

Awesome Aurora!

The Termly Magazine of Aurora Academies Trust — Seven Schools, One Family

July 2020
Issue 5

Wishing all staff a restful and happy Summer break

Welcome to the final edition of Awesome Aurora for the year 2019-20. It has been quite a year for many reasons but most of all for the challenges faced across the world by the coronavirus situation. This has been an unprecedented time for the education sector and it is safe to say that every member of staff in every Aurora school has been magnificent in their response to this challenge. It has been wonderful to see every Aurora school partially reopen with great success over the last month and the feature of this term's magazine is to get a flavour of what it's been like in each school.

Aurora is sad to say goodbye to two long standing Heads over the summer. Mark Roessler, Head of The Gatwick School, has taken up a Principal post at Ormiston Park Academy, Thurrock in Essex and Jane Foyle is retiring after many years of service to the Oakwood school and community. The Trust would like to thank both for all of their dedication, skill and hardwork and wish them the very best for the future. In addition to this, Mark Church has left his role as Headteacher at City Academy Whitehawk to join the Trust central team as a Strategic Improvement Partner.



While it is always sad to say goodbye to any member of the Aurora staff, the Trust is pleased to welcome new Heads to these schools. Firstly, you will recall that Susan Kelly is taking up a Head of School post at our new school in Horley, Westvale Park Primary Academy. The school has recently passed its pre-opening Ofsted inspection and will open in September for children in Nursery and Reception.

The Trust is delighted to announce that Ryan Laker, formally Head of School at King Offa, has been appointed as Head of School at Oakwood.



Ryan is replaced at King Offa by Natasha Baker, who is the new Head of School. The Trust would like to pass on congratulations to both who have been instrumental over the years in the success at King Offa.



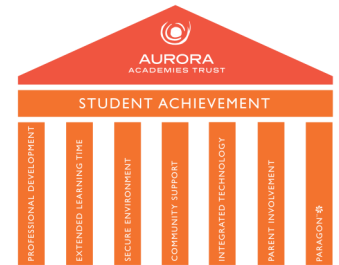
Thomas McMorris has been appointed Headteacher at City Academy Whitehawk after three successful years as Deputy Headteacher at the school. The Trust would like to wish him and the school all of the best for the future.



At The Gatwick School, we are delighted to welcome our new Headteacher Bianca Greenhalgh, who joins the school from The Littlehampton Academy where she is currently Vice Principal. We are thrilled that Bianca is joining the Trust and she has written some introductory words in this magazine.



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Gatwick School - Bianca Greenhalgh, Headteacher



Bianca Greenhalgh

I am thrilled to be starting as the Headteacher at The Gatwick School in September. The work has already started, I would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank Mr Roessler, Head of School, as well as the rest of the Senior Leadership Team, for their unwavering support whilst we move through this transition in these most challenging of times. I am excited to be building on the great work that is already in place, creating the best possible opportunities for all children at the school.

I started my journey in the arts and studied Dance and Performing Arts at Middlesex University. Spending my early career in the hospitality industry in Central London, I then completed a Masters in Dance Studies, after which I completed the Graduate Teacher Programme at Portsmouth University qualifying as a teacher in secondary education. I first taught at Northumberland Park in London before moving to East Sussex to join William Parker Sports College, Hastings, where I undertook the role of Learning Leader. I was privileged to work at The Cavendish School as Assistant Headteacher Inclusion, while we became an all-through school and led on ensuring we were achieving equality by addressing equity for our children. In September 2016 I was successful in becoming Vice Principal at The Littlehampton Academy focusing on teaching and learning, as I strongly believe that Quality First Teaching and qualifications are the currency that create future opportunities for all young people.

I usually swim regularly and look forward to pools opening again. I like to keep busy and love returning to my catering roots by cooking for relaxation. I love music and read for pleasure, enjoying a range of genres and particularly enjoy books that develop me both personally and professionally.



Mark Roessler modelling 2020's *must have* outfit!

Gatwick Reopening - Amy Cowdry-Byrne, Class Teacher

On the morning 8th June I eagerly awaited the return of 10 children from my Year 1 class. It felt like a lifetime ago I said an emotional goodbye and it's fair to say I had a mixture of emotions once again; nerves and excitement about how the children would react to the new rules, different layouts of the classroom and being away from their grownups for the first time in 3 months. There were a few tears and confused looks when they could only give you a 'marshmallow' hug. However, the children, being the amazing little humans they are, have adapted to the new changes in their stride.

