Acorns

Acomb Primary School

Magazine
2019

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School Council on a mission

Environmental issues in the spotlight at Acomb

INSIDE • British Museum trip • Shakespeare • Fiver Challenge

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FROM THE HEADTEACHER

15th year as Shakespeare pioneers

2019 has been my 15th year at Acomb Primary – working for the first six as Deputy Head and the last nine years as Headteacher has been an absolute pleasure and privilege. Over the past decade and a half many hundreds of children have been educated at our school and have, I am sure, many fond memories of their time here.

Back in 2004 I introduced Shakespeare to the work of the school and turned the Y6 leavers' performance into a full Shakespeare play. Little did I know back then that 15 years later the whole school would be performing two plays – A Midsummer Night's Dream and Hamlet – to over 500 people at three performances.

I am very proud of our pioneering work with Shakespeare – it is now part of our lives every year and is something that makes our school special.

This year there have been so many great things happening. One highlight for me was our first-ever trip to the British Museum in London with Y3 and Y4 – two very long, but amazing days for the children, staff and parents who came along too.

Another has been the outstanding work of the school council on reduce, reuse and recycle – look out next year for even bigger and better things from them.

This year has also been our first full year as part of Pathfinder Multi Academy Trust and there have been some great opportunities for staff to work with the eight other primary schools in the trust to develop their own practice.

We hosted the first trust-wide training event at Acomb in November and our links with the schools have grown throughout the year. This has been a very positive move for the school that helps to secure our future and to support our continued move towards excellence.

Lee Haynes, Headteacher

British Museum is capital adventure

A trip to the British Museum in London was a first for the school – and a first for some of the Year 3 and 4 children taking part, some of whom had never been to the capital before.

"We saw a vast collection of ancient Egyptian and Greek relics," said Mr Simon White, deputy headteacher, who organised the trip. "It was a perfect way to reinforce the learning – finding out about Egyptian embalming, history and culture; and Greek armies."

The day long trip, by train, also gave children the chance to see some of the famous sights of London, It was a fun day as well as an educational one – and a chance to complete another entry in their personal Acorns journal of experiences collected while at Acomb Primary School.

Acclaimed musical adds extra show

Curiouser and curiouser – this year's Alice in Wonderland show, produced by Years 3 and 4, proved so popular that the school had to put on an extra performance.

Teacher Miss Rachel Sarson is full of praise for all the children across both year groups who took part in the 80-minute musical.

"This is one of the best I've ever done," she said. "It was just brilliant! Crazy at times, hard work and very full-on, but also amazing. We really value the importance of drama and creativity here at Acomb and these children will remember their part in this play for the rest of their lives."

Everyone in Year 4 had an acting part and children of Year 3 were the perfect chorus line. Instead of charging parents and carers for admission tickets, voluntary donations were requested, raising an impressive £328 for school charity Sash.

Work on the show went beyond the stage, however. Alice in Wonderland also inspired lots of literacy work, where children wrote their own scripts and had to describe the characters taking part.

Among the children Miss Sarson selected for special praise were the two Alices who took it in turns to take part – Lottie Procter and Megan Parker. Olly Savory was the White Rabbit, Isobel Rhodes was the Cheshire Cat and Oliver den Braber was the Mad Hatter.

Special effects were projected onto a screen above the stage when Alice went down the rabbit hole.

Bouncing bombs away as Acomb recreates the Dambusters' mission

Pupils and staff respectfully noted anniversaries of significant World War II events this year, in particular D-Day and the Dunkirk landings.

But it was the Dambusters raid by the RAF's 617 squadron, and the ingenuity of bouncing bomb innovator Barnes Wallis, that really caught the children's imagination.

As our pictures show, Class CJ had lots of fun making their own bouncing flour bombs and launching an attack on the 'dam' wall in the playground!

Saving the world, one step at a time

It started with a trip to a recycling plant – now Acomb's School Council is on a mission to Reduce, Recycle and Re-use

Children at Acomb Primary School are championing the importance of sustainability and the urgent need to look after the natural environment.

A string of initiatives by the 14-strong school council has helped the school win a prestigious ecological award and, in the kitchen, led to a change of supplier.

"The children are so passionate, have great ideas and are committed to their cause," said Mrs Emma Stevens who with Miss Emma Peggs work alongside the school council.

An organised action plan was drawn up following a trip to the Allerton Waste Recovery Park near Knaresborough. Children from Acomb got to see close up the colossal amount of waste generated by the city, what could be recycled and how the rest is converted into fuel.

"It was very big and smelly!" said Mrs Stevens. "The sorting process was vast and cavernous – the children were blown away."

The visit made such an impact that the school council told an assembly of their findings and then a staff meeting. A new school council Twitter page was established (@APSCouncil) and everyone was encouraged to collect plastic bottle tops for an initiative run by city centre store Lush.

School council preparing interview questions for a recent teacher appointment

An environmental review revealed some lights being left on in classrooms, too much single use plastic is used and waste bins that seemed to fill up too quickly.

