

As I realised that yet another academic year was drawing to a close I put my mind to recalling events and achievements over the past twelve months. This time seems to have passed so quickly and I am not sure whether this is significant of age on my part or an extremely busy year. I prefer to lean towards the later!

September 2009 saw the Day Nursery grow increasingly busy, with a marked increase in the numbers of children in the 3 to 5's department. During the summer Helen Deacon joined Our Lady's to take on the role of senior Nursery Nurse in this area and it was not long before it was apparent that she and Miss Doran would make a formidable team. Miss Doran, who became Mrs Burrows over the half term much to the mystification of the children, and Helen have worked extremely hard over the year to develop and extend this area of the Nursery. Along with their team they are currently working on the outdoor learning environment which has been enhanced by the completion of the long awaited covered area. I know that this shelter was a long time in coming and would like to thank all of you who have, over at least the last two years, attended fund raising events and put your hands in your pockets with a smile on your face – well mostly!

Whilst on the subject of outdoor covers I would like to thank the Trustees for agreeing to match funds raised so that we could, after such a long wait, have two covers constructed. I would like to particularly thank Father Kevin for recommending a contractor who could complete these bespoke pergolas at very competitive prices. This gentleman is in fact a past pupil and comes along with the advantage of us being able to ask for modifications and added extras without eyes being raised to heaven and several pounds added onto the bill. I don't think we irritate him too much and Gemma and Sam seem to explain exactly what we need in the nicest possible way. Needless to say we have once again secured his services and your children will soon benefit from two state of the art outdoor sand pits complete with their own permanent roofs.

Worryingly, Gemma and Sam have recently been seen lurking in the playground deep in discussion and at the end of last week I was summoned to the garden to be told of plans for garages, staging areas and steps. I did try to avoid the first liaison with Gemma but after waiting for me for a while she didn't give up but came and to find me fussing over a baby who I maintained couldn't possibly do without me and only me at that very moment! I consider myself fortunate that the two most senior staff in the Day Nursery have such energy and enthusiasm for the development and progression of the setting whilst working very hard to maintain a high standard on a day to day basis. Both Mrs O'Reilly and I are only too aware of how their job has grown and changed as they are required to manage an increasing number of staff who all come along with their individual needs and problems. Thank you to you both for all your hard work and commitment.

Gemma, understandably given the circumstances, needs a rest from all this pressure and will be taking her well earned maternity leave starting in September. Don't stray too far from the phone Gemma we may need you! I am delighted to announce that Sam has agreed to take up the Manager's post while Gemma is off with her feet up. I didn't have to twist her arm too much and I am certain that you will all wish her well and be pleased to know that your children are in such skilled hands. The running of Our Lady's is very much team work and I am certain that Sam is the right person to help keep the team on the right course. Both Angela and I look forward to working closely with you Sam.

As always, the Christmas Nativity was a joy to witness, but having such young children as the cast came with its own challenges. Mary, as with any young lady expecting her first baby, decided she could not cope without her mother - who could honestly hardly be noticed on the stage throughout the performance! The older children were not to be deterred by this or any other difficulties caused by costume mishaps,

stage fright or minor skirmishes over who stood where and they did the school proud. Their faultless work throughout the show, particularly Charlie who carried the presentation with his clear narration, was a credit to Mrs O'Reilly and Mrs Chamberlain who have worked tirelessly over the year to ensure these pupils are educated fully and comprehensively. The many advantages of small class sizes come with a few challenges which require skilled teaching and careful planning when delivering the curriculum. Both teachers carry out this task in a calm and efficient manner and the children acknowledge this by their enthusiasm and joy for learning. Thank you to you both.

The increasing numbers in the Day Nursery over this year has once again come as a surprise to us all. It has been great to see the business move forward at such a speed and to be honest at times has taken my breath away. The Trustees, as always, have acted in a quiet, steady and supportive manner. They have given encouragement in times of doubt, help in times of need, they have listened to my frustrations and have never wavered in their vision for the future of Our Lady's and all it stands for. Over the last four years a relationship based on truth and trust has grown between me and the Trustees without which I could not do the job I do. I cannot express my gratitude enough, thank you Trustees. It must be understood that the Trustees time is given freely and willing to ensure the integrity and success of Our Lady's as a School, Nursery and Day Nursery. Please put your hands together and help me express my appreciation to the board.

As I reflected on events over the last year a variety of memories came to mind. The snow caused some concern but we stayed open and did our best – I can hear the mutters of the staff saying “she was away for the worst of it!” Sarah Morphey went on maternity leave and had a beautiful baby boy, Oliver was christened a few weeks ago and it was a pleasure to be with her and her little family. I couldn't work out who enjoyed the Easter bonnet parade most the children of the staff – but

fun was had by all. The Circus Workshop, Katy Ashworth's Story Afternoon, the visiting pantomime company, the reptile man, sports day, the trip to Odds Farm all added to your children's experience of school life over this year.