Having their temperature taken every morning, washing their hands many times a day and playing games with their friends from a distance, has become the new 'normal'. Seeing children's beaming smiles and the skip in their step has made me reflect on just how important school is for their well-being. The majority of children in my class are back in school and I feel so fortunate to be able to spend this time with them before they move on to Year 2 in September.

It can't go without saying all this wouldn't have been possible without the amazing team at The Gatwick School. Everyone has pulled together to make sure it has been a smooth and successful return. A big thank you to the teachers who have taken on the Year 1 online lessons as well as their own to support those children still at home. What a year it's been and a very strange first year as an NQT, but definitely one to remember!

CAW - Sally Singh, Welfare Manager

I've now been back at school for three weeks having worked from home for twelve weeks due to my husband receiving the first shielding letter. Luckily I was one of those who could continue to work at home with some adjustments. I packed up my things feeling apprehensive about the weeks ahead, wondering how I would manage my work load and continue to support my colleagues at school. However that was made easier because I felt really well supported by them and by the messages of support from the Aurora leadership team.

I'm lucky, we have a home office... sorry, as my husband reminded me several times - he has a home office, which I commandeered. After a good tidy up (apparently it didn't need it) and a bit of reorganising - I didn't want the ironing board to be on show in the background when I was on video conference calls and I didn't want to look at a calendar picture of a Chelsea footballer from 2018 either, I was ready to go! If I really wanted to bore you I could share my time at home as a diary - Day 1 etc. Don't worry I'm not going to do that! I have to say, any illusion that I was going to catch up with admin, housekeeping or other long-pushed aside tasks.....well that never happened. My days were always full, welfare calls to families and children in school, keeping in contact with school colleagues, social workers and other professionals and numerous video conferences for child protection meetings and even participating in interviews for a new deputy Head teacher and teachers. The days and weeks flew by.

What did I love about the time at home? Not having to get up so early, no crawl in the traffic to and from school and the lovely view from my office window. My husband has a new appreciation about why I don't call him back instantly when he calls or texts me during the day "Does your phone ever stop?" "No" and "Is it normal to have that many meetings?" "Yes!"

There were some funny moments too - On a Facetime call with brothers at school, the younger one asked me where I had been? I told him I was working at home; he asked "Show me around your house then." His brother told him "Mrs Singh's not allowed to, it's private!" So the younger brother then asked "Have you got any kids, where are they?" I told him my daughter is grown up and has her own home, but I have got a cat. His reply "Well get your cat and show me then!" I told him I wasn't sure where she was and he replied rather sarcastically, "Suppose she's got her own house too!" During one of the very hot afternoons, with my window open, I was just about to speak during a child protection video conference about the impact of warring parents on their child. Our neighbours have chickens and at that moment the cock decided to cock-a-doodle-doo very loudly every time I started to speak. Believe me it's not true that they only do it at dawn!! This could clearly be heard by everyone taking part as they all started laughing at the noisy bird and my frustration as I slammed the window shut. Thankfully it did help to lighten the mood for a couple of minutes.

What did I miss? I missed the daily contact with children and my colleagues back at school. They were great at keeping in contact with me but video contact isn't the same as having a moan to a colleague about something annoying that just happened, or sharing something that seemed funny at that moment. But we get on as best we can, working or not, in or out of school, we are all doing our bit. Children will continue to amaze us by how resourceful and adaptable they are. Going forward, things might have to be a bit different from how they were but believe me; it's amazing how life really does go on!



Oakwood—Dan Smith, Assistant Site Manager



At the start of the lockdown, I had only been with Oakwood since just before Christmas, so I was relatively new. The first few weeks seemed to go slowly but I think that was getting used to working in an almost silent building with minimal staff and just a handful of students. After a while, I got used to the situation and it became the norm.

During this time, we were busy preparing to open for more children, this included many conversations with multiple suppliers to get products ordered for the return of students, deep-cleaning, painting and other remedial works were completed. Unlike many others in the country at this time, I have been lucky enough to make the most of the situation to develop and learn within my role.

