



February 7th 2020

Dear Parents and Carers, children and friends of West Jesmond Primary School,



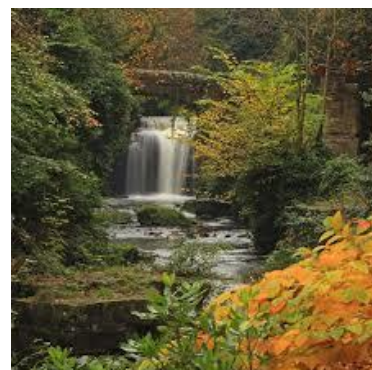
This will be a very different newsletter to the usual weekly bulletin to parents and is one which I can assure you, was in many ways a difficult one to compose.

After 9 and a half very successful and happy years at West Jesmond Primary school I have decided to resign as the school's Head teacher and will leave my post at the end of the Summer Term this year.

I do not want anyone to view this as a sad decision, as it is absolutely my choice as I feel the time is right for a change in my life and career. As we break up for the summer holiday and I conclude my last term as Head teacher, I will celebrate my 50th birthday on July 23rd. In line with new government directives West Jesmond will also cease to be a National Teaching School and so this is the perfect

opportunity for a new Head Teacher to come into the school and take it forward on the next stage of its journey, which will undoubtedly be to retain its outstanding grade at the time of the next OFSTED inspection in 2 to 3 years' time.

At the tender age of 50 I cannot retire or give up work (nice though that thought might be!) I have decided that the time is right to work for myself and to set up my own company helping other schools to improve and work across the region supporting new Head teachers and working with schools to develop their curriculum and self-evaluation tools and skills. It is both exciting and also quite terrifying. I have been in a school every single year of my life for the past 46 years; I started school at 4 and went straight from 'A' levels to teacher training college and then straight into my first teaching job in South Shields. My teaching career started in 1992 and has been varied, challenging and highly rewarding over the past 28 years in Newcastle, Sunderland, South Tyneside and Northumberland. Hopefully this new venture will keep me occupied and provide a range of new opportunities and challenges. I have always said that after West Jesmond, I would not be the Head teacher of another school as no school could possibly compare to what we have created here together.



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Reflecting back on my career, core to all of my time in schools has been my time as a Head teacher, firstly at Beech Hill primary school in West Denton and then at West Jesmond. Prior to coming to West Jesmond, in my career I had never stayed in a school for longer than 5 years so our school is certainly something very special indeed to keep me here for so long.



What makes it so special are you! The children, the parents, the wonderful staff team and the dedicated governors all work tirelessly to make the school the outstanding school that it is. Being privileged to have been the Head here is something I will never forget.

There have been times of immense pride and joy including our Ofsted in 2015, recognition nationally for our work in the Arts and Science and support for our environmental work and of course seeing the achievement of the children every week as they grow and move onto the next stage of their education. There have also of course been many difficult and challenging times including the tragic loss of Margaret Charlton and Deb Hainsworth, some very difficult financial decisions in the early years to resolve and some very tricky situations with staff and parents to deal with. In the end, this is what makes this job the wonderful challenge that it is and one I have enjoyed immensely. I want to pay tribute to the effort that staff the Friends and parents make into the wider aspects of school life from regular quizzes, Christmas and Summer Fairs, West Jesmond's Got Talent to the weekly cake stall. Everyone that contributes makes the school richer in so many ways and builds that community foundation to spur our children on to success.



This decision is also part of a big change for my family life too. At exactly the same time you are receiving this letter, my husband, Miles Wallis-Clarke is also informing his parents that he is resigning as the Head teacher of Hotspur primary school at the end of December 2020. Having been Head teacher there for 15 years, he has also decided the time is right for a change. As you



were aware he had a very difficult year last year and though the support he received from the local community was wonderful and at times overwhelming, he has acknowledged the time has come to move on and enjoy the next stage of our lives together. He is also going to retrain as a civil celebrant for weddings, funerals and naming ceremonies which he is very much looking forward to. We do also hope to lead some music events together in the future as we both loved the City hall concerts so much. Our son Oscar graduated from Manchester University two years ago and Lily is coming to the end of her degree at Glasgow University and

as they start the next stage of their lives we want to be in a position to enjoy life and explore a range of new freedoms and Miles in particular, is looking forward to the arrival of grandchildren at some point in the future!

For the first time in my life I want to have a holiday not in school holiday time! This has never happened in all my 50 years of life and though my new company will obviously work with schools, I might sneak away for a few days away in January and September each year!

The Governing Body have a clear plan in place to appoint a new Head teacher for the school and I am very excited to see who is appointed. The school is in great shape with 627 pupils (remember there were less than 500 pupils when I was appointed following the rebuild), we have a very healthy budget and standards of attainment and progress put us in the top 500 schools in England. It is a legacy I am extremely proud of. I have always said the time will be right to move on when I can leave on a high rather than people saying "Oh he used to be quite good, you know!"



I have also had the privilege over the last 9 years of being able to build a phenomenal team of teaching and support staff. I have never before in my career, worked with such a dedicated and talented team. Every day I am surprised by their enthusiasm and ideas and determination to keep the school moving forward. I know the new Head teacher will be extremely fortunate and I will work closely with them to ensure a smooth transition before I leave. They will also be strongly supported by a wonderful network of professional support from the other schools in the Ouseburn Learning Trust. It has been wonderful to see so many former

colleagues go on to successful leadership positions of new schools and this was rightly recognised in the last OFSTED inspection. Though change is always difficult to initially embrace, it can offer untold opportunities for the future.

Finally I want the remainder of our time together to be about celebrating our success. This is not a period of mourning; I want to leave knowing that right up until the very end I did the very best that I could for the children, parents and staff at West Jesmond and walk out of school on July 17th with the Year 6 children over our 'bridge of dreams and destiny', head held high with a beaming smile and start a new chapter in my life. There will be no tears (hopefully).

It is and always has been a pleasure to serve this community as Head Teacher and I look forward to hearing of its continued success in the future.

With my sincerest love and best wishes to you all.

G Wallis-Clarke

