

Lewes New School
Annual letter to supporters
13 July 2005

Dear supporters

It's our last day of term. As our fifth year comes to a close I look back in tenderness at the progress we've made as a community of learners.

It has been a richer year than ever. The topics, including Historical Lewes, Toys, Light and Dark, Zambia, The Tree, and the current Skills, have been highly successful in providing a framework for the 'journey of discovery' and 'love of learning' that we have always aimed to create – for both children and teachers! Zambia in particular illustrated how we can go from knowing nothing to falling in love with a country and its customs at a distance, and not wanting to stop learning about it. We really are a community of learners.

Academically we've been clarifying our expectations for children at different stages of development, using the national literacy and national numeracy strategy for guidance. We're focusing on skills rather than knowledge as more appropriate for the modern age. As we are not using the national curriculum and its targets to drive our teaching, the teachers are required to be perceptive in understanding whether individual children are developing appropriately, and whether and when to introduce additional learning support outside the classroom.

A pattern that we are noticing is that children who are naturally talented in a certain area: sport, writing, maths, being empathetic, etc, leave our school with that intact. This might sound odd, but I have seen countless examples of people who have lost a sense of their uniqueness and direction as they've been covered over with the sheer volume other expectations put on them.

This is a school where children are allowed to develop at their own pace. One of the reasons that prompted me to co-found the school was when our local village school told us that our third daughter Rose aged 5 might need learning support as she was not picking up reading. I felt strongly that she needed time to develop at her own pace rather than at the pace set by the government. Rose was still a reluctant reader aged 8 at our school but about a year ago she finally 'got' books and not only reads avidly at both ends of the day, but has discovered a passion for writing and is writing three stories/journals at the moment. Rose is moving on to secondary school after five years here and when I see her and the other children who have been here since the early days and who have their own unique stories of achievement and obstacles overcome, I feel immensely proud of the school and of the children, who are interesting, intelligent and mature individuals.

Stephanie Davies-Arai, another co-founder, has been helping us embed emotional intelligence in the daily practice of the school even more this year, and in the last term has been in the school frequently, working with children, teachers and parents in a variety of wonderful ways and modelling skills to us all. She has been using conflict resolution with both children and adults, cooperative approaches to no-blame bullying, working with parents in practicing our behaviour management policy; running a free weekly parenting course which gives parents powerful and

effective skills; observing, supporting and training teachers and playground assistants... Stephanie is helping create the school's own model of working cooperatively, which we hope at some point to publish. Our school is the subject of a paper being presented at an academic conference at Oxford in the autumn.

Our staff team remains quite stable, so that our culture and identity is really forming. It's a year and a half now that we've been running the school collectively between teachers and school manager. That's worked well but the level of responsibility is great and we've decided to look for a head teacher to help us consolidate the good educational practice, and lead the school with vision. It's not urgent, so we will continue to look until the right person appears. The details of the post are on our website. Please help us to network for this unique person. They don't have to have been a head teacher before but do need to be a qualified teacher with the ability to lead a team collaboratively. It's the most brilliant opportunity for an educationalist to make a difference not only to our school but to inform change nationally.

It's an interesting time in education in Britain. The government is starting to loosen up some of the restrictions of the national curriculum and is looking for innovation. As Human Scale Education's pilot primary school we had a positive visit from the DfES who long with No 10's policy unit wanted to offer us government funding as a centre for change. Unfortunately the local education authority felt differently and would basically only fund us if we complied with all the rules binding all state schools ... which are too heavy to describe here! We are still open to getting government funding – perhaps some years down the road – but not at such a cost.

The governing body and trustees continue to be a great invisible backbone to the school and oversee the staff and the annual school development plan.

As ever parents continue to play a huge part in co-creating the heart of the school through random acts of kindness and grand gestures. There is a parent group, class reps and the now termly Open Forum, a facilitated circle to bring change to the school.

We're continuing to pioneer other aspects of school life, including our third year of organic school lunches, now taken up by 85% of the children and in the autumn term they will be served to everyone three days a week.

Parents at the school have bought woodland near Lewes and this term all classes spent a day in the woods and the top half of the school went on the fourth annual school camp there – see this space for our developing woods-based education. As an Eco school we've installed new effective boilers and now actively reduce recycle and reuse. Our big plan for the autumn is to introduce insulation to our huge roofs.

If anyone would like to support the parents at the school by donating regularly to a bursary fund, please contact me. Equally, we'd be very grateful for any one-off donations to the insulation project or to buy digital cameras for each class to support our documentation of portfolios of work, coming onstream in the autumn.

Once again, thank you for your support in the last year and we welcome any visits in the new year.

Warmly, on behalf of the whole school community, Adrienne Campbell