

Parents Newsletter – May 2008

Dear Parents,

I have wonderful news to tell you this month and sad news to tell you. I will tell you the sad news first and you will find wonderful news throughout...

This newsletter is slightly early this month as I wanted to let you know that Dave, our exceptional support service officer is retiring on 2nd May. Needless to say that we are all very sad about Dave leaving Cowgate but we are all very happy for him. Dave's wife Margaret retired last year so we knew it was only a matter of time, every day has been precious. We are having a little pot luck lunch 11am -1pm on 2nd May to say our goodbyes. To which you are all invited.

We thought, in light of this news, that we would postpone our celebratory event on 2nd May and rearrange it for June.

Now that the sad news is out of the way...

Eco – Schools

As you know with every newsletter we like to share any progress in relation to our eco-school development.

There are three main things...

1. Grant Applications

Lorraine has applied to Grounds for Awareness (City of Edinburgh Award Scheme) for funding to grow more climbers in our garden.

Lorraine and Amie have put together a wonderful application for a considerable amount of money for musical instruments for the garden.

2. Developing a creation to record and monitor our recycling

June is in the process of developing a wall creation that will enable the children to record and monitor their recycling, i.e., when they go to the recycling bank they currently record in our diary how much paper, plastic, cardboard and so on that they recycle. Our new creation will be a more visual way for the children to record their materials.

3. Parents as recyclers

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the parents who regularly recycle; we really appreciate your involvement. All parents are welcome to recycle items at any time.

I came across this little article in the Scotsman and thought you may like a little read. Apologies to those of you who read it on Saturday.

Nature Diary

Springing into action

April is usually the month of Easter and daffodils, but both have been early this year. However, one date to put in your diary that will be regular as clockwork is the arrival of our summer migrants – a sure sign the seasons are changing. Some species are familiar to us – house martins, sifs and swallows – but more unusual visitors are most welcome too. Look out for the spotted flycatcher, golden oriole and a variety of warblers. Listen too for nightingales and cuckoos – their numbers are sadly declining, so it's a real treat to hear them.

British Summer time has begun, so let's hope the weather measures up to the beading period will soon be underway for our wildlife. This is the busiest time of the year for many birds and there will be tremendous activity in the nests as they work hard to feed and nurture their young.

Enjoy the longer days and wield your secateurs with caution as nests have a habit of turning up in bizarre places and expectant mothers will be most put out.

One of nature's best controllers will emerge from slumber about now – the hedgehog is a true friend to the gardener. As they come out from hibernation they will be very hungry indeed, so put out some cat or dog food and water if you can. Remember, cow's milk and bread is not good for hedgehogs as it doesn't really have any nutritional value and can swell up in their stomachs.

While talking about a variety of wildlife we can't miss out the bee. Not everyone likes these busy insects but almost everything in the garden depends on them. There has been talk of the plight of the bumblebee recently and I can't stress how important it is to help conserve our bees. Try not to mow your lawn too short, and see if you can tolerate a few wild plants, such as clover, in your grass.

It's not too late to sign up for the RSPB Homes and Wildlife project which will arm you with all the information and tips you need to make your own wildlife haven.

Kate Humble (Scotsman Magazine).

For more information visit
www.rspb.org.uk/hfw

*For the latest news on Scotland's wildlife go to www.visitscotland.com/wildlife
for accommodation details go to www.visitscotland.com*

Our Sponsored Child

Thank you to everyone who contributed so generously to Kadi's annual fee. We have now paid the sponsorship for 2008. All other contributions will go to sending small packages throughout the year.

We are often asked by our visitors why we support a child from PLAN. As our visitors read the newsletter on our website I have inserted a small introduction about PLAN.

CHANGING THE WORLD (an update from PLAN)

Many of us are looking for a chance to make a difference but how often do we know what our support means? When you sponsor a child with PLAN, their letters notes and can give you a real insight into their life. You will also receive annual reports and updates about how their community is benefiting from sponsorship funds.

5 Good Reasons to Sponsor a Child with PLAN

- 1. In the world's poorest countries, one in five children dies before their 5th birthday.*
- 2. Plan sponsorship is a real solution, funding community-based products that address children's basic needs, from clean water and health to education.*
- 3. Children and their families are actively involved in these projects, ensuring solutions that are practical, relevant and long-lasting.*
- 4. Not only will you be helping communities to develop but you can also play a positive part in helping a child to realise their potential.*
- 5. And to prove it, you'll see the difference you are making through annual photos, project updates and country progress reports. Exchanging letters and pictures with your sponsored child and their family can also be a source of inspiration and encouragement.*

(www.plan-uk.org)

Thank you to Emily (Sala Infantil)

Over the summer we will be designing a new PLP to incorporate the learning strands from the ACE curriculum. We have asked Emily if she would draw the visual images for us. She has agreed. Thank you Emily ☺

Oor Tours

We had a visit from Oor tours. Oor tours is a unique musical journey through the rich history of Edinburgh's Old Town.

They are going to visit us to play for the children and the parents. They come highly recommended. Graeme from Oor tours said they will do children's parties. You will find more about Oor tours from their website.

www.oortours.com

Curriculum for Excellence Debate

As many of our children prepare to leave we thought it might be useful to have a little more information about the Curriculum for Excellence, the Curriculum that will be in all Scottish Schools in August.

Work on the Curriculum for Excellence formally began in 2004. Unlike England there is no statutory curriculum in Scotland so anything published by the Scottish Government is just guidance. This allows schools what they want to teach and prevents any diktat from the centre ordering schools to provide certain subjects.

