



Dear Parents and Carers,

After three weeks away from school, it was a joy to get back this week after recovering from surgery and feel back at home with the staff and children. Whilst I have been keeping up with emails and news as well as seeing everyone in our weekly Bench of Glory, it's just not the same!



For our final fortnight, the whole school is working on the same timetable and theme. We are basing our work on the Matt Haig book, *The Girl who Saved Christmas*. Whatever their age, I hope that the children just love the joy of this traditional story... and if Father Christmas should be looking for some inspiration for good books to add to his sack, or you'd like a heart-warming bedtime book for the holidays, the other two tales that fit into this trilogy are equally delightful and I'd recommend them to you.

You'll notice the wonderful letterhead on this week's newsletter. Imogen in Year 5 was the winner of my Willow Brook Christmas Greeting competition last week, alongside Santino in EYFS, whose fabulous robins will appear on emails and newsletters next week!

I would like to introduce you to some new faces who will be joining the school in the new year. We were absolutely delighted to appoint Tom Clarke as our new TA/sports lead. Mr Clarke qualified as a TA a number of years ago and has been working both in schools and for the YMCA sports coaching initiative. He has visited Willow Brook since his appointment and was an immediate hit with the staff and children that he met. He will work alongside Year 1 in the classroom and spread his sporting expertise and enthusiasm across the school in PE and extra-curricular activities. I have a feeling that he will be a great asset to the school.



The school also appointed Miss Johnston's permanent job share partner after half term. Molly Fleming started her teaching career at Willow Brook doing her NQT year with us in 2010. Since then her skills have continued to blossom and she returns to us as an accomplished and experienced teacher, excited at the thought of being part of the Willow Brook team again. Miss Scott will continue to work with Year 2 until Mrs Fleming starts in February.

The 2019/2020 year has been quite a journey for Willow Brook staff. There were 6 new babies and 3 maternity leaves and I realise that (alongside a pandemic!) this was quite a big deal for a relatively small primary school staff and its community to absorb! Just last week, Miss Weston gave birth to her second child – a beautiful little girl called Keira! Appointing Mrs Fleming was the final piece of our permanent staffing structure, and whilst I love the joy of new life, I'm now hoping for a settled period ahead!

The Final Week of Term

Whilst this week would have seen Willow Brook at its busiest with carols, concerts and community celebration, it is important to make the most of our final two weeks as best we can. By popular demand, the Birthday Fairy has extended her season as Tier 3 restrictions continue to blight the opportunities for public parties!

As well as our work on The Girl Who Saved Christmas and Friday's Snowflake Championship, there are a couple of events that I'd like to take this opportunity of sharing. We might need your help!

A reminder that on **Tuesday 15th** we are having our Christmas dinner! By now you will have let the office know if you **DO NOT** wish your child to have the traditional meal. To make this all the merrier, we would like the children to spend the day in their Christmas jumpers! The afternoon will have a party spirit in the classrooms, thanks to The Friends of Willow Brook and we hope that this will raise spirits and add a little end of term celebration to the week.

On **Thursday 17th** afternoon the whole school is going **TO THE PANTOMIME!** (Oh, yes we are!) The Price Waterhouse company (courtesy of Mrs Razzell) had invited us to go to the theatre, but as we can't go to the theatre, the theatre is coming to us! We are all going to share 'Sleeping Beauty' together on the afternoon of **Thursday 17th** filmed live from the Theatre Royal and invite you to send your child with change of clothes if they would like to get dressed up for the experience! Anything pantomime ... a party outfit or a princess dress would be perfect – it's your choice! Just send clothes in a named bag with your child on the Thursday and we will all dress for the occasion.

During the last 6 days we will be marking Christmas with a candlelit celebration of story and music for each year group in the hall. I have missed our assembly times since September – they provide a sense of togetherness and peace, so I am looking forward to meeting safely with each year group to share a special hour.

You will have heard or read in the media that the government announced on Tuesday that schools could choose to redirect one of their inset days to Friday 18th December. This is not an 'additional inset day' and, controversially, comes with too little notice and without great purpose. Whilst it primarily means that a headteacher would not have to be 'on call' to respond to COVID related issues on Christmas Eve, it offers no greater last minute benefit and potentially gives working parents and families childcare issues both now and in July when we would have to alter our end of year plans. Our current arrangement of breaking up on Friday 18th December stands.

This term has been both unusual and demanding. Whilst we have temporarily had to make the best of such a limited life, we continue to work hard to provide as broad a curriculum and school experience as the rules allow. I am grateful for your understanding during what we hope will be a short-lived period, and your words of encouragement together with the wonderful way that your children have adapted and coped in a narrowed world has been admirable. It is not normal. It is limited. It can often be frustrating. There are no assemblies, mixing of classes, group work or team teaching projects... BUT as we meet 2021, I hope that there will be a sense of optimism. Many schools have faced unprecedented teacher absence and frequent episodes of class isolation and extended home-learning. I would like to publicly thank the Willow staff team for their sheer determination and loyalty this term. Their frustration is often as great as yours but I assure you that there is not a single one who would not put their commitment to your children first. I imagine there are not many headteachers who are able to say that, and I am grateful.

Thank you too, for your compliance with our request that you wear face masks in our communal areas. This can only add to our collective wellbeing and I respectfully ask that you continue to do so.

With my best wishes to you all for a very calm end of term, Louise Ballard