In the week or so before the additional children came back, the school started slowly getting back into life. It was quite strange to see the car park full again. These days were the busiest and hardest. On one of the days I had clocked up over 22 thousand steps! This week was spent preparing the building for return of the students (thanks to all staff for setting up the classrooms) and dealing with issues such as losing hot water to one of the buildings on the week before re-opening. I had to plead with the plumber to fix the boiler in time! Nervous times included awaiting for an on-time delivery of much sought after hand sanitiser. Despite having some very busy moments I found the lockdown period productive and positive.

We are now into the fourth week after welcoming back more children and have settled into our new routine with cleaning schedules etc, and so far we have had no issues - that is down to the dedication of the site team and having the support we need.



Pupils in Year 1 at Oakwood have been carefully looking after their sunflower plants across the past few weeks and they're growing really well. They have been measuring their height and observing how the leaves have changed.

Here are some of the children who have been looking very closely at the plants and writing up their observations so far.

Glenleigh Park - Jo Richardson & Martin Young

At the start of June, more children came back to school and risk assessments were written. Action plans were created and hand sanitiser ordered by the gallon! Martin Young, site manager, ordered signage so that everyone who would be visiting knew where they were allowed to go and, more importantly, where they weren't! He kindly changed all the padlock codes so that they were all the same and so SLT didn't need to learn about 6 different versions. This was all just so that we could get all the children in safely from various entry points (we are lucky enough to have three) around the grounds, We are again grateful that we have such an amazing buildings footprint at Glenleigh Park - allowing us to keep our children socially distanced.

'Bubbles' has become the latest buzz word and one parent even thought we were creating actual bubbles to place the children in – now there's a thought... Washing hands has become the new norm. Martin used to complain that he had never had to refill the soap dispenser in the boys' toilets but that has certainly changed!

We completed all the rewrites of documents, the socially distanced meetings, the continued preparation and handing out of work packs, the discussions with parents, the moving of furniture and making the school 'Covid19 — Proof.' Throughout all of this I have never felt such a team spirit at Glenleigh Park; all striving to ensure that our children and adults are safe whilst delivering an education to those able to come back to school. The feedback from parents has been incredible and, to be honest, to see the smiles on the faces of our children and adults, back where they belong in the classroom, has made all the stresses worthwhile.



Ducklings Nursery having fun drawing faces on balloons

A LAB Chair's point of view - Karen Rolfe, Heron Park



Lockdown and wider opening perspective from a LAB Chair's point of view.....

My time during lockdown has been a very strange but interesting time.... having a thirteen year old son at home trying to home-school and one daughter still working as a key worker. On top of that, continuing my role as LAB Chair for Heron Park has been quite a learning curve. I have been going from learning about China via secondary school homework, to organising a LAB and continually finding out what we as a LAB should be focussing on, as well as supporting staff, children, parents and the wider community.

My time has been varied from going out for a bike ride, building a new room and continuing my studying online, to making sure we are all up to date and keeping in contact. I have also been emailing updates that I had received and always being on the end of the phone or email for support. LAB meetings have been reduced but are far more focussed so that Heron Park feel challenged but at the same time always praised and supported for all their hard work.

I have been careful to make sure to think of the well-being of everyone and checking in when necessary (being the middle woman so to speak) via emails directly to me rather than inundating staff who were already going above and beyond. This proved to work really well and was welcomed by many.

I miss going in on my usual Friday all day visits to see everyone but have visited on a couple of occasions recently to welcome parents and children at the front gate and when they are going home. It has been a massive change but one that I can see is working well and everyone is working amazingly well together.

I cannot thank enough everyone at Heron Park and my LAB members for being so supportive in this pandemic.



Heron Park's children enjoying their bubbles!

King Offa - Catriona Malone, Class Teacher

We have been extremely proud of our pupils at King Offa Primary Academy. They have adapted so well to the new rules and routines at school and have worked together to keep each other safe. Our pupils have shown they can prevent the spread of germs by remembering to wash their hands regularly. They have all taken care of their own resources and continue to keep their individual work stations clean and tidy. Our pupils have enjoyed daily PSHE lessons and understand why social distancing measures are in place.

Our youngest pupils have enjoyed 'elephant distancing' where their elephant trunk ensures they are keeping a safe distance from their friends. The children enjoy eating a school picnic lunch in the classroom, where new friendships have formed within bubble groups. We are delighted to have welcomed our children back to school, their enthusiasm and readiness to learn every day is a joy to see. We look forward to welcoming the rest of our pupils back to school soon.



