Acorns

Acomb Primary School

Magazine
2017

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Loud and clear

Continued phonics success puts Acomb among top schools in the country

INSIDE • Friday Mile • London calling • Science week • Our councils

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Letter from school standards minister

We're among top three per cent of schools for phonics

I would like to congratulate you, your staff and your pupils for your school's outstanding achievement in the 2016 phonics screening check.

We want to ensure that every child develops a firm grasp of phonics which is why I was delighted to see your results. With 100 per cent of pupils at APS reaching or exceeding the pass mark in the check, your school is in the top three per cent of all primary schools in the country.

This year's figures show that 89 per cent of pupils who achieve the expected standard in the check go on to achieve at least the expected standard in key stage one reading, which underlines the importance of developing the ability to decode words effectively at an early age.

Department for Education

I am pleased to hear that you have ensured all Year 1 children at APS have a firm foundation in reading, from which they can develop further and becoming increasingly fluent readers. This will help them develop a lifelong love of reading.

Thank you for your work in this vital area of a child's early education and congratulations again to you and your staff for all you have achieved.

Nick Gibb MP
Minister of State for School Standards

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FROM THE HEADTEACHER

Another special year

It is once again my absolute pleasure and privilege to look back on a school year at Acomb Primary School and reflect on all of the marvellous achievements and wonderful experiences that we have given to our children.

This is an extra special year for me, with the Year Six leavers being my first-ever reception intake as Headteacher at Acomb Primary School.

They, and all of the children, continue to impress me with their hard work, determination and kind-heartedness.

I am proud of each and every one of the children at our school and thankful to work with such a dedicated team who always give their very best to make school interesting for the children.

I hope you enjoy looking through this magazine and seeing a small selection of the things that we do.

Lee Haynes, Headteacher

Acomb children go far – every Friday!

Acomb's sports coordinator Tom Dennis is a man on the run – and he wants the rest of the school to join him.

Mr Dennis has set up the "Friday Mile", a popular end of week jog for everyone and part of his big push to boost fitness across the school.

Every Friday after assembly, come rain or shine, pupils and staff run a route around the field. Everyone? Well, says Mr Dennis, mostly everyone. "It's the only way," he says. "To be in it together!"

The exhilarating activity has gained positive feedback from children, staff and parents and while it's relatively new, Mr Dennis hopes it becomes a regular fixture and possibly extend beyond the summer term.

The Friday Mile is part of an overhaul of sport at the school. Mr Dennis's enthusiasm and belief that promoting sport is a benefit for life, is rubbing off on his pupils. Acomb came second in rugby, second in netball and its football team were champions of York (west). Joseph Richardson collected the golden boot trophy for scoring the most goals in the resulting North Yorkshire finals.

"We have lots of training sessions and we promote hard work – and it pays off," said Mr Dennis.

A Sports Council has been set up to help make decisions on what sports clubs to put on as well as working out new activities to do on sports day.

And Acomb continues to do well in the Big Pedal, a scheme run by Sustrans to encourage people to travel regular journeys by foot, bike or scooter instead of the car.

Smart: Acomb's triumphant football team in their new kit, sponsored by Richardson's of Woodthorpe. Pictured front row, from left: Leo Nichol, Francis Hamilton, Matthew Blount, Ben Lumb, Hollis Lansford. Back row: Samuel Bradley, Harry Bricklebank, Mr Tom Dennis, Joseph Richardson, Jamie Wilkinson

On the lookout for Arts Week

Classes worked together for Acomb Primary School's Arts Week, producing a whole school dramatic production of The Lighthouse Keeper's Lunch. It was then performed for parents.

Acting combined with art as class teachers and pupils helped interpret different elements of the story. Younger children made masks to represent fish and seagulls, while older children used engineering techniques to create a pulley mechanism and a "trebuchet", a kind of catapult.

"For some there were also elements of factual TV for a short film," said Mr Lee Threadgold of Animated Objects theatre company, based in Scarborough, who ran the project for Acomb.

Mr Threadgold, a former theatre designer and puppet maker, said the Arts Week project brought many benefits for those taking part: "There's a lot to be said for such a shared experience.

"Performance develops confidence and it's great for a school community to work towards one goal. It's has been a real pleasure working with the Acomb children."

