



WILLOW DENE SCHOOL

Friday 26th January 2024

Head Teacher's Message

Welcome back to our first newsletter of the Spring term. We hope you all had a happy holiday and would like to wish you a joyous 2024.

This year's holiday was unusual in that the end of term was very close to Christmas and our return to school was, as a result, later than usual. We would be interested in any feedback from you about whether you prefer this configuration to an early finish and early start to the Spring term.

We were very happy to hear that the majority of children and families were safe and well over the holiday. It was reported that several of our children were unwell with influenza during the holiday period. This is something to be vigilant for both at home and school this term, as we know it can make children very unwell.

Sadly, last week we received the news that one of our children was very poorly in hospital and subsequently received the news that he had peacefully passed away. You should all have received our letter telling you more about this and some of this newsletter is dedicated to the memory of our funny, cheeky Abubaker.

We were immediately busy during our first week back with visitors. As a Little Wandle Champion School, it was a pleasure to welcome Mark Siswick who is the CEO of Wandle Learning along with a group of colleagues from the DfE to talk about early reading and phonics and how this looks for all our learners. We hope the team from the DfE took away what they saw to help steer their thinking. Mark wrote after his visit to say, 'it was so wonderful to meet the children today and see them learning, I'm completely in awe of what you do'.

On Thursday 10th January we had our second visitor of the week, Julie McCulloch from Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL). As a first-time visitor to a

special school, it was interesting talking to Julie and showing her our school. Julie wrote to us after her visit to say 'I had a wonderful, thought-provoking afternoon at Willow Dene. Thank you so much to all the fabulous staff and pupils who took the time to show me all the amazing work you do'. Our final visitor was ECO trust who visited on Wednesday 17th January to find out more about how Willow Dene works. We look forward to sharing their feedback in our next newsletter.

All across the school we are making the most of every minute of Spring Term 1. There is exciting learning and some beautiful photographs. Examples of these are on twitter (X), which you can see by following us @WillowDeneSch.

With February half term on the horizon, we know that if your child is in Year 6, you will shortly find out where your children will be placed for Year 7. This will happen around February half term. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you need advice, or someone to talk to. We know this is an anxious time for you all. If your child is in Year 11 we are delighted that progression to Willow Dene Sixth Form is automatic unless you have requested a change of placement. We are excited that your young person will be continuing with us in Year 12.

With an exciting few weeks ahead of us, we will shortly releasing a calendar of events for the rest of the Spring term, which will give all of you the opportunity to get involved.

Enjoy your weekend.

Rachel



Our Abubaker -

We first met Abubaker before he was born! This was because his big brother Mohammed was one of our children at Willow Dene quite a long time ago. Mohammed is now 22 and still remembers our names! Nimo and Rashid, Abubaker's parents have been Willow Dene parents for 18 years now. We have been laughing about how we have got old together! We have been there to watch all of Abubaker's beautiful sisters grow up and become young women.

Abubaker started his Willow Dene experience in Kingfisher class with Joanna when he was 3, just as Mohammed was leaving us for secondary school. Abubaker was a very active, determined nursery aged child who was often to be seen scooting around on his bottom to get to all the interesting things, exploring in his walker and, as his mum reminded us, playing with his favourite toy bells. He was seldom seen without them, and Nimo still has some of them at home!

His next class was Nightingale class, and it was here that Abubaker showed us what a fighter he was. After becoming poorly with a viral infection, he suffered a cardiac arrest and was brought back to life after prolonged CPR. He spent a long time in hospital but recovered, defying all prognosis to get back to us in school. It was not long before he was back in Nightingale class making good steps to recovery.

Abubaker then moved to Woodlark class where he remained until present day. He was quite a character. He made us laugh every single day with his facial expressions, expressive vocalisations and the way he looked at us. We will all remember him shouting (loudly!) at us if we surprised him or putting his arms up for a cuddle.

His favourite toy over the last few years was a slinky and there are lots of them in class, at home and wherever Abubaker was! He used to get himself in a terrible tangle with them and then hold them out so we could help him. Abubaker was very quick when he was on the floor and once he had learnt to roll he was off getting into all sorts of mischief and we had to watch him very carefully because he was also very interested in his friends! He surprised a lot of them with unexpected and very big cuddles.

Abubaker used to take tiny steps in his walker on his well-rehearsed route from the classroom to the bathroom every day. Sometimes we would give him an unexpected destination, like the fish tank or



reception and then burst out laughing because of the way he would look at us, like we got it wrong!

Last year Abubaker got his purple uniform as he started his secondary experience, but Woodlark class was where he had his stability and that is where he stayed. His special interest was messy food play. Abubaker was always quick to get his hands into whatever was on offer and then put his hands to his face and hair and equipment and sometimes even to his mouth!! He was our sensory chef and in the summer term put on his chef's hat and invited all his Year 7 friends to come and make fruit kebabs with him.