Checking out Acomb's in-house school kitchen facility the children discovered that all except one supplier caught their fish in sustainable conditions – that has now changed so that all suppliers now comply with requirements.

"It's a great example of how one small step at a time can make a big difference," said Mrs Stevens.

Children across the school took part in the "Great Big School Clean", wearing high-visibility vests and gloves to scoop up rubbish from the site.

A film night was set up to raise money to buy resources needed to create reusable beeswax wraps. This means food can be

Following an audit by the children, Acomb School kitchen staff discover one of their suppliers doesn't fish in sustainable conditions – leading to a change in supplier. Left, Mrs Stevens and the team

kept fresh without resorting to clingfilm.

"Reduce your Use" is a slogan created by the school council to encourage everyone on the school community that we all have a part to play in protecting the planet.

The efforts have helped Acomb to win a prestigious Bronze award from the national Eco Schools initiative.

This year's school council have been among the most active ever. It's for all of Key Stage 2 and securing a place requires children to take part in election campaigns and hustings; there are polling cards and out comes the ballot box to make the process as democratically accountable as possible for the school community.

The process was explained to York Central MP Rachael Maskell on a visit – and she was very impressed.

Above, making beeswax wraps, which replace clingfilm and silver foil. Children will be selling these to raise fund for more initiatives. Left, the "Great Big School Clean" and the trip to Allerton

15 years of the Bard – we know him well

The work of William Shakespeare is normally part of a secondary school curriculum – but it's been embedded now at Acomb Primary School for 15 years.

"We know what we are, but know not what we may be," is a line from Hamlet – this year's Year 6 play – but also sums up the reasoning behind headteacher Lee Haynes's decision to introduce the Bard to primary age children back in 2004.

As Shakespeare pioneers, Acomb's work with England's greatest playwright has been applauded over the years and the school has worked with York Theatre Royal and the Royal Shakespeare Company itself to spread the word. It's so important to appreciating culture and heritage, says Mr Haynes.

To celebrate its 15th anniversary, children from across the school have been involved in a Shakespeare festival. Key Stage 1 performed A Midsummer Night's Dream and Key Stage 2 have worked with Hamlet.

Initial plans to open the school's work to wider audiences in the Museum Gardens were scuppered by poor weather and staff illness but Acomb still used the outside as well as the inside of the school in West Bank to make best use of space.

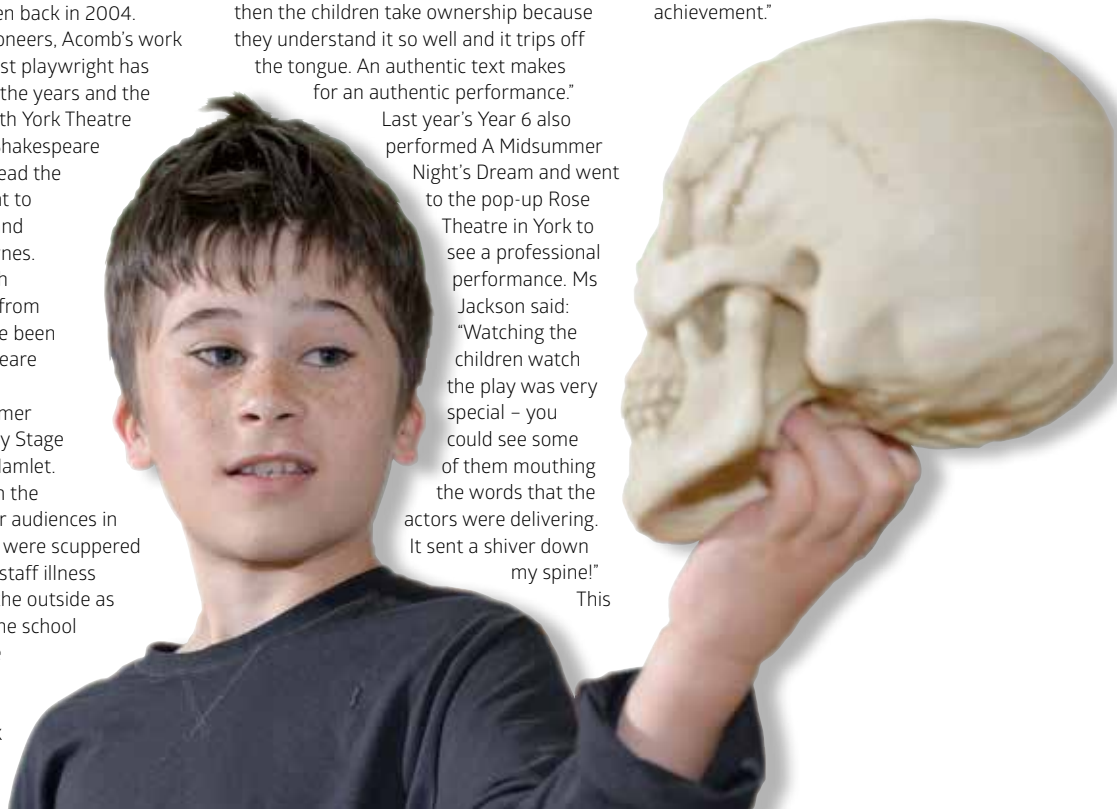
Year 5 teacher Ms Cathryn Jackson is a passionate advocate of Shakespeare in Acomb. But is it not too difficult for younger children? "They get it, but not always immediately," she said. "We don't shy away from using the authentic language and we understand the whole story by talking about the context.

