



Llangattock School Governors' Christmas Newsletter



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Autumn Term

An end of term newsletter from the Chair of Governors, George Smith

A Point Of View

Recently I was talking to Rita Waldron about what she had been working on with the children in my son's class. They had been practicing sewing skills in preparation for a Design Technology project. The intention was to teach them running stitch and blanket stitch. She observed that most of the children really struggled to even sew a running stitch let alone a blanket stitch. Upon reflection neither of us was surprised at this lack of skill but upon further reflection we started to look at the wider implications.

Sewing is actually a useful life skill, as a child when I called on my grandfather I would not be surprised to see him turning a collar or reversing a sheet on his hand-operated Singer sewing machine. Or he might have been darning a jumper or patching a pair of trousers, he was a single parent and very adept at all household jobs. My mother, who would not describe herself as practical, used to make all the curtains and occasional items of clothing. I, personally, really enjoy repairing and making things; from cookery to curtains to repairing our cars, (I was a car mechanic before I was a teacher.) I have inherited many of these skills through watching my parents and grandparents.

My oldest son, who is 12 years old has no interest in practical things despite seeing me do such activities all his life, it maddens and surprises me! Why should he have my interests? He has grown up in an age of CBeebies, CBBC, computer games recordable satellite T.V., touch screens and tablets. He does not need to be bored, there is always something to watch or play. When we were children T.V. was far more limited, less accessible and there were virtually no computer games. It was preferable to play outside, help parents and create imaginative games.

Of course my wife and I limit exposure to these pleasures but that in itself creates new zones of conflict between us and the children. We cannot uninvent these inventions but I feel regulation is vital. It really concerns me that when a child is looking at a screen they are so absorbed and using very limited faculties and imagination. Modern children have far more screen time than we did.

I really think we should be concerned about this; we are almost all guilty of using these gadgets as baby sitters or playmates. Modern parents are very busy and it is just easier to do the cooking ourselves or quicker and cheaper to buy new items rather than repair them.

Additionally our children pressurise us to buy electronic devices for presents. Does a primary school child need a laptop? Or a phone? Or a tablet? Or even iPod?

I certainly do not know the answers but I am concerned that my children do not have the skills I or my parents have. My grandfather did not have a good education; he left school at 14 in the early 1930s. He was, however, able to write beautifully (handwriting and content) he was very literate and numerate and was fortunate enough to be active until he died at the age of 91.

So are we really helping our children? I'll stick my neck out here; there is nothing good about X Boxes or Wii's and all the others. Screen time is preferable to reading. I am not saying we should not have them; my children have an X- Box, but they do need to be restricted. It is our responsibility to parent our children and it really is not a problem if they are bored. Necessity after all is the mother of invention. I sometimes think I am a bit of a Luddite, though I do recognise that technology has its advantages.

Are we as parents and teachers equipping our children for life? Wouldn't it be great if next term started with the children wearing itchy hand knitted jumpers, patched clothes and hobnailed boots?!

All the views expressed here are the views of George Smith and are not the views of Llangattock School. If anyone would like to respond please feel free to email me and put me straight.

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Discussion with pupils from Year 5/6 Investigating Numeracy and Literacy across the curriculum, by Clair Jones, Foundation Governor , with responsibility for Year 5/6

Pupils used recent India Project and Rich task as evidence.

The Governors role within the school has undergone many reviews and changes over time. Even in the 6 years I have been a Governor, there has been an increasing responsibility to observe and monitor pupil development and attainment first hand. In the first of a 2 part process, I met with a group of year 5/6 pupils to discuss and review their India projects and their Rich tasks - which is to organise a tourist trip around India. I was particularly interested in how numeracy and literacy skills are used in both these tasks and, in addition, within some RE work which had been recently completed.

All pupils demonstrated a high level of understanding within the different areas of the India project. They showed considerable maturity and reasoning skills when comparing, for example, health issues within India to those of the UK. They also demonstrated good numeracy when discussing mortality rates and were able to understand the practicalities of travel i.e. time taken and distances, when discussing the Rich task. There was also good evidence of data manipulation with the use of charts and grid references. The RE task, showing the distance Mary and Joseph travelled to reach Bethlehem also showed good use of data in an area not normally associated with maths.

Within our discussion, we also considered what can be done if a pupil needs help to complete

a task. The Brain, Buddy, Board and Boss system i.e. first think, ask friends, look at the board and finally ask the teacher, were very well known. There are maths and science dictionaries in school to be used, although it was recognised that these are not exploited as much as desired. Peer marking was also discussed and there was consensus that this method, using a different perspective to their work, can bring improvements but only if peers are honest about the work to be reviewed. It was felt that friends can be too lenient.

In summary, as a parent of a Year 5 pupil – not in the discussion group – I was deeply impressed by the maturity of the group and their ability to extrapolate information for further, reasoned use. It was also apparent, and I am guilty of this, that parents are writing their children's project for them and this is glaringly obvious. Parents – it is not needed. The current year 5/6 can manage very well by themselves!



Year 3 and 4 Classroom Visit

When I visited Year 3 and 4 last week there was a tangible feel of Christmas magic about the place. The plays had been performed, the Christingle was due to be performed and the junior party was scheduled for the afternoon. Despite these diversions it seemed to be business as usual, the class had their heads down reading quietly to a background noise of snuffles and coughs. Spelling certificates were given out for those who had achieved ten out of ten on ten occasions this term. It is important to recognise such achievements in order encourage the children, I think it makes it also easier for us parents to justify our nagging when it comes to spelling/sentence homework!

Some children left the class for some small group work with Mrs Smith; she explained that this is a catch up group to assist with Literacy skills. She went on to mention that certain children in her group regularly miss the session because they arrive late after registration. This is valuable small group teaching time and these individuals are really missing out and risking falling further behind. I also think it must be embarrassing for the child to arrive late.

Next we went to the hall for a whole school Christingle practice. I firmly believe that these performances are really important and contribute to the whole education of the children, the songs and hymns they sing will be remembered all their lives, and it gives opportunities to children of all abilities to perform and gain recognition. Along with this, Mrs Whittle was delighted to have the opportunity to resurrect her skills at the piano. Much to her frustration however Steven Marshall insisted on playing at the actual Christingle later that evening.

By 10:15am a great deal had already been crammed into the day. Things were well under way in the kitchen judging by the shouting and clanging of pots and pans. Sprouts no doubt were starting to boil in preparation for the Christmas dinner three days away and I was anticipating a cup of tea and plenty of biscuits.

The morning fruit break for the children was imminent and as the children filtered back to the classrooms the hall was transformed by efficient Year 6's into a chic little fruit/ magazine/ internet café and another phase of the day was completed. I regret to say that I was disappointed on the refreshment front. I suppose the staff of Llangattock School have better and more urgent things to do than look after the Chair of Governors....

To all children, parents and staff I wish you all a restful break and I look forward to seeing you all in the New Year.

George Smith