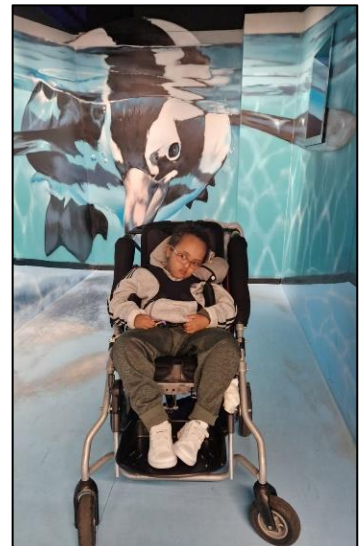
In Year 7 and 8, Abubaker was developing his own sense of style. In the summer he started looking a lot like a basketball player with his baseball cap and shorts. In the winter he was matching his Daddy with the same jumpers. His sisters were teasing him by saying he was starting to get a moustache. His curls and his cheeky little face and the trouble he got himself into taking his glasses on and off are all things we will miss!

We are so grateful to the staff on Safari Ward at Queen Elizabeth Hospital for taking such amazing care of our boy while he was poorly and opening their doors to allow us to say goodbye. During his last few days, all the people who worked with him at Willow Dene from the swim team and office team to the staff in all of his classes, were able to spend time with him and his family. Telling our best Abubaker stories, and there are lots!

Abubaker's amazing family also opened their arms and hearts to us to allow us to say goodbye to him at the East London Mosque on Tuesday 23rd January 2024. We were able to spend this time with his extended family and the team from Safari Ward and we are very grateful for this.

Our parents and wider school community have been so kind in their thoughts and gestures for us and Abubaker's family. There has been a lot of love in our hearts over the last few days. It has been a privilege to work with Abubaker and his family over all these years. His family say he was a 'precious gift' and that we have all been lucky that we had him in our lives. We are in complete agreement with this. Nimo, Rashid and the rest of the family will not stop being Willow Dene parents. They will continue to play a part in the life of our school.







CELEBRATING OUR SIBLINGS

'Being Arianna's sister means there's always laughter and hugs, she inspires us everyday with her resilience and her cheeky smile'.

CALLING ALL DADS!

Strong Dads, special hearts!

Being a parent of children with special needs can be stressful, especially for the Dads.

So, here at Willow Dene we are inviting all our wonderful Dads to come and meet each other to have a chance to relax and destress,

We are here to help you with any difficulties that you may be experiencing. This group is organised by our Learning Support Assistant Mo, Dad of wonderful twins who attend Willow Dene.

So please come and join us on 7th February at 5:30pm.



On Monday 15th January the whole school took part in a Poetry and Art Day by enjoying the same poem, 'And A Tree' by Kate Wakeling. This beautiful poem inspired every class from Toucan to Sixth Form to create beautiful art and immerse ourselves in sensory poetry.

We will be selecting photographs, art and writing from the children to be displayed at the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) national conference in Liverpool in March. This will be a real privilege as this means our children's work will be viewed by hundreds of delegates from across the country.

INSET DAYS UPDATE

We were very happy to return to school on 8th January. Term began for us with an INSET day. These days we are too big as a school team to fit in the halls at Willow Dene and so for the first time we decanted and occupied the hall at Plumstead Manor School for a day of staff training which focused on staff wellbeing with resilience training and team building.

We were even more delighted to be back in our own building and open to children and families on Tuesday 9th January 2024. There were many smiley faces from children, parents and staff. The start of term is always one of the most exciting times at Willow Dene and this is no exception!

PUPIL VOICE – GOLDCREST



We are having a very busy and exciting half term in Goldcrest Class as we had our first forest school session this week. We enjoyed working as a team to build a tall tower. We then explored the forest and enjoyed making music with the pots and pans, the swing but especially relaxing in the hammock.



In class, we have been playing with our peers in Numeracy as we are developing our parallel play skills by exploring sensory trays. We enjoyed exploring the safari tray and smelling the sawdust. We also learnt about what animals eat and had a try of the different foods to express our likes and dislikes. The berries were a favourite!



We have been having fun in Art as we have been expressing ourselves to music. We have been listening to different genres of music and creating masterpieces to show how the music is making us feel. We have been using a range of tools and colours as we dance to the music.

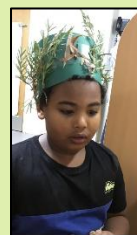


FALCON

Falcon class have been quick to get back into our school routines after the Christmas holiday. We have just had our first swimming session since coming back and enjoyed playing 'What's the time Mr Wolf' in the pool with our friends, which had us all trying hard to swim away from the hungry wolf.

We have lots of new topics to look forward to in our new term ahead including RSE sessions where we will be learning about keeping safe. We will be doing lots of role play and dressing up on the topic of people that keep us safe in the community for example the emergency services. We will be exploring different cultures in our TPPC sessions. We will all have the opportunity of experiencing cultures representing the children and staff within our class. This will include trying lots of different foods, yummy!

Falcon really enjoyed the poetry day this week, the poem we read was called 'And a Tree' they produced some lovely work including writing one-word poems and created some lovely artwork by producing crowns made from items collected from the sensory garden.



