



Woodgrange Infant School

Woodgrange aspires to be an outstanding, nurturing school at the heart of the community.

We will provide child-centred, high quality learning through play and exploration that fosters curiosity, confidence and a love of learning.

Governors Newsletter Autumn 2019

Dear parents and carers of children in Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 and welcome to all of you who are new to the school.

Governors make strategic decisions about all aspects of school life – budgets, buildings, behaviour and learning. The Governing Board has 12 members: the head teacher (Sarah Soyler), a staff governor (Fatiha El-Zanaty) and 10 lay volunteers who are elected parents or recruited from the wider community for their skills and experience. The volunteer governors include Sarah Raine, Thom Sanders, Tim Ovenden, Anne Asfaw, Faiza Gul Durrani, Brad Emerson, Kam Hudson, Jeyaraam Santhiramohan and Louisa Tock. Their role is to be a *critical friend* by providing support and challenge to the head teacher and to make decisions in the best interests of the children's learning.

The Governing Board and subcommittees for both Finance and Learning meet at least once a term. A subcommittee is also responsible for the head teacher's annual performance review with the help of an expert adviser. Governors visit the school to speak to staff and the children. They hold Parent Governor Focus Groups in the Autumn and Spring term to consult with parents.

Please will you put these dates in your diary and come to an Autumn **Parent Governor Focus Group on Thursday 14th November 6-7pm or Friday 15th November 9-10am**. Nearer the time the topic will be set with your help.

In the Spring there will be a new topic and the dates will be **Thursday 5th March 6-7pm or Friday 6th March 9-10am**.

Feedback and complaints

If at any time you have a concern, please follow it up. Have a look at "The complaints procedure" on the school website. In brief, you need to speak to the class teacher or the head teacher, Sarah, first, then write to Sarah if there is a need to follow up. If your concerns are not resolved, write to the chair of governors at the school address.

If you know a parent who faces a barrier in raising something, please be a stand for them and accompany them or let Sarah, Shama or Dana know.

Message from the Chair of Governors

There are a lot of questions for governors to ask. Are all the children learning to read, write, and do maths? Are they curious and learning about the world around them? Do they experience and produce art? What will prepare them for the adult world in 15 years' time? What things in the school environment will help or hinder them? What different needs do pupils have? Are all pupils included properly? Everyone asks different questions and I wonder what questions you would ask.

Some school projects are reaching their goal, others are taking off or still a seed. It is a beautiful and complex process. Understanding our strategy and aims is very important because school will have a huge impact, one way or another.

In the last newsletter in Summer 2018 (which can be found on the school website), I said you would notice more playful learning and exploration in Key Stage 1, including more active and outdoor time in Year 1 and more projects in arts and science in Year 2.

Governors saw children selecting activities themselves, deciding to write about what they were doing and writing more. This is fantastic and unusual. Teachers visiting Year 1 from a local school were so struck by it that they have sent more teachers to come and take note. Please tell us what you have noticed.

It took something to break with the status quo of more formal learning at tables and chairs and make it a success. I know the learning will continue to evolve in a culture of reflection and openness. That culture takes participation and challenge from all of us to be a reality so please be a critical friend too and discuss school life with staff and governors. I know it makes a difference because I have seen key improvements result from parents' input.

Last year teachers began whole-class phonics (everyone together instead of in ability groups) and showed that all children make better progress when they learn together and there is much less need to take children out of class for extra groups and allocate additional resources.

Our special educational needs team has continued to specialise, assess more needs and create targeted learning opportunities. The whole school is getting more inclusive, helped by a wider format of activities in Key Stage 1, whole-class learning and rotating learning partners. We must improve support to teachers to challenge and teach pupils with special educational needs.

Thank you to everyone who listened and commented in discussions on stereotypes about boys and girls. This journey is still opening up possibilities.

