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OLD UNICORN NEWSLETTER

JULY 2024

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Website: www.unicornschoole.org.uk

From the Headteacher We have enjoyed another fun and exciting year which has been packed full of wonderful things the children have taken part in and achieved.

We had the unveiling of Fi Law's (scroll down for more details) commemorative plaque on 2 May here at school, where past Headmistresses, Julia Chappell, Fran Bayliss, Fiona Timmis along with current Head, Polly Fraley and a host of past pupils, staff and founding members attended.



Left to right: Fran Bayliss, Julia Chappell, Polly Fraley and Fiona Timmis

Autumn term saw memorable Christmas productions; Red and Orange Classes' Nativity and Yellow and Green's 'Born in a Barn' were both full of vibrant singing, acting, costumes and music. The Junior Christmas concert at the Barn Church resonated with beautiful singing, musical ensembles and Ultra Violet speaking their parts so confidently and clearly.

Ultra Violet deserves huge congratulations for their results and even more praise for the calm and mature way they have conducted themselves throughout the 11+ process. For a cohort of 19 children, they received 70 offers, including 7 scholarships and accepted places to:

Chiswick Community
Ibstock Place
Latymer Upper
St James Boys'

City of London
Kew House
Notting Hill & Ealing
Surbiton High

Francis Holland
Kingston Grammar
Orleans Park

Hampton
Lady Eleanor Holles
Radnor House

Party Day didn't disappoint; whilst the Infants enjoyed 'The Elves and the Shoemaker' in the hall, the Juniors walked down to the Curzon Cinema in Richmond to watch *Polar Express*. All the children then had parties in their themed classrooms with UV's as a scene out of *Narnia* complete with an avenue of huge Christmas trees and snow machine on the forecourt and magic wardrobe entrance to their classroom! Mr Gladstone was dressed as Aslan, Mr Jones as Mr Tumnus and all UV children were dressed as Peters, Susans, Edmunds and Lucies (bottom left photo right hand side is Billy Yorath, Fiona Timmis' grandson). The parent helpers were dressed as various other characters including Mr and Mrs Beaver, the White Witch, Mrs Wolf and many more!



Charity We still carry on the tradition of the children bringing in a present for those less fortunate via the West London Action for Children and Unicorn families showed amazing charity by donating so many on Party Day.

School Committee has raised in excess of a staggering £14,000 over the last year, which will be split between our charities, Little Village, The Children's Trust and the School Bursary Fund.

Trips Blue and Indigo had a great stay at Sayers Croft, Violet enjoyed their week in Devon, UV had an action-packed stay in Cumbria and Violet and UV loved their ski trip to Norway. Other highlights this year have included trips to Gunnersbury Museum, Kew Gardens, Garson's Farm, Roald Dahl Museum, Water & Steam Museum, Curzon Cinema, Battersea Park Zoo, Natural History Museum, Bekonscot Model Village, BBC Earth Experience, Hampton Court, National Archives, Sayers Croft, Legoland, Saxon Sustainability Centre, Thames Explorer Trust, Orange Tree Theatre, Richmond Park, Bocketts Farm, Junior Citizenship at Holly Lodge and the Houses of Parliament. All UV completed their Bus and Tube day challenge to get themselves from school to the fountain outside Green Park Station, a quick selfie and then back again!

This year's UV in Cumbria



Blue and Indigo at Sayers Croft



Bekonscot Model Village

Music There have been tea time concerts, try an instrument afternoon, Kew Sparkle, Violet and UV sang at Cecil Court Care Home and many other musical delights this year. Unicorn Singers competed in the annual Richmond Festival and performed songs from Joseph and the amazing technicoloured dreamcoat at the Hurlingham School in Putney. Musical Theatre's Spring term production of Frozen was spectacular.



Drama, Class Assemblies and Productions Drama continues to be excellent, with outstanding performances of Violet's Macbeth and Indigo's Celts and Romans Assembly. The end of year UV plays seem to get better and better with no exception of this year's production of 'Ali Baba and the Bongo Bandits!'. Unicorn really does produce some very capable, confident children!



World Book Day saw some brilliant costumes including Dobby, Sherlock Holmes, butterflies and many other great book characters!



