

P.20 Diary of a support assistant

Wendy Clark, Furze Infants' School

21st March 2005

1 Background

I am a learning support assistant, with responsibility for ICT at Furze Infants' School in Chadwell Heath, Romford, Essex. It is a large, four form entry school, with 104 children who attend the Nursery either for a morning or afternoon session, giving the total number on roll 440. The school day is very busy with lots of 'traffic' and requires good organisation from adults in all areas for smooth running. Playtimes are split across the three year groups in order to accommodate the high numbers of children in the playground. Lunchtimes are split with the reception children starting and then finishing their lunch half an hour before the rest of the school. However, this means that members of staff in different year groups do not get much time to spend together during the school day.

I have worked here since 1996 and I have seen a number of changes to the way school operates. At present, the school has a total of 24 children on the special needs register, including 9 children with statements and it has an exemplary record for success in this area.

Over the years, the number of outside agencies involved with the school has grown and this in turn means more visitors on the premises on some days, not always familiar to all members of staff.

The school office is always very busy with administration, day to day running, first aid and numerous other jobs. One of their jobs is to keep the parents informed of matters by way of a newsletter. Sometimes the pressure of getting these newsletters out just before the end of the day, means that the teachers are not always able to read them and trying to read them on the 'run' is not easy.

2 Vision

We have a 'paper based' signing in daily diary, but it doesn't always contain extra or more detailed information. Given this and the problems mentioned above I thought of introducing a staff diary/ newsletter.

After a very busy Christmas in December 2003, I went to see the head teacher to see if we could create a newsletter for the staff to keep everyone informed of visitors, forthcoming events (work and socially related) and any other business that would help to maintain a 'togetherness' throughout the whole school. She thought it would be an excellent idea. I decided to talk to my Test Bed manager, Rupert Hay-Campbell on the premise that it would be probably be just some sort of word document we would type up, photocopy and pop into each member of staffs' pigeon hole once a week. He, however, said we could develop this into an electronic version, which staff could access through their computers in addition to the paper copy. The first edition to go on-line was in January 2004.



Furze staff news

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<p>News</p> <p>Staff ICT Questionnaires: Click here for the teaching staff questionnaire. Click here for the non-teaching staff questionnaire. Please remember to complete your questionnaire by the 28th May</p> <p>Jackie's Pedagogy corner: OFSTED have just published their latest report on the use of ICT in schools. OFSTED highlight the fact that <i>"The Government's aim that ICT should become embedded in the curriculum is still only a reality in a small number of schools. Pupils' ICT experiences across the curriculum are sporadic and teacher-dependent and in many schools opportunities to exploit the technology are lost on a daily basis."</i> Click here to read the full report.</p> <p>The Koreans are coming! After their successful sell out tour last term the team from Samsung are coming back due to popular demand. This time it's the power supply units in the visualisers. They will be coming into school on Friday 21st May in the afternoon, like last time they will need to take your visualiser away for 15 minutes or so while it is repaired. We have</p>	<p>Diary - week commencing 17/05/04</p> <p>Monday</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Anna [redacted] and Charlotte [redacted] begin work experience in the Nursery.• Gordon [redacted] (Fireman) to visit Reception classes, 9:30- 10:50.• SEN Review [redacted] 10:20• Inset Emotional Literacy with Jane [redacted] <p>Tuesday</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mrs. [redacted] (Nurse) to visit Reception classes, 9:15- 11:00.• Linda [redacted] to see [redacted] (SEN observation 1-1½ hours.) 1pm.• Lynn at Westbury 4 -5:30 <p>Wednesday</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Anita out all day, First Aid Refresher course.• Jean from St Chads to do assembly.• SEN Review : [redacted] 10:20• Ann [redacted] to see all Early Years Staff, 3:15 <p>Thursday</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Karen P in today.• Ann [redacted] (Whalebone Library) to visit Reception classes 9:30-10:50 <p>Friday</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• JB will be in late today JR to cover assembly for Early Years 9:15- 9:45
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Figure 1: Example newsletter

To start with, we collected information from the diaries of the secretary, the head teacher and the deputy head teacher for the following week. We decided to split the newsletter into two sections, one half would take the form of a weekly diary and the other for news stories, forthcoming events and other important or relevant issues that may concern us with regard to our profession. At times we also set up links to websites which are running interesting or important information which may be of help to some members of staff. We go through an 'editing' session with the head teacher and S.M.T. on Friday mornings, using a projector and large screen before making copies for all staff members. Using the large screen allows everyone to see and comment on changes being made. For those absent or on courses, they can access the newsletter from home if they have the internet.

3 Evaluation

Over a year had passed before I decided to do an evaluation of the newsletter and in March 2005, I began to write up this report.

I asked some members of staff to read the report that I had written about how the newsletter began. These staff included experienced teachers, teachers of special needs, NQTs support staff and a nursery nurse.

I set the same questions - did they read the newsletter, how useful has it been what has been the most informative part, have there been any unexpected outcomes and is there anything that could be added that may be helpful.

They all said they read it with interest. Quote. "I definitely read it - it's the first thing I do at the end of the school day on a Friday". This came from a year two teacher.

Others keep it pinned up on the wall above their desk for "at glance information" and day to day reference. They found it helpful to know who's in and who's out and provides an excellent overview of what is going on in the school.

The daily timetable of events for some has been the most informative and helpful.

The nursery finds it useful because they don't share any breaks or lunchtimes with the rest of the school and sometimes felt they weren't very well informed. They also felt it helped to keep them in touch with staff they don't always see, as a reminder for the week and what is happening on INSETs and forthcoming events.

The staff like the hard copy but appreciate the 'click here' facility for more details of news items etc. The links to wider issues e.g. the DFES document was considered to be "very impressive."

One unexpected outcome has been that some staff have been encouraged to use the internet more and learn how to e-mail.

Ideas for anything that could be added were training courses, and an SOS or lost and found section. This would track down missing items of equipment, specific books, curriculum resources, spares and duplicates so that staff would be able to resource or assist one another directly.

Someone thought it would be a nice idea to mention forthcoming birthdays, but under the data protection act, I think we may need individual written permission before we can do that.

Overall, the majority feel that the newsletter has been a big success. Words that were expressed included, "wonderful, invaluable, extremely useful, couldn't do without it now" and it has even been the talking point with people out of school.

Although the initial idea for the news letter was mine, I have to thank Rupert for his help and support because he is responsible for the more 'technical and intellectual' side of things and I am usually in despair if he is out of the office on publication day.