Currently, funding for schools is frozen or drops every year, while costs and inflation rise. The school leadership and the governing board are working to manage our resources and provide our best school within the tight budgets that all schools currently face. This depends on the huge dedication of staff and our increasing specialist expertise. For example, we have seen subject leaders develop striking skills in teaching oracy, maths mastery and science and expertise in learning powers, autism, and speech and language development. We also collaborate in creative ways with local schools in our soft federation,

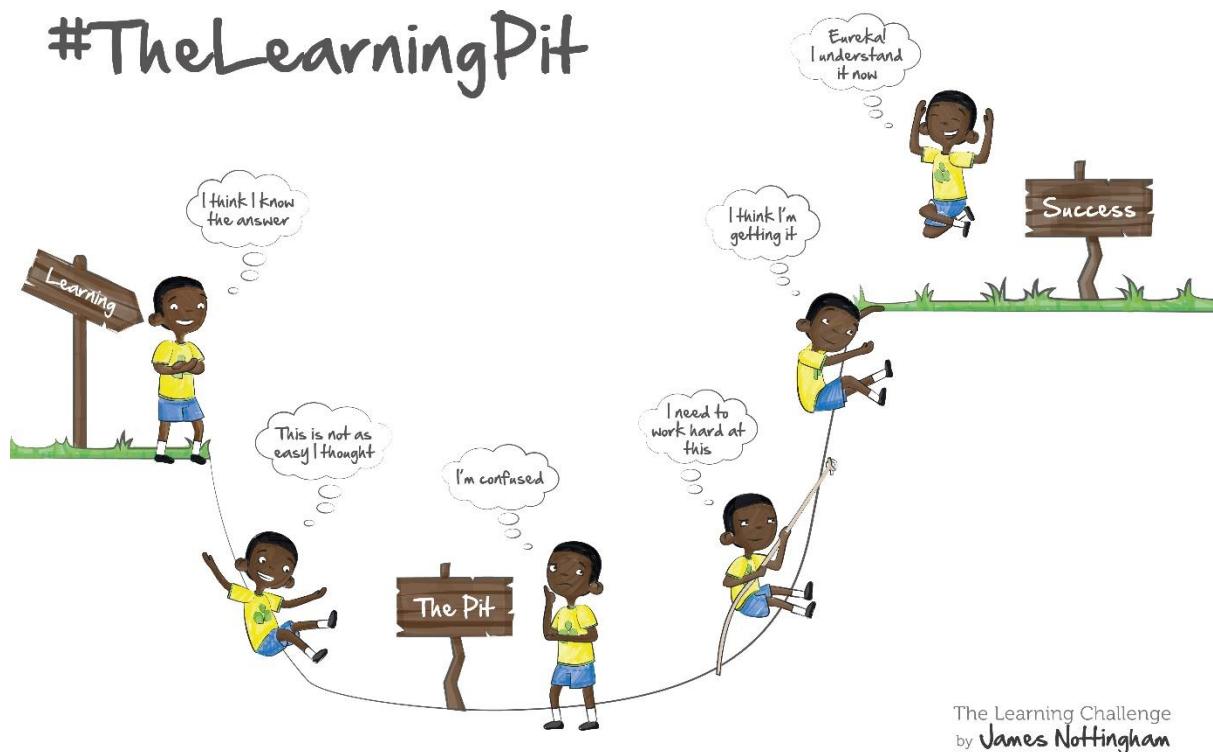
Newham North Learning Partnership (NNLP) and we aim to negotiate savings with our collective bargaining power.

The PTA have funded key resources including canopies for outdoors learning in all weathers, sandpits, grass carpets and gardening workshops, as well as events for the children. Come by and have a look at the children using these areas and you will see how precious they are. Thank you to the dedicated organisers and all who volunteer, attend and contribute.

Every year, we can allocate some funding from the local authority to maintain and improve our buildings. The older part of the school's roof was replaced last year to keep class rooms warm and cool, reduce electricity use and prevent water damage. The toilets in the Reception and Year 2 classrooms had reached the end of their life and the head persevered to find additional funds so all classrooms were done together over the Summer and all children could benefit.

What if some things we thought we knew about education were wrong? The head teacher is challenging all of us, including herself! to examine our assumptions about learning.

Imagine you walk into a classroom and the children look confused. Is that a good sign? It might be.



