

# Willow Dene News

Friday 27<sup>th</sup> May 2022



## Head Teacher's Message



This newsletter will reach you on the last day before half term. All the way across the school, classes have been marking the occasion of Queen Elizabeth's Platinum Jubilee so that they have the opportunity to be part of history in the making. Activities have included everything from balcony parties to red, white and blue art, to role play and immersive experiences. What fun!

We have now had a formal handover of the swim spa at Oakmere Road and we are looking forward to an opening event for all the people who helped make the project happen during the first week back after half term. We will also be getting our first children into the pool. We are hoping to invite our Oakmere Road parents to visit during the same week so look out for a date for this after the holiday.

It has been joyous to see so many parents around the school in the last few weeks. From meetings to appointments to the new Thursday Speak Easy group. The school feels complete with all of you in it! If you haven't made it into school yet, you are welcome at any time. Next half term there will be Sports Day and Parents Evening for some additional opportunities for us to see you. Don't forget that if your child is leaving us this year, the school will remain open for you to visit, joining the



Speak Easy or any parent training. You will always be welcome.

We are finishing this newsletter with sad news. Some of you may remember Alicia Sekerani, who was a pupil at Willow Dene from the age of 2 years old when she joined as one of our first Toucans. She went on to Puffin class and then Nightingale before leaving Willow Dene in 2021 to live in Zimbabwe with her Mum. This week we learned of Alicia's sudden and unexpected death, at home with her Mum in Zimbabwe on May 6<sup>th</sup>. We are in touch with Saru, Alicia's Mum and will be sending her lots of photographs and memories of Alicia from her time at Willow Dene. Alicia was a small person with a big character! Her boundless energy and sense of humour made us all smile. We will miss her greatly.

Whatever you are doing during the long bank holiday weekend, we hope you have fun and enjoy it! Don't forget that school returns, ready for a packed half term on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> June. If you need us during the holiday for advice, to tell us something or if you need to speak to someone, the emergency phone line will be available. If you text or leave a message a school leader will call you back.

*Rachel*



## Kingfisher

We have been working hard on different ways of moving and using lots of motivating opportunities to try and get where we want to go.

We are using the standing sling in class, in the ballpool and on the magic carpet. We are learning to pull ourselves up to reach something and scoot around the big space in the hall. We have 2 electric Buggys in class and the children have been racing along the corridors and the gardens. We also use walkers to get around more independently and love freer movement in the swimming pool.



We do lots of things together as a group and love our sensory stories which always have lots of 'wow' moments to keep us interested. We have lots of time to play together and have been using the water tray in the garden now the weather is warmer.



## CHALLENGE PARTNERS

In our last email we promised you some feedback from our Challenge Partners review of the school. The outcome for Willow Dene that we are a 'Leading School'. The full report is on the school website, but we wanted to share some highlights with you here:

**'Parents feel valued and welcome at Willow Dene. A genuine parental partnership is in place – one by which the school can learn from what parents see and say, and vice versa. The family support adviser ensures that parents have frequent and varied opportunities to network with each other, the school and with a range of external colleagues who can support parents with their areas of expertise. For example, parents are supported to be aspirational for their child through discussions around careers and future life. This helps parents realise that their child has a place in society. Staff benefit from well-planned professional development. Trust-level provision encompasses all staff, with career paths mapped, pedagogical strategies explored, and aspiring leaders supported. More specific to Willow Dene is mandatory school training, which includes medical learning. The school has a strong ongoing focus on well-being. During the pandemic, practices were embedded quickly to support families and staff. For example, families talk about how the school was a lifeline during Covid lockdowns. Staff describe how the response to the pandemic and recovery has supported their well-being. One member of staff said, 'children add value to the lives of staff''**

We are very proud of our school and this report. We hope you enjoy reading it too.

# Play Therapy at Willow Dene

Over the past year Play Therapy at Willow Dene has continued to ease back to how things were pre-pandemic (i.e. finally I don't have to wear my visor!). Some of the children referred to therapy were those for whom the changes of lockdowns and shielding had significant impact. Some had become a lot more anxious, others found it difficult to settle back into school. During the most difficult times of the pandemic, we all had less contact with other people and for many children getting used to being around others again has been a tricky adjustment.

Play is great at enhancing connection between people. The sharing of experience and fun is important so here are some suggestions to get reconnected:

- **Playing catch** (using a bean bag is sometimes easier for those who find it hard).
- **Driving toy cars/other vehicles** back and forth to each other or alongside each other.
- **Using rhymes**, especially those with actions or which involve touch, e.g., round and round the garden, horsey horsey don't you stop, wheels on the bus.
- **Singing and dancing** – find favourite songs and dance together (you can still dance sitting down for those who find mobility/balance difficult).
- **Water play** - now the weather is getting warmer why not have a go at splashing about together in a bucket or use plastic cups and bowls to pour water from one place to another.
- **Sensory materials** such as play dough, dry rice, and shaving foam can be lots of fun
- **Small figures of people, animals, characters** can be used to act out scenes (perhaps the grown up can do different voices?)
- **Using puppets** for story telling
- **Role play** - 'playing at real life' e.g., use toy food to have a tea party or run a cafe
- **Dressing up**
- **Construction toys** such as Lego, wooden bricks, etc. create something together
- **Arts and crafts** – use pens, pencils, crayons, stickers, paints to create a family picture for the wall

Get playing, get connecting and have fun!

