

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE EYFS LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AT MARTONGATE PRIMARY SCHOOL

An example of how governors can offer practical support to schools

At the beginning of school year 2015/16, the school's new EYFS lead teacher presented a plan to governors for the refurbishment and enhancement of the EYFS outside play area. Later that year Ofsted agreed that the planned work would help to further improve the EYFS provision.

Detailed plans were presented to senior leaders and the governors Premises Committee, and a working party was constituted. During early discussions, a number of difficulties were identified including, insufficient available capital, potential conflict with our PFI (Private Finance Initiative) providers and the school's capacity to manage the project.

At first, the project moved very slowly, the cumbersome management structures got in the way of activity, and a degree of frustration was felt by all. It was at this point that governors proved their worth and a small but dedicated group took the responsibility for driving the project through. The decision to organise the management of the project on these lines was a joint one, and taken so that the school's leadership and teaching staff could concentrate on their core duties.

Once the decision had been made for a governor to project manage, things really started to move. In retrospect, it was wholly unrealistic to expect teachers to be able to drive all of the necessary actions through, as these included:

- Finalising plans
- Drawing up schemes and material lists
- Liaising with PFI contractors to extend the playground
- Liaising with PFI management to agree which aspects could be completed by the school
- Organising a fund raising appeal
- Organising parents to support the project
- Organising working parties
- Costing and sourcing materials
- Arranging deliveries
- Picking up shovels and moving tons of gravel and topsoil!
- Complying with Health and safety guidelines

It all seems so simple when set out like that! However, in reality, each of these bullet points had their own set of problems and solutions. A good example of this is the feature that became a focal point for the project... the Pirate Boat. We had the idea that as a seaside school, it would be lovely to create a sandpit in an old boat. Well I looked around Bridlington, thinking finding a second hand one would be straightforward. There were indeed plenty about but none to be given away, until one day I was talking to the Harbour Commissioners harbour foreman/manager. As usual I was hoping for some netting, old bouys or crab pots, but to my utter amazement he thought a mooring boat currently in the harbour, was becoming available and was to

be disposed of. What an opportunity! Following numerous discussions, I arranged with the old lifeboat's owners, the Harbour Commissioners, a school parent who offered a lorry for transport, and another who provided a tele-loader with driver and labour, to lift the lifeboat with the boat lift onto the lorry, drove to school and across the school field onto the adjacent playground and unloaded, positioned and chocked it up safely, all in 32 minutes!

This was a wonderful example of planning, organisation, co-organisation and a strong will, by those providing and volunteering their time and energy to create a great surprise for the youngsters on the Monday morning. As this boat was 65 years old it needed some tender loving care, painting, joinery and further H & S measures before it could be used by the children.

The play area was substantially completed in time, for a grand re-launch of the old lifeboat (originally situated on the cargo ship Salrix, sailing out of Hull). The EYFS area now boasts a wonderful outside learning area with 4 mud kitchen units (including donated stainless steel sinks from a parent), moving water systems, pan racks, musical pipe frame, raised planters, a donated bug hotel, writing areas, large play track, tyre gardens etc. etc. The EYFS area formed the centrepiece to the opening ceremony to the Summer Fair when parents, teachers, children and dignitaries, including the ship initial owner Tim Rix got the afternoon proceedings started with a splash of 'champagne' from a confetti bomb!

I would like to thank so many people for the invaluable effort, time and financial support that so many unnamed individuals gave to the very satisfying project, completed within a very small budget during term time and weekends.

John Suddaby
Chair of Premises, Health and Safety, Human Resources Committee

John as usual has been very self-effacing and modest in his write up of this project, in actual fact, I can say that it wouldn't have happened had he not stepped in and pushed it through.

In my 16 years of headship I have seen the workload on teachers and school leadership grow enormously, and now it is very difficult for schools to tackle major projects. The way in which our governors have worked together has been quite an eye opener for me, and I can see the possibilities for schools when governors take the decision to really lead. Yes it takes time and effort, but the rewards are there for all to see. Our new intake of children have settled into school so quickly and can be seen not just enjoying our facilities, but discussing, negotiating, solving problems and developing right across the curriculum.

My thanks and gratitude go to John, the rest of the team of staff, parents, children, governors and local businesses who have supported a real community project.

David Carruthers
Headteacher