"With familiarity comes confidence and then the children take ownership because they understand it so well and it trips off the tongue. An authentic text makes for an authentic performance."

Last year's Year 6 also performed A Midsummer Night's Dream and went to the pop-up Rose Theatre in York to see a professional performance. Ms Jackson said: "Watching the children watch the play was very special – you could see some of them mouthing the words that the actors were delivering. It sent a shiver down my spine!"

This year's Year 6 worked alongside Lee Threadgold and Dawn Dyson-Threadgold of theatre company Animated Objects to raise the school drama to another level.

Mr Haynes said: "The children always rise to the Shakespeare challenge and I'm very proud of the enthusiasm it consistently generates across the whole school community. It's always a terrific achievement."



Pictures show rehearsals for this year's Hamlet

Success in 'windfall' grants from York Vikings

For the third year running Acomb has been successful in securing "windfall" grants from York Vikings Rotary Club.

These pots of money have to be applied for to benefit the pupils, and also have to be outside of the usual school budget.

"Each year we have tried to respond to a particular need in school," said Ms Cathryn Jackson, Year 5 teacher. "In 2017 we wanted to develop computer coding in school and we were lucky enough to be granted £1,000 to buy special kits that allow children to write code which animate Lego models.

"In 2018 we wanted to make better use of our amazing outdoor space and won money to buy outdoor equipment to promote team-based, creative outdoor play. We bought things like crates and planks, sets of stilts and shelter building equipment.

"This year – 2019 – we have scooped £500 from the fund, based on our plan to create a set of games and resources that would promote the development of 'Memory' across the school. We called it the 'Making Memories Project'. The children talked about the kind of games and activities they have used to help develop memory skills and they brought some of them in to school.

"They also researched what else they could buy. As soon as the money comes in, we are going to make up some boxes with sets of activities in them that will be suitable for different year groups.

"On behalf of Acomb Primary School, I'd like to say a massive thank-you to the York Vikings Rotary Club for continuing to create such fantastic opportunities for schools each year."

Success in sports: on the field and beyond

When it comes to sport, Acomb is on a roll... and a bike... and a scooter.

PE leader Mr Tom Dennis calls it "consistency of sporting excellence" and with accolades coming in thick and fast, it's a fair description of a school that continues to try and keep its children fit. And it's not just by working out on the school field.

Acomb is achieving considerable success in asking parents and carers to not use their cars to bring children to school. This has led to a gold "Modeshift STARS" award, ranking Acomb third across the city and among the top 100 nationally for best practice in sustainable travel.

For the third year running Acomb has been shortlisted for the Active School awards. We won it outright last year, when initiatives such as the Friday Mile and other, all-inclusive, activities caught the attention of the judges.

This year, the same award-winning programmes continue and Acomb has now spread its wings and partnered with nearby Our Lady Queen of Martyrs RC Primary School to promote sustainability together. Working with Sustrans and the City of York Council iTravel team, there's a big push for everyone to cycle or scoot to school. If there's no option but to use a car, there's now new "park and stride" facilities at the RI as well as the top of West Bank.

"We're also working with ward councillors to improve the streets," said Mr Dennis, "and 88 people turned up to a special 'active breakfast' we held for people walking, cycling or scooting to school. There's been a lot of interest and support."

Thanks to funding from the council, there are free courses on how to ride a bike. The "Bikeability" scheme replaces what was once known as the cycling proficiency test.

And Acomb is York City FC Foundation's biggest partner, helping the school achieve its pledge that every child should experience the benefit of at least one expert sports coach, on top of the timetabled two hours' of PE per week. As well as football, this is being rolled out in basketball, cricket and handball.

Sports day, outdoor learning, basketball – just some of the many activities at Acomb

Entrepreneurs rise to fiver challenge

Enterprising Year 6 children are helping others as well as funding their own leaving celebrations, thanks to the "Fiver Challenge".

For the third year running, budding entrepreneurs have stepped up to the challenge of investing £5 into money-earning schemes of their own making. Over a three-week period they have to weigh up whether or not to reinvest profits to make even more money.

Some of the ideas have managed to convert £5 into more than £250.

"The 40 children split into their own groups, minimum four and maximum six, to see how much money they can make with a £5 budget," explained Mrs Olivia Bevins, Year 6 teacher.

"Bright ideas range from making and selling hair scrunchies, friendship bracelets and keyrings, to bathbombs, cakes and film nights – but it's the children themselves that decide."

Profits are then shared between this year's chosen charity, Sash, and the Year 6 leavers' celebrations that include entrance to trampoline centre Energi and a picnic.

Roll up: Children find novel ways to turn pennies into pounds as part of the fiver challenge