Harriet Armstrong BSc MA

BAPT Registered Play Therapist



## Pupil voice

As the Covid-19 restrictions have eased over the last half term we are all able to explore different parts of the school again, and most importantly, start to meet again! Children at Willow Dene have been able to meet and communicate their opinions and to have an input on the decisions that are made about their school.

### ACE group

Our ACE group have started meeting. They meet to discuss different topics presented to them by the Local Authority, to make positive and meaningful changes within Greenwich about things that directly impact children and families with SEN/D. This month, the ACE group were asked to share their opinions on why it is important to be able to give their views, when the council are shaping services that are relevant to them – and why it is important for these views to be listened to and acted upon. The children expressed that they were the future of this world and that they know what they need and what needs improving. The children also discussed why they should be listened to, and the most popular responses included: "to keep us safe" and "to give us opportunities and experience". When the children were asked what important changes they would like to see, they suggested more wheelchair accessible venues, such as ball pools and sporting areas. They also suggested adapting Low

Traffic Neighbourhoods for non-able-bodied cyclists.

## School Council

Last half term, the school had their first School Council meeting for this academic year. The meetings are now being conducted slightly differently and, at the moment, all children are involved in the discussions and voting procedures. Previously, this was done by representatives. During the meeting, the children had 4 important decisions to make – What equipment should be purchased for the playgrounds? How can we help the environment when at school? Should we have a vegan day? Should we have radios in the hygiene rooms? The children explored the options in ways appropriate to them and either voted or had their preference interpreted by the teaching staff. The results were collected and counted and are as follows:

- Children voted in favour for climbing equipment for the playgrounds
- Children voted in favour for using reusable bottles
- Children voted in favour for not having a vegan day at school
- Children voted in favour for having radios in the hygiene rooms

Keep an eye out on our twitter account to see our pupil takeovers, as well as up to date news and other achievements. Twitter - @willowdenesch



# WHAT'S ON



On Saturday 11 June the charity Peeps-HIE will be holding its first PeepsTogether event for families affected by HIE (hypoxic-ischaemic encephalopathy) at Thames Chase Forest Centre, Upminster, RM14

3NS. For more details and registration see [www.eventbrite.com/e/324065056307](http://www.eventbrite.com/e/324065056307)



The Willow Dene summer scheme is a specialist, two week play based programme commissioned by the Royal Borough of Greenwich as part of the Short Breaks Core Offer for primary aged children from reception to Year 5.

**WHEN:** Week 1 start date **25TH July 2022**  
Week 2 start date **1st August 2022**

At Summer scheme children are able to enjoy a range of exciting activities designed to captivate, inspire and nurture their interests. Children will have access to specialist areas such as eye-gaze, outdoor facilities, on-site swimming sessions and more. We are also delighted to announce the return of off-site trips. Our playscheme is staffed by Willow Dene employees which means children will continue to receive an exceptional quality of care in a familiar setting.

If you are interested in booking a place for your child at our Summer Play Scheme then please contact the RBG Short Breaks team.

**The deadline to register your interest with short breaks is JUNE 3RD 2022. Its advisable to sign up as early as possible - Due to popularity places fill quickly.**

Please be aware the programme is available to those children who:

- Aged 4-10 (up to and including Year 5)
- Have had a social care assessment
- AND are in receipt of a specialist care package from the Disabled Children's Social Work team (DCSWT)

If you are unsure that your child meets these criteria, you can contact the Short Breaks team for advice and support. If your child is not eligible to access the Willow Dene summer scheme, there are alternative programmes that the short breaks team will be more than happy to discuss with you.

Short Breaks team contact information:  
Tel: 0208 921 3002  
Email: Short-Breaks-Referrals@royalgreenwich.gov.uk

LIMITED SPACES!



For more information on what we offer, contact this years organiser Raven Callaghan  
Tel: 020 8854 9841 Email: rcallaghan@willowdene.compassps.uk



## Inclusive Dance

Pan-disability inclusive dance sessions for D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent children  
All disabilities/abilities welcome

### Session Information

When: Fridays  
Time: 5 - 6 pm  
Where: Waterways Children's Centre, SE28 8EZ  
Age: 6 - 11 years old  
Cost: First session free, £4 thereafter

### Book here:

[AimHighAcademy.Co.Uk](http://AimHighAcademy.Co.Uk)  
Click 'Book Now' and find Fridays session

### Got a question?

07904 313 603

[Info@AimHighAcademy.Co.Uk](mailto:Info@AimHighAcademy.Co.Uk)

Supported By:



## IMPORTANT DATES

Platinum Jubilee Bank Holiday

Monday 6<sup>th</sup> June 2022

Children return to school

Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> June 2022



## Play Therapy Pods - newlifecharity

Newlife offers the free loan of specialist toys to families who have disabled and terminally ill children. The Play Therapy Pods are self-contained and are delivered direct to the family's door.

[newlifecharity.co.uk](http://newlifecharity.co.uk)