to the opportunities on offer to our Pre-Prep children; this like the dance, instrumental lessons is an additional extra. We are keen however to keep the extras to a minimum; providing care early in the morning, recorder group, gym, singing clubs and outings free of charge. I am grateful to Mrs Lynn Edwards for continuing to manage our After School Care Club and to Mrs Stenton and Mrs Walker for stepping in to help run the club.

New things which were less welcome this year included a change in the funding of three and four year olds, the EYEE. Looking through the diary I have spent four evenings and one afternoon in consultation with East Sussex, countless meetings with our bursary and numerous hours in emailing, letter writing, form filling and in making phone calls to the funding manager of East Sussex. If I could have found a more generous resolution for our families I would have, but it has proved impossible to do so while maintaining quality care and education.

Something Old

Some events have become Pre-Prep traditions; our Christmas Children's Get-Together was well attended and included a number of families new to Vinehall. It is lovely to begin to see Vines returning to us with their young children and we now have a number of families with long standing connections with the school. The children enjoyed our Christmas party and must have all been good as Father Christmas arrived and handed out gifts. Unfortunately our end of term Christmas Assembly for parents was snowed off, but the staff and children celebrated together a day early.

Year 1 have visited a windmill, Battle Abbey, St Mary's Church and the seaside as in the past; however a change is planned for next term and Mrs Ford should be in a position to announce her initiative early next term. Year 2 decided on a healthier option and enjoyed an outing to Wagamamas in Tunbridge Wells; apparently Miss Plant had lots of parent volunteers to help who were unfortunately not required. 'Yvette', Mr Aphorp's vintage car thundered into the grounds for the children to observe and draw. Year 2 also visited Wilderness Wood as in the past and was invited to a French picnic and afternoon of activities by our French Department. The children were split into groups and enjoyed workshops on French life and played boules. The Reception class went on their planned train trip without incident this year and enjoyed a visit from the dentist and Battle fire-fighters. Mrs Hammond led the outing to Bedgebury Pinetum where the children looked at habitats and minibeasts.

Other events which we have repeated included our whole school assemblies such as the Harvest and Grandparents one. Parents have joined us for our Reading and Number workshops. We met current and new families during our Open Days, the Welcome Evening, taster days and parent/teacher consultations and transitional meet the teacher mornings. Our thanks go to the 'Friends' again for their help on Bonfire Night, Christmas Fair, Pancake Day and for organising the School Fete and Disco.

The children continue to amaze us and their performances in drama, music and sport always provide entertainment. Miss Louise Plant and Mrs Nikki Towner have coached the children over the summer term in athletics sessions. In a recent 'Vinelines' it was wonderful to read of the successes of many of our past Pre-Prep pupils doing so well at regional and national levels, I'm sure they must owe a little something to the good start they had in Pre-Prep! We remember Julian Moore, Daniel Hotz, Sam Lloyd, James Fosbery, Isabel Powell and Clara Taylor for their achievements from an early age as well as Finn Piper who held the throwing record in Year 2 which recently fell to Tommy Forder.

Music and drama is a real strength and our children benefit so much from performing in front of an audience, it is wonderful to see the Year 8 turning up on a Friday morning to give an impromptu interpretation of the assembly story. This inspires the Pre-Prep children and they tend to take performance 'in their stride'. Our Nursery and Kindergarten children performed a delightful 101 Little Pigs or something similar, we went 'Around the World' with the Reception children, the Year 1 children performed a delightful assembly for parents in the Lent term followed by a recent musical afternoon. Year 2 entertained us with an informal concert which included individual and class musical pieces. As in the past we have continued to invite in groups from the Prep School to entertain and inspire us. Groups have included the brass, recorder, clarinet, saxophone, double bass and cello.

We have continued to support the Fellowship of St Nicholas as our Pre-Prep charity, this term the children arrived (on a day of special significance for Mrs B!) wearing 'mad shoes' which they had decorated. The Fellowship runs the Fun Van which visits deprived families in the Rother area. Thank you for your continued support of our charities; our Vinehall families have been very generous over the years and have raised large sums in particular for Rwandan charities. Thank you to Mrs Cannetty-Clark and Mrs Todd for their talk on Rwanda Aid. The image of the school particularly remains in my mind and serves to remind us what privileged lives we lead.