Westvale Park Primary Academy Aurora's Press Release



Head of School - Susan Kelly

Even when there isn't a pandemic, starting a new school can be daunting for children and parents alike. This is why Mrs Susan Kelly, the Head of Westvale Park Primary Academy, part of Aurora Academies Trust, has welcomed her founding pupils in a very personal way.

Westvale Park Primary Academy and Nursery, based in Horley, will open its doors this September to 90 pupils across its nursery and 2 reception classes, and soon will occupy a brand new, purpose-built school. To welcome these founding pupils, the new Head hand-delivered 90 personalised, *Westvale Park Teddy Bears* to all the homes of the first intake of children. Mrs Kelly said, *"We wanted to recognise that these 90 children and their families will forever be the foundation of our new school. It is a significant and exciting time for everyone."*

Aurora's Director of Early Years, Sam Attwater added, *"These Teddy Bears are not only a great way to help children's transition to the new school (and are, of course, wonderful mementos) but are also a way for Aurora to reach out to our children, at such an unprecedented time."*

Paul Reilly, Aurora's Director of Education said, *"In light of the current circumstances, we wanted to engage with our families in the most personal, yet responsible, way that we could. Hand-delivering these little bears to the doorsteps of the 90 families of our first intake, demonstrates how keen we are to interact and connect with the community from the outset."* Mrs Kelly ensured that she kept to all the current guidelines on social distancing whilst delivering the bears, and she was clearly as excited as the children were!

The children and their families were delighted to receive the bespoke gift, with many parents sending in photos of their thrilled children hugging their cute bears. One grandmother immediately sent an email to Mrs Kelly saying *"Such a wonderful idea! My grandchildren, Tilly and Carter proudly showed them to me on a video call and they haven't put them down all afternoon! Lovely idea. I think they are both going to love their new school. Thank you!"*



Central Team - Sam Attwater, Early Years

Nevada Smith, Andrew Wright (from *Action your Potential*) and I have spent this academic year developing a Mental Health and Wellbeing curriculum called 'The 10 Rocks of Wellbeing'. This will focus initially on early years starting from the youngest two year olds in nursery to the end of reception and our aim will be to develop this further for all of Key Stage 1. The curriculum will include a clear guide for staff, activities and physical resources for pupils, webinars for parents and additional training sessions for staff.

The 10 Rocks are the following:

- Sleep
- Emotions
- Connect
- Exercise
- Eat
- Grateful and Kind
- Music
- Walk Outside
- Be Still
- Play, Learn, Create

I would like to say a big thank you to all staff involved in welcoming back our early years children. I have been so impressed with how well children have settled and this is thanks to everyone's' hard work and preparation.

I would also like to take this opportunity to wish you all a very relaxing summer and I am really looking forward to connecting with you all in September.



Central Team - Heidi Attwood, Safeguarding

I would like to say a huge thank you to all the staff who have worked tirelessly to continue to offer support to vulnerable children and families at our schools.

Even through the challenges of opening the schools more widely to welcome more children back every day, we have not forgotten those who remain at home and still need support. Designated Safeguarding Leads, Deputies, Teachers, Family Support Workers etc, have all kept up regular contact with these families, and help and advice has been given where needed. This has been over and above the expectations set by the government and far more has been offered by Aurora than at many other schools.

Foodbank referrals have been made, parenting advice and emotional support given, and Children's Services have been contacted when there have been significant concerns. This has all ensured that the children at our schools have continued to be safeguarded and is a fantastic achievement of which we should all be very proud. Keep up the good work!



Central Team - Nevada Smith, Mental Health & Wellbeing



Hello! I hope that those of you who are in work are managing the situation for yourselves and the feelings/emotions that come with it and also to those of you at home for whatever reason. I know for many the CORONA virus has affected them in ways they would not have imagined and for some this has been negative. Please remember you are NOT alone...just reach out. Perhaps a cue for a song??? I hope you find some of the ideas in this edition helpful.