As last year drew to a close the Trustees challenged Mrs O'Reilly and me to offer a variety of added extras to the children who attend Our Lady's. Their idea was that each day something exciting would happen at school – I must say it usually does but not always the planned activity! I hope you agree that we rose to the challenge and the children can now benefit from three languages, football, pottery, swimming, Jo Jingles, cookery along with the general day to day regular business of being at school and nursery. Life here is never dull!

None of these things happen without the co-operation of the staff. The senior staff in the Nursery really have their work cut out. I am sure you as parents know how difficult it is to get one or two children ready, willing and able for something to happen at a set time and how frustrating this task can be. Well multiply that task and add junior staff who may or may not listen to instructions. This is a daily part of the senior staff's life here at Our Lady's – it is not easy and I never underestimate the responsibility they have when ensuring that each of the children in their care arrives safely and happily in the right place at the right time. What I would say to the staff at this moment is - safely is mandatory, happily is desirable but on time is a bonus. Phillipa I am pleased that you decided to stay with us and that you are so excited about the expansion of your area of responsibility – thank you for your hard work. Sarah welcome to your first end of year celebration and well done for taking on this difficult task, I know you are working hard to learn this role which is new to you – thank you and remember you're not alone.

Whilst broaching the subject of the expansion to the baby room which from this point forward is to be referred to as the nought to 18months room, you can see the door which now joins this to the hall. Shortly, purpose built barriers – there in boxes in the entrance hall at present -will be put in place to give these children more space and freedom to move about in the provided area. Mrs Lynch has been protective of the hall space, which she takes pride in keeping as neat and tidy as possible given the traffic and use this encounters on a daily basis. Currently she is more concerned about kitchen space which is at a premium. Each time I hear her asking for the next month's numbers I hide until she calms down. Mary quite how you produce such tasty, varied food for the vast age range I don't know. But thank you and your staff for feeding us so nicely! Can I share a fact with you all – every morning whilst checking on the children's daily dietary requirements Mary goes to each part of the school and takes individual lunch orders from the staff!! You spoil us Mary and we love it!

Some of the Board of Governors have been in position for over a year and some are newly appointed. They are settling into a group who will work for the benefit of Our Lady's and as some of you witnessed a few weeks ago can organise an event successfully with little fuss. Thank you for your time and enthusiasm. At this point in the evening I would also like to give a vote of thanks to Mrs d'Espagnac and Mrs Field who have both assisted me with fund raising, marketing and more when I am sure they have plenty to do without me giving them extra. When I arrived at school this morning the decorating fairy had been and we now have a very pretty corridor leading from the hall to the 1 – 2's.

As you have heard from Mr Halpin, the Trustees have given the go ahead to investigate the possibility of taking up the government initiative to become a free school or academy as they will be known. Our Lady's is at the very first stages of looking into this and I am very excited, whilst a little nervous of what it may entail. One of the criteria

for the first proposal of interest is that we must show parental demand for such a school. If you support this idea and you think it is the right way to proceed please make sure you sign one of the petitions available either tonight or over the next few days.

Each July when the school finishes for the summer break I think that next September will bring a more settled year. Each September when the new academic year starts I realise how wrong I can be – and as my husband will verify you won't hear me say that very often! Life here at Our Lady's is up and down, great excitement can be followed with despair in a very short space of time. The care of your children is paramount and their best interest is always top of the list – which is as it should be. The trouble is this pushes other mundane tasks such as administration, banking, weekly newsletters down the list which can, believe me, lead to some very long to do lists. When all these things pile up on me there is one person I can rely on to be there and say the right thing – it's usually can I make you a cup of tea! Angela if you had a pound for every time you've made me a drink this year you would be a rich woman. What I can usually be heard saying to Angela is "read this and see if it makes sense" or "can you just do this for me?" I don't always say this at the time but your hard work and support is invaluable and much appreciated. We make a good team Mrs O'Reilly and I so much so that the children are often heard to call me or her Mrs O'Robinson which always makes us smile.

On Friday I was at the wedding of a past pupil of Our Lady's – that young man is 28 years of age and started here in the Nursery. At that wedding there were more than a dozen past pupils of this school all now in their twenties and early thirties – I knew them all in their days here and am lucky enough to still be in contact with them. During a quiet moment in the evening I looked around and that famous Jesuit motto came to mind "show me the boy at seven years old and I will show you the man". Those young people were all lovely children at

seven and are all lovely adults now. They have remained close and a certain bond holds them together even though they are now living all over the country and even the world. If Our Lady's can give your children a little of what it has given those young people I will consider my role as Headmistress a success.