DON'T TELL US!

As part of our North Newham Learning Partnership (NNLP), a collaboration between eight local schools and nurseries, Woodgrange has had a key role in organising a conference event on September 2nd, the first staff inset. Exceptionally, this brought together ALL the staff of

all eight schools together to consider the topic of how children learn best and to continue to embed the Learning Powers Approach. It was an amazing sight.

A governor from each school attended the conference and I want to tell you about it here.

The main speaker, Guy Claxton, made the case like this.

Picture education as a flowing river. Knowledge can be easily seen at the top. Skills are visible just beneath. By the river bed, changing more slowly and harder to see, are our attitudes and dispositions. Attitudes and dispositions are influenced by the culture at school, at home, and elsewhere.

Whether we think about it or not, we do design the culture. One key part of the culture is what children experience when they are struggling.

For example, children might experience adults being caring and comforting: "Never mind" or helping them by simplifying the problem. Children know that rescue is coming and many will not try something unless they already know they can do it.

In another environment, adults will say "I can see you're getting upset. Can you take two more minutes to try to do it and if you're really stuck, I'll come and help you. And I want you to tell me precisely where you're stuck." The children taste the satisfaction of self-rescue and the joy of the struggle. Soon enough they will cry: "Don't tell us!"

This example made me think: when a child is struggling, I might jump in the river to rescue them and teach them to be helpless and await rescue.

I was suddenly very present to the trap children could fall into. What if they learn: "I am bad at learning"? I saw that struggle is the privilege.

Taking a break from writing this, I watched myself and noticed I step in and rescue my children a lot! And I didn't think I did. I guess I can't do it.... yet.

I know the children spend a lot of their time at school and the culture will have an impact one way or another – will it help them believe in practice and hard work or will it make some think I am not good at art, or maths or sport. Will they feel curious or will they decide learning is boring or too hard. Will they fear getting the wrong answer or will they treasure the mistakes that come before a breakthrough. I think these are some of the most important questions we should ask about a school because I think these distinctions make the difference between holding the children back in their future schools, relationships and businesses or launching them into a future of possibility.

Why is NNLP taking on the Learning Power Approach?

Guy Claxton argued the world needs powerful learners. Employers want team players who are resourceful, unstoppable and imaginative. Powerful learners get better grades and do better at college. Research tells us that powerful learning closes the gap usually seen across economic divides and that powerful learners live happier lives. They spend more of their time making progress at things they consider worthwhile. Learnings powers turn out to be key to mental health, more resilience and less prone to anxiety and depression.

The speaker was frank that the Learning Power Approach is high maintenance. It takes thought, practice and openness over several years, in fact for ever, to develop us as people who can always learn. It is not techniques or tricks, but habits. It cares about wellbeing and it cares about optimal grades and confident, independent learners.

The specific habits we will consciously work on are being inquisitive, determined, collaborative, articulate and concentrated.

These learning powers cannot exist without a safe space to be in learning mode. That is a space where you can take risks and try before you can do it. Mistakes are crucial to learning independently and don't need to be hidden or erased. How many of you were eraser hoarders?! We want the default to be learning mode for the children (and why not us) and as children get older they will learn to put their best face on when mistakes are costly. We need to recognise when children (and us) are in defence mode: avoiding threat, fearful of failure, acting up as a distraction.

We can encourage children to question the teacher: "Good question: how can we check?"

We can talk about all the different identities a child has to help them use their knowledge and skills across different areas of their lives, e.g. daughter, sister, girl, swimmer, writer, friend, cook. How many can you think of for yourself?

We can let children choose their own different learning partner every week and watch as they learn from their choice. (This one surprises teachers when children admit their best friend is not their best partner for learning, or when a doubted pairing produces great learning).

Listen for signs from the children of the culture we want to nurture:

"Give me something harder."

"Don't tell me! I think I'm getting there"

"I haven't a clue, give me a hint to get me started."

Thank you to all members of staff, volunteers, parents and carers, governors and children for the contribution you all make to school.

Anne Asfaw, Chair of governors