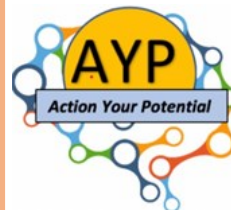


From the week beginning 6th July I will be running half day (3 hour) mental health awareness courses. The short course is quite comprehensive and does provide all the basic information you would need to be more aware and to develop an understanding of mental health in children and young people. I would love for as many staff as possible to have taken this course because, I feel at this time in particular, the more we know, the more effective our help can be. A range of times will be available...you may need to speak to your line manager to organise time for this. More details to follow, get in touch!

12 Rocks of Wellbeing

- Rock 1 - Sleep (8-9 hours a night)
- Rock 2 - Exercise – (20 mins a day)
- Rock 3 - Eat healthily, hydrated (complex carbs, protein, low sugar)
- Rock 4 - Mindfulness (be present without judgement 5-10 mins)
- Rock 5 - Mind wandering (allow your mind to social problem solve)
- Rock 6 - Manage Emotions (notice, accept, share with trust)
- Rock 7 - Walk outside in nature (15-20 mins)
- Rock 8 - Listen to music (20-30 mins)
- Rock 9 - Connect meaningfully with people you care about and who care about you
- Rock 10 - Gratitude and kindness (express both explicitly each day)
- Rock 11 - Engage in activities important to your life purpose
- Rock 12 - Learn, play, create (reading is great)

One of the ways we can help our mental health and wellbeing is to look at how we can involve the 12 rocks of wellbeing. These are from Andrew Wright (Sam and I are working with him on 10) We do not need to do extra but look at how our everyday life can 'tick them off' as we already do them. Try more than one together!



How do you do yours?

Which one is missing for you?

www.actionyourpotential.org for great information, webinars and more!

If you find yourself with any time (?!!), you may like to participate in some FREE training: TES SEN conference is virtual this year with webinars and information available www.tessenshow.co.uk

Future Learn (151 free courses) and Open University (900+) have a wide variety of courses that are free, most not work related!

www.futurelearn.com
www.open.edu/openlearn/free-courses/full-catalogue

Take care of yourself first

or you will have nothing left to give others.

Self-care is not selfishness.

You cannot serve it from an empty vessel.



Emily's Quotes

Where else can I go for help?

- Mental Health Foundation - Looking after your mental health
- Every Mind Matters - Get simple steps to better mental health
- Mind - Tips for everyday living
- Rethink - Looking after your wellbeing and physical health
- Men's Minds Matter- advice, support, helplines

"It's alright to ask for help"

SAMARITANS

116 123



News from the CEO, Tim McCarthy



Dear Colleagues

If you are anything like me, then you must be finding it hard to believe how rapidly the end of year is approaching! The day that all UK schools 'closed' on Friday 20th March seems a very long time ago indeed. Over the intervening months, Aurora has successfully risen to many challenges. We have made effective childcare provision for the most vulnerable in our communities and for the children of society's keyworkers. We have made huge efforts to distribute food to our most disadvantaged children and their families. We have prepared, provided and distributed thousands of work and activity packs to help maintain home-school education. We have made thousands of telephone calls to safeguard and aid the wellbeing of children and our colleagues. We have become experts at delivering lessons online. We have conducted hundreds of risk assessments and made our schools as safe as we possibly could, to enable more children to access provision. We have worked from home or at school and have collaborated remotely in online meetings. We have put in place revised cleaning schedules and made our buildings safe. We have dealt with all manner of parental requests and concerns. We have made sure that all the back-office functions have been maintained. In short, the whole Aurora team has done whatever was needed ... and always in a spirit of generosity, service and with impeccable professionalism. You should each be proud of the role you have played.

In this edition of *Awesome Aurora*, we have the chance to say farewell to some colleagues who are leaving us and hello to some new colleagues. To those leaving we say a very sincere thank you for your dedication and service to our children. To our new 'recruits' we wish you well for your new career with us. You are joining a great team.

Finally, please make sure that you all get a rest this summer. That is absolutely vital, as everybody must recharge their batteries. We know some things about what schools might look like in September but nobody can predict what might happen between now and then to change it. All that I do know is that whatever the future holds, Aurora is very well placed to deal with it!

As always, please enjoy celebrating the work of your colleagues. Please also continue to look after your own health and that of your loved ones.

With my very best wishes
Tim

AURORA ACADEMIES TRUST—SEVEN SCHOOLS, ONE FAMILY



City Academy
Whitehawk



Westvale Park
Primary Academy



Aurora Academies Trust

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