Art truly is inspirational whether it's paintings, ceramics, pottery or tapestry, it's always of an exceptionally high standard. Below are some fabulous artworks from our Big Draw whole school collaboration under the theme of 'Drawing with senses'.



Sport The children have participated in matches and tournaments in football, netball, hockey and cricket and also the Borough Swimming Gala, where for a small school, we enjoy many successes.

Thursday Afternoon Clubs This year's clubs on offer included Board Games, Chess, Computer, Cookery, Dance, Debate, DT, Golf, Inventors, Padel, Pottery, Riding, Sailing and Sew What?.



Staff At the end of the summer term we say a fond farewell to **Miss Strickland**, Recorder, Music Theory and Orchestra Teacher and Old Unicorn parent (**Rohan and Hugh**) for the past 17 years; **Mr Max (Peregrine)**, Teaching Assistant this year, Gap Year Student last and attended Unicorn as a child; **Miss Rapti**, Teaching Assistant in Red Class for this year and **Mrs Sneddon**, Teaching Assistant for this year and Old Unicorn parent (**Emma and David**) and **Mr Casper (Martin) (Inigo's big brother and Bryony Boxer's eldest)**, Gap Year Student for the previous two terms and who, like his mother, also attended Unicorn as a child. All of them a cheerful presence in school and hugely popular with the children and staff alike. We will be sad to see them go and wish them every happiness for the future.

Governors who are leaving, we say farewell to **Rebecca Raffan**, Education and Staffing Committee for one year and **Jo Webbern**, Education and Staffing Committee and our Safeguarding Governor for 7 years. We thank them both for their constant support and invaluable contribution over the years.

Listed below is our current cohort of staff, I wonder how many names you still recognise!

Headteacher: Mrs Fraley	Red Class: Mrs Langdon (nee Reynolds)	Orange Class: Mrs Maher
Deputy Head: Mr Gladstone		Green Class: Miss Engelmann
Assistant Heads: Mr Jones and Mrs Langdon	Yellow Class: Mrs Palmer	
Blue Class: Mr Gough	Indigo Class: Miss O'Gorman	Violet Class: Mr Jones
UV Class: Mr Gladstone	Violet & UV English: Mrs Bird (nee Roncone)	Teaching Assistants: Mrs Nicholas, Mrs Gentle, Miss Franklin, Mrs Gardner (nee Adie), Mrs Chalong, Mrs Bryan
DT & Art: Mrs Daw & Mrs Washington	Games: Mrs Young	Science: Mrs Roblin (nee Stephenson)
Computing: Mrs Walcot	Library: Mrs Gladstone	Bursar: Mr Guy
Drama: Miss Timpson	Maths Specialist: Miss Botes	Registrar: Mrs Rodgers
French: Mrs Baghaei	Music: Miss Gresson	PA to Headteacher: Mrs Jones

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all staff, governors and parents for their continued support and phenomenal contribution to school life; I am grateful to them all.

Best wishes

Polly Fraley

POLLY FRALEY
Headteacher

Ceremony in memory of Felicia Law, first Headmistress and founder of Unicorn School

Fi would have been furious to know we arranged a celebration in her memory. She liked things done her way and had opted out of Unicorn matters some years ago. However, she was a remarkable person who achieved the establishment of a remarkable school and this history must not be allowed to disappear into oblivion, so we decided that a plaque on the wall and a book in her memory would be a suitable and permanent reminder for past, present and future Unicorn families.

Founders and members of the steering committee, early staff and pupils and their families all gathered in the school hall on 2nd May this year and enjoyed drinks and delicious canapés prepared by the school chef. Videos of the early days of Unicorn were showing on the big screen while Ultra Violet children conducted tours of the school for the guests.

Julia Chappell, Fran and Geoff Bayliss, Sylvia Marder and Margaret Marshall all spoke about their memories of Fi. These are recorded in Fi's book, along with contributions from past pupils and parents. The book will be kept in the school office for everyone to see.



Our most senior guest, founder parent Sylvia Marder, a sprightly 96 year old who did not sit down all evening, unveiled the lovely Unicorn plaque, which was made by past pottery teacher, Lilah Clarke, and is now displayed on the wall in the entrance hall.

