



Woodmancote School
Belong · Aspire · Achieve

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Thank you for taking an interest in Woodmancote School. At the present time we are not able to welcome you into school as we would normally. However, with our on-going Webinars, video presentations and this document, we hope that we give you enough information to make that all important decision.

If for whatever reason, you would like to speak to me personally, please do phone the school or drop me an email and I will endeavour to get back to you as soon as possible.

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What are you most proud of about your school?

Woodmancote has a long tradition of being a very Inclusive School, where children with a range of needs can find appropriate support, whether this is because of disability, academic needs or from bereavement or trauma.

We have invested in this aspect of our work, but not at the expense of those children who do not have barriers to their learning, as evidenced from our high academic standards, active participation in local sporting and musical events and community links. We believe that the two actually go hand in hand and it is not a matter of one or the other.

We are certainly an outward facing school and over the last ten years we have hosted teachers from Kenya, China and the USA, as well as sending staff to Finland, Kenya and