All the children were expected to read and understand the story and then work out the best ways to portray it. "It was scripted through improvisation," said Mr Threadgold.

Lee Haynes Headteacher at Acomb Primary School, praised the children for their creativity. "This has worked extremely well and I'm grateful to Animated Objects for their hard work and dedication. As a busy school, this whole school project is something we couldn't have done on our own."

Being creative: children take part in acting out The Lighthouse Keeper's Lunch

Learning to read; reading to learn

Acomb Primary School is leading the way in the teaching of phonics – helping children become lifelong learners

Phonics is the way children learn to read – understanding the way letters sound and the words that are made when blended together.

"You learn to read, and then you read to learn," said Mrs Angie Walker, leader in English, specialising in phonics. "It's a life skill and we're constantly looking at ways to keep it fun and to make children want to learn."

Phonics at Acomb is one of the school's many successes and its impressive results make it one of the best schools for phonics teaching in the country. For the second year in a row, all pupils passed a statutory phonics screening check with flying colours – an achievement described as "outstanding" in a letter to the school sent by Nick Gibb, Minister of State for School Standards.

"With 100 per cent of pupils at Acomb Primary School reaching or exceeding the pass mark in the check, your school is in the top three per cent of all primary schools in the country," wrote Mr Gibb.

Pupils individually learn to understand the sounds of six letters at first – S A T P I N – and once M and D are added, they have access to their first reading book, where letters are blended into words creating simple stories young children can read for themselves.

"Parents love it when their children get their first reading book," said Mr Lee Haynes, headteacher. "It's another of those important milestones in a young child's life."

The systematic approach taken by Acomb in phonics starts on a pupil's first day in Reception and there is a 20-minute, four-part lesson every day, practising sounds and learning how to decode them. Word hunts take place to add variety and fun, taking the children into the fresh air when they can to

Getting to grips with reading: Acomb children in a phonics lesson – blending letters into words and going on 'word hunts'. Left, Mrs Sandra Fox plays a key role supporting Mrs Walker

look for letters hidden outside.

"There is a real emphasis on phonics," said Mrs Walker, who has been at Acomb since 2002. "It's high on our agenda and we do get the best results because we make sure children enjoy it. One pupil told me that phonics is 'better than McDonald's'!"

Children's progress is monitored and regularly assessed, with extra sessions run by Mrs Sandra Fox in the afternoons for pupils that need them.

Mrs Walker's success in the teaching of phonics has led to her providing training for other primary school teachers across the city. Her "phonics in action" courses have been running for two years.

York Minster hosts 'truly amazing' choral performance

Year 3 and 4 children have been hitting the high notes as part of a York Minster choral project.

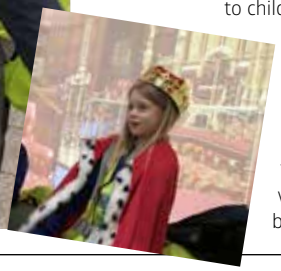
Together with three other schools in the city, including the Minster School, Acomb rehearsed for three months before giving a "truly amazing" performance at York Minster.

Parents were invited to watch in the majesty of the magnificent cathedral. Teacher Miss Liz Johnson said: "Our children were not fazed at all by the vast space they were singing in. There were lots of people there and it was quite emotional. It was a truly amazing experience."

Some 85 children from Acomb sang eight songs, including an original piece, "Shine", composed by Mrs Nicola Betts and accompanied on the piano by Mrs Anna Snow, an Acomb Primary School parent.

"The children represented the school beautifully and there was very good behaviour throughout the day," said Miss Johnson.

London calling



Acomb schoolchildren have been walking the corridors of power.

Pupils in Key Stage 2 saw behind the scenes in the Houses of Parliament, in a special trip that lifted the lid on how the country is run.

"It was brilliant and we were quite starstruck seeing some famous faces," said Mrs Mel Batey, a Year 4 teacher and one of the organisers.

The invitation to Westminster was open to children interested in politics and set up by the education group at the House of Commons.

It meant a long day for the children, teachers and parents who went along, starting with a 7.30am train journey and which included a whirlwind exploration of the capital before their privileged tour of the palace of Westminster.