It was wonderful to see so many old friends and catch up on 50 years of news on this very happy evening.

Julia Chappell's talk about Fi and the founding of Unicorn

Fi and I first became friends in the sixties when we had a summer job at Penguin Books helping out at The Puffin Club. We spent a lot of time together and were both teaching at Broomfield School in Kew. We'd been taken on specifically as we were only a few years out of training college and the then Headmistress, Mrs Rose, said the parents wanted a more up-to-date and creative approach to their children's education.

A few years later, when Mrs Rose and her husband retired to their cottage in the New Forest, Broomfield was under new management. We felt that our particular blend of teaching, with a focus on projects and the creative arts, was no longer appreciated. We handed in our notice. It was the summer of 1970 and neither of us had other teaching jobs lined up. Just as term ended, a group of enthusiastic parents asked to meet us both in a local pub one evening ... the conversation went something like this:

"Where are you going ...? We'll send our children with you." "Why don't we start our own school ...?"

So ... the germ of an idea to start a new school began to take shape. This group of parents formed a steering committee, which later became the nucleus of our first board of governors. Long meetings were held around peoples' dining tables, often into the small hours of the morning and it soon became clear that the venture just might work. Fi and I spoke about what we believed in at public meetings in church halls and we visited the homes of interested parents ... our prospective pupil list was growing rapidly. Our venture just might work.

There was tremendous enthusiasm locally for the venture, but also some opposition - particularly from the council (the Conservatives were only just back in power after a six-year Labour government). Ruffled feathers were smoothed by Fi's determination and by tactful negotiations by the steering committee. Even so, some local people still thought it was a ridiculous idea ...!

Meanwhile Fi and I were taking advice from other schools, choosing reading schemes, acquiring unwanted furniture, text books, stationery and equipment suitable for all ages. At the children's fashion store, Pollyanna, it was decided that the school colours were to be petrol blue and ginger, with a range of clothing, smocks, and smart doubled-breasted blue coats with velvet collars. (This soon morphed into the more practical brown duffel coat we know and love.)

The steering committee devised a parental loan scheme in addition to the school fees - but I do remember Fi and I took the bank manager at Coutts in Park Lane out to lunch in our miniskirts and hot pants!! Parents donated more equipment plus a tremendous amount of time and energy and thanks to a growing team of amazing and talented teachers, Unicorn opened its doors on 21 September in the old Youth Club in Richmond. We had 17 pupils aged from 3 - 9 years. Parents were galvanised into action and helped set up the school very early each morning and cleared away all trace at the end of the school day so that the Youth Club could function in the evening. As term went on, more children joined the school every few weeks ... and by the following April we moved into our permanent premises at 238 Kew Road with 4 classes. By September we were full with a waiting list. The rest is history ...

The setting up of Unicorn was a team effort due to the hard work, dedication and commitment of the group of exceptional staff and the belief, goodwill and determination shown by parents. But it was Fi - brilliant, vivacious, imaginative, determined and utterly convincing - who inspired us all. We couldn't have done it without her.

Unicorn flourished in the 7 years of Fi's leadership and the school went from strength to strength. Effervescent and captivating, she was a dynamic head and an unforgettable teacher. She instilled in children a lifelong love of learning - involving them in exciting projects and memorable field trips.

Fi was an innovator with a great capacity for fresh ideas and reinventing herself. When she left Unicorn, she started up the Lion and Unicorn Children's Bookshop and also New Edition Bookshop in Richmond. She then went on to forge a successful career as a children's author, editor and publisher. But of all Fi's many achievements, we remember with gratitude her lasting legacy of those very early years of Unicorn School.

Old Unicorn Staff

The Mottley Crew, a group of retired Unicorn Staff who live locally, continue to meet for lunch and lively conversation. Judy Mott, a much loved teacher who died some years ago was a founder member, hence the name.

Last Autumn, in September (2023), we had an excellent lunch at Royal Mid-Surrey Golf Club. We had recently heard the sad news that Felicia Law, the first Headmistress of Unicorn, had died and Julia Chappell with Fran and Geoff Bayliss spoke about Fi's life and the founding of Unicorn School.