However, there are subjects all schools will offer, including English and maths plus any subjects universities may deem compulsory such as languages.

The existing rules are known as the '5-14' guidelines, introduced in the 90s in a drive to create a more socially equal education system. They will be subsumed by the wider-ranging 3-18 Curriculum for Excellence which, it is hoped, will be more relevant to the skills needed by today's school leavers and more engaging for pupils.

It is also hoped it will create a more streamlined education system, with smoother transitions, particularly between primary and secondary.

The new curriculum is based on the underlying principles that all young people should be able to become:

- *Successful learners*
- *Confident individuals*
- *Effective contributors*
- *Responsible citizens*

These are known as the four capacities and they are at the very heart of the new curriculum. The initial review which generated these new guidelines focussed on, not just how subjects are taught, but on the whole ethos of schooling.

Broadly speaking, A Curriculum for Excellence has been divided into sets of “draft outcomes” (as previous parents’ newsletter) on different subject areas, with all published apart from religious education and personal and social development, which are due out within weeks. They are known as drafts as practitioners will be able to feed into final versions.

Learning and Teaching Scotland which is driving forward the new curriculum, says there will be an adaptation period with it fully up-and-running in every school after final outcomes are created.

It is thought that parents should find they have a better understanding of what their child’s learning is equipping them to achieve and should be more confident their child can apply the skills of literacy and numeracy, as well as skills for work and skills for life.

Literacy

Under new literacy guidelines, text messaging, social networking websites and internet blogs will be studied alongside books, plays and poetry in future. Children will be taught in the new media in an effort to bring English into the 21st century.

The idea is to use modern methods of communication to engage children and prepare them with skills necessary for the workplace. New emphasis will be placed on teaching how and when to use a particular method of communication. For example, pupils will be taught not to use abbreviated text language in an email where more formal language is appropriate.

Under the new guidelines, pupils will also be taught to examine information on websites, television and radio more critically.

Social Sciences

Scottish history will be brought to the core of the subject under the new curriculum guidance for the subject.

In future, social sciences will be divided into three broad areas: people past events and societies; people, place and environment; and people in society, economy and business.

There will also be a new emphasis on making history, geography and modern studies, relevant to children's own experiences, while the use of collaborative learning technology and field trips will be encouraged.

For example in history, our youngest children should be able to make a link to the past through people or events in their own lives, while older children will have to investigate a Scottish historical theme to discover how the past have shaped Scottish society.

Numeracy

In future, maths lessons will be made more relevant to pupils' lives.

Key topics will include:

- *Managing money and planning finances*
- *Understanding and managing earnings, benefits and credit*
- *Managing a household budget, and work-related financial situations*
- *Estimating and calculating*
- *Reading timetables, calculating distances and journey times and reading maps*
- *Interpreting information in graphs and tables*

Teachers will be encouraged to link maths and numeracy in with other subjects in the curriculum.

So for example a study of the pyramids of ancient Egypt could include lessons on the geometry and algebra needed to create the structures.

Or younger children could visit the school garden to count flowers, measure plant growth or even role-play a garden centre where they could make mock purchases and calculate correct change.

Expressive Arts

Children will be encouraged to develop their creative talent with the idea that it will eventually enhance both their working and recreational lives as adults.

Pupils will be given opportunities to develop the wider world through various media from film, theatre, photography, and jewellery making to the more traditional art lessons of drawing and painting.

Technical, presentational and performance skills will be taught which will be useful in other subject areas and will hopefully help them to become 'confident individuals.'

Science

Lessons will become more relevant to the real world which pupils and their families inhabit. From recycling, to how metal is extracted from the earth, pupils should be able to understand how science affects them. The guidance moves away from the previously tick-box mentality of science education.

So for example, instead of being asked to name a list of certain types of plants, pupils will have to select a particular plant and explain how it has contributed to society and improve quality of life.

Languages

For the first time curriculum guidance has been produced on Gaelic. Scots language will also be accepted in the classroom with greater study of literature using the dialect and pupils not corrected if they use words like 'aye.'

Children's Literacy Development

As you know at Cowgate our children are exceptional in their literacy development. I would like to suggest a book to you written by fellow Froebelians:

'Essentials of literacy: Children's journey's into literacy' by Tina Bruce and Jenny Spratt.

I was explaining to Professor Bruce about our children and invited her to suggest supporting materials. She has suggested this book, I will be buying it and you will all be welcome to peruse it.

Forest Schools

Well our forest school has had an exciting start all credit to Jane's organisation and enthusiasm. Jane is delighted with both the supporting team and of course the children involved.

Our Forest School offers a different landscape for the children (albeit a small landscape, but who else can say their child has a little forest under the castle?). One of the Forest School principles is that it 'builds on an individual's innate motivation and positive attitude to learning, offering them opportunities to take risks, make choices and initiate learning for themselves.' It also aims to develop children's confidence and self esteem (Doyle 2006).

Children are encouraged to explore and venture, sometimes out of the sight of adults. Helping children to become empowered, and developing children's confidence and feelings of self-efficacy are all part of the plan.

There are no toys in Forest School; the natural landscape offers the resources and props for play. Children therefore have to use their imaginations to transform features of the environment. The 'Forest' itself provides inspiration for playing games.

Children transform features of the environment such as logs, sticks, fir cones, leaves, twigs and mud into whatever they want them to be.

The natural landscape offers children direct first-hand experience of nature so that they can know and come to understand the changing seasons, seeing how a familiar space transforms in sometimes subtle and sometimes dramatic ways (adapted from Tovey, 2007).

We will keep you regularly updated on the fun the children are having ☺

Warm, kind wishes

Lynn