"They went overground, underground and on a riverboat too," said Mrs Batey.

"A trip like this could only have been possible with parents being there. It meant we had a one to three ratio of adults to children."

York Central MP Rachael Maskell met up with the group, too, and explained what life was like as an MP. She revealed that it was an educational trip like this one that made her think about a career in politics.

School Council have influential role to play

Grilling: members of the School Council who interviewed potential staff

Members of Acomb's School Council are making a big difference in school as well as in the community.

The children – elected by their peers after preparing their own mini manifesto – played their part in helping to appoint three new members of staff. They also organised an impressive collection for York Foodbank.

"They were were not afraid to ask searching questions," said Mrs Mel Batey. "Candidates in the job interviews were asked what their classrooms might be like if they were successful – and if they were a biscuit, what biscuit would they be and why!"

Aware of the sobering statistic that one in five of the UK population lives below the poverty line, and that one of the four York Foodbanks for people in crisis is based at the Gateway Centre in Acomb – the original site of Acomb Primary School – the School Council swung into action. A successful appeal for items resulted in a magnificent donation to the local cause.

"The children realise that planning is the key," said Mrs Batey. "They take suggestions from their friends and highlight needs. They've initiated playground activities and are a credit to the school in representing the pupil voice."

Tesco helps Eco Council have a wider view of sustainability issues

Putting ideas into action are members of Acomb's Eco Council.

The 16 eco-warriors are clamping down on waste, promoting recycling – and turning lights off in school when classrooms are not being used.

"They're an eager, inspired bunch," said Miss Emma Hunt, who looks after the Eco Council and once a month hands out jobs to do to the older children.

The action started with an eco review of the school at work, looking at the way it functions to see if anything could be done differently to save valuable resources and eliminate waste.

A paper recycling bin appeared in the staff room and posters around the school remind everyone of the benefits of sustainability.

A trip to Tesco gave members of the Eco Council a fascinating behind-the-scenes look at how the country's biggest retailer does its bit for sustainability too.

"It was really interesting for children to see the wider picture of where food comes from," said Miss Hunt. "We also learned about the Fair Trade Alliance. Tesco were very helpful and the visit gave us the chance to reflect back in the school environment."

Extra bins for litter and recycling, more effective use of compost and bird houses to encourage wildlife are some of the initiatives introduced and there are more on the horizon. "We have some really brilliant plans," said Miss Hunt.

Every little helps: Acomb children pick up sustainability tips from Tesco

Science Week

Appliance of science: pupils get to understand what change means with various experiments

Unravelling mysteries of the world

Acomb brought science to life with a hands-on science week across the school.

The subject is now considered to be as important as numeracy and literacy, so it was on with the white lab coats and goggles back in March, as children got stuck in to scientific investigations.

Science technicians from Manor Church of England Academy introduced chromatography – separating different components from a mixture. They made patterns from understanding colour runs.

"We focussed on 'change'. We made slime, a real gloopy mess that children love," said Miss Emma Hunt, science leader at Acomb.

"And we explored the digestive system. We were very busy and it was brilliant."

Resources such as the BBC's Terrific Scientific scheme, involving live lessons once a term for Year 5, were used to make sure learning remained stimulating.

"Lessons that children remember are the key to success," said Miss Hunt.

Photographs courtesy of Ant Robling http://roblingphotography.com/

Bringing Shakespeare to life

A shipwreck scene of their own creation formed the centrepiece of Acomb Primary School's contribution to the York Schools' Shakespeare Festival at York Theatre Royal.

Year 5's interpretation of the opening scene from Twelfth Night was "very visual and very loud," said Ms Cathryn Jackson. "This was the most difficult scene to interpret as there's nothing much for the children to hold onto.

"But I was impressed with their understanding, which was evident in the way they said their lines."

Acomb has something of a tradition with Shakespeare plays. As ever, the children rose to the challenge and all 30 in the class were involved in one way or another with the ensemble piece.

"We turned the storm into a physical being and came up with our own sound effects. The children were fantastic. It was a privilege to be with them. At the Theatre Royal, they all knew exactly what they had to do."

The world's a stage: young actors from Acomb Primary School at York Theatre Royal

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