Julia and Fran followed Fi as Headmistresses, while Geoff has come full circle in supporting Unicorn. He was there for Fran when she became very involved at the beginning, then as a Unicorn parent and more recently as Chairman of Governors, a role from which he stood down last year. This seems a good opportunity for us teachers to thank Geoff for all he has done for Unicorn and to wish him a happy retirement.

We had another more informal lunch at Fiona Timmis's in April this year. There was a good turnout of 21 past members of staff and this proved to be a great fun, catching up on each other's lives, while eating, drinking and laughing together.



We were sorry that neither Sue McDonald nor Fiona Pagnamenta were able to be with us and I am very sad to say that Sue died the following month.

We look forward to our next meeting for lunch at RMS Golf Club on Wednesday 18th September. As well as the Mottley Crew, other past members of staff are very welcome; just leave a message with me; see contact details below.



Audrey Sayer, our founder Bursar celebrated her 90th birthday on 5th July this year. Audrey lives in a care home and is hugely supported by her daughters.

Photo of past Mottley lunch at Fiona's with, left to right, back row: Fi, Shena, Fiona T, Louise, Margaret T, Audrey, front row: Judy, Fiona P, Julia, Jane, Margaret H).



The Mottley Crew is a wonderful group, all very supportive of each other. We feel lucky to have taught at Unicorn and have become great friends for life.

We wish Fiona Pagnamenta the very best while she has her hospital treatment and hope she makes a speedy recovery.

With all good wishes to past Unicorns and their families,

FIONA TIMMIS

Headmistress 1988 - 2004

fiona.timmis@btinternet.com

Current children of Old Unicorn Pupils

We currently have 10 children from 9 families where a parent attended Unicorn as a child:

Alford (nee May)	Dunne (nee Ellen)	Verwey
Burley (nee Howard-Smith)	Somerville Waters (nee Waters)	Wallace
Martin (nee Boxer)	Thijs (nee Boa)	Yorath (nee Timmis)

Obituaries:

Felicia Law: Felicia Law, founder and first Headmistress of Unicorn School, died on 29th July 2023. Fi, with Julia Chappell and Fran Bayliss and a group of local parents founded the school in October 1970 and was a truly inspirational Head.

After 7 years at Unicorn, Fi went on to found The Lion and Unicorn bookshop in Richmond. She wrote over 300 children's books published by international publishers world wide and then founded her own publishing company.

Fi lived in Italy for many years and then moved to Ireland in 2022 to be near her sister. She died there the following year, leaving her sisters Caroline and Elisabeth, four nephews and nieces and their families, as well as a vast menagerie of pets.

Quoting her agent; "She battled illness for many years but this beautiful, brilliant, fiery, determined, amazing, infuriating woman was not indestructible after all."

Thank you Fi for Unicorn. We, the children, staff and parents, are so fortunate to have been a part of this fantastic school.



Sue McDonald: Sue had cancer and died peacefully in hospital surrounded by her family. Phil, her husband, wrote that she was a real superstar in the way she battled the disease and was positive to the end.

Sue taught at Unicorn in the 80's as Blue Class Teacher. She was a sweet person and a lovely bubbly teacher, much loved by her colleagues, children and parents.



Sue and Phil lived and raised their family in Cheshire and it was so good to see her at the Mottley Crew lunch at Unicorn a year ago.

Phil said that Sue loved her Unicorn connection and particularly all the staff and children and that the family planned to have a Unicorn on her headstone.

Sue will be greatly missed and we send our love to Phil, her children and grandchildren.

(photo of Sue with Louise on the left and Hilary on the right).

Jenny (Hardyment) Leigh Mitchell: Jenny died of cancer in January this year after a very full, active and interesting life. Her younger children Katie and Richard came to Unicorn and Jenny was an exemplary parent; so sensible and wise and a much respected member of the community. She made a great contribution to the board of Governors at Unicorn; always thoughtful, perceptive and generous with her time. More recently two of her grandchildren attended Unicorn.

We send our good wishes to Katie, Richard and all the family.

In order for us to maintain contact, we require a completed and returned Data Protection Form. If you have already done so - thank you, if not, please use the link in the covering email.

We are always happy to hear any Old Unicorn news - please email:

lisa.jones@unicornschoo.org.uk.