SIXTH FORM

As you all know, our Sixth Form have been working extremely hard to set up our café at Swingate Lane and to gain to all the skills and knowledge they need to run it. This term we have decided that we are ready to register 'Willow Delish' as a business, which will enable us to prepare and sell food to a wider group of customers.

On Tuesday 16th January, five days after we registered as a business, we received our first unannounced visit from Environment Health Officers for a food safety inspection. We are delighted to share that as a result we received the top Food Hygiene Rating Indication of 5 which indicates that our standards are very good. This is the highest possible rating. We are very excited to receive this rating. We know from comparing ourselves with our competition that it is not easy to do. We are extremely proud of our café team and are excited about the opportunities this will bring us.

COLD WEATHER INFORMATION

Last week was extremely cold outside although we have been cosy and warm inside. It is possible that during the next two weeks we may see some snow.

When it snows our first priorities are to find out the state of the roads around the school and liaise with transport to see if children can make the journey to school safely. We also check the state of the school site. As you know our school site can become dangerous very quickly and we also need to be sure that we could evacuate in the case of an emergency.

We try to make our assessments as quickly as possible on the morning following snow and once a decision has been made, we or passenger services will let you know this as soon as we possibly can. We will let you know by sending you a parent mail.



If you are considering a house move, you will need to reapply for transport and be aware applications take 28 working days to process before transport is provided.

If you require a transport application please follow this link:
<https://www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/xfp/form/773>

Important Information

School number
020 8854 9841

Greenwich Transport
020 8932 8652

School website:
[Willow Dene School - Home \(compassps.uk\)](https://www.willowdene-school.com)

Twitter(X):
@WillowDeneSch

IMPORTANT DATES

Dad's Group Meeting	7 th February 2024 (5:30pm-6:30pm)
Last day of term	Friday 9 th February 2024 Finish at 3:15pm
Half Term	Monday 12 th February 2024 To Friday 16 th February 2024
School returns	Monday 19 th February 2024
World Book Day Swingate Lane	5 th March 2024
World Book Day Oakmere Road	6 th March 2024
Spring Fling Event	23 rd March 2024 (11am-2pm)
Shakespeare for Schools, Albany Theatre	27 th March 2024 (TBC)

School Vacancies

Join our Talent Pool

We do not currently have any vacancies available at Willow Dene School. Please visit our careers page at MyNewTerm to join our talent pool and we will review your application.



Join Talent
Pool

Please follow the link to apply [Willow Dene School - Vacancies \(compassps.uk\)](https://www.willowdene-school.com/vacancies)

WHAT'S ON

LUSH Bluewater ExperiSense SEN Workshop



Come and join us for a 45 minute LUSH SEN sensory experience. This tailor made SEN workshop consists of multiple stations to help you explore your senses. All ages are welcome. Each station will have a specific LUSH theme attached to it with visual communication cues available.



You will even get the chance to make your own Lush product!



Sunday 11th February
9AM - 9:45AM



Sunday 11th February
10AM - 10:45AM

For any further details please call, email or visit us in store.
01322 427951
Bluewater@lush.co.uk



SUPPORTED LOVING WITH DR CLAIRE BATES

Are you an adult sibling who grew up with a brother or sister who has a learning disability or who is autistic? Would you like to support them to have a relationship? Join our online session to find out more.

Sibs
For brothers and sisters
of disabled children and adults

TUES 6TH FEB, 7PM - 8.30PM

BOOK AT WWW.SIBS.ORG.UK

Book now

Happy New Year Everyone!

Willow Dene Honey
£7.50 per jar

We have limited numbers of honey left, so get yours today to avoid disappointment. Sales from reception, cash only.



The school day begins at 9.15am and ends at 3.15pm. This totals to 30 hours per week

Autumn term 2023	September	Mon 4 th	INSET Day – School closed to children
		Tue 5 th	INSET Day – School closed to children
		Wed 6 th	INSET Day – School closed to children
		Thurs 7 th	First day of autumn term
	October	Fri 20 th	Last day of 1 st half autumn term
		Mon 23 rd	Half-term holiday begins
		Mon 30 th	First Day of 2 nd half of autumn term
	November		
	December	Thurs 21 st	Last day of term
		Fri 22 nd	Christmas holiday begins
Spring term 2024	January	Mon 8 th	INSET Day – School closed to children
		Tue 9 th	First day of spring term
	February	Fri 9 th	Last day of 1 st half of spring term
		Mon 12 th	Half-term holiday begins
		Mon 19 th	First Day of 2 nd half of spring term
	March	Thurs 28 th	Last day of term
		Fri 29 th	Easter holiday begins
Summer term 2024	April	Mon 15 th	First Day of summer term
	May	Mon 6 th	Bank Holiday
		Fri 24 th	Last day of 1 st half of summer term
		Mon 27 th	Half-term holiday begins
	June	Mon 3 rd	First Day of 2 nd half of summer term
	July	Tues 23 rd	Last day of term
		Wed 24 th	INSET Day – School closed to children
		Thurs 25 th	Summer holiday begins