Something Borrowed

In recent years we have organised a week of curriculum enrichment and the arts based on a different theme. This year was our fifth Arts Week, it was entitled 'Dreaming of India' and became a real highlight of the year. We began by begging and borrowing items for an interactive display and our thanks go to everyone who contributed including the Pestalozzi centre and Hastings Museum. Beeja, an Indian dance troupe kick started the week's activities and had all of us trying some classical and Bollywood moves. On the Thursday our staff, dressed in saris, greeted the children. A day of workshops followed an assembly by Emilia in Year 7. She told the children about her life in India which included a description of cleaning out and riding crocodiles. Our thanks go to Mrs Quelli Coles for helping the children to make 3D clay elephants, to Mrs Radia, Kajal and Aneesa for painting over 100 hands with henna and to Mrs Lynch for demonstrating how to tie a sari for the 'film and fashion' workshop. It was lovely to see so many parents at our open assembly on Friday and a great opportunity to include all our children from Nursery to Year 2.

Something Blue - Moving On

We said 'goodbye' to our Year 2, Tarran, Mrs Julie Robinson and Mrs Elizabeth Wells today, they boarded our Moving On Van and waved as they circled our hall and moved on up the corridor for the last time while Year 1 took their places on the benches. We wish Year 2 well as they move on into Year 3, as a staff we continue to follow with interest what the children do and we look forward to hearing all about their successes in the Prep School. I am sure our farewell to Mrs Wells will only be temporary and she will no doubt look forward to that early morning phone call requesting her supply cover. I toured a prospective parent recently (this was in addition to the visitor I took

round in my sari!) and witnessed our guest singing 'Mud Glorious Mud' with Mrs Wells – too much time spent in Pre-Prep maybe!

This year we said goodbye to Mrs Jan Tearle who was a much valued teaching assistant and to Mrs Olivia Aylott, she is still in contact with us and continues to offer ICT advice. A new list of recommended websites is available under 'useful links' on our website. Due to increased numbers for September 2010, we are delighted to have appointed a new Reception teacher, Mrs Lynn Harding who will be working closely with Mrs Juliet Hammond and Mrs Clare Ruddle. This means that our Art Room will be relocated to 2WR and I am grateful to staff for their uncomplaining efforts in changing our resources over just one year on.

Our final 'goodbye' is saved for Mrs Robinson; she has worked tirelessly to pull Vinehall into the 21st century. She can be proud of the part she has played in steering us through a very successful inspection. We wish her well and she leaves Vinehall for a very prestigious post with the Independent Association of Prep Schools.

Final Thoughts

Last year I wrote that some of our most memorable days have been those that are completely unplanned when we have just grasped the opportunity and taken the initiative to enliven the school day and make it relevant to the children and the events around them. The same remains true of this year, by embracing change and by responding to events and happenings we can ensure that we make the most of all the opportunities that come our way.

This year has been clouded by the deterioration of one of our Year 2 pupils. Sadly Annelous was unable to return to school for any length of time. What little time we have enjoyed with her has been precious. The children shared having their nails painted, dressing up as princesses for a party, having a pyjama day and learning together through some hospital role play. The Vinehall community has played an amazingly supportive role and our very best wishes go out to Annelous and her family.

I am very thankful to **all** the Pre-Prep staff, and I include Andy, for their commitment and dedication over the year. I know there are times when they 'raise their eyebrows' and humour my enthusiasm, but they so often go the extra mile for me, the children and our Pre-Prep families. I am grateful for the complementary skills and interests that the staff team has and know that we are privileged to work in such wonderful surroundings.

The Pre-Prep staff and I hope that you all enjoy a happy summer holiday and we look forward to welcoming you all back in September along with a number of new families.

Warmest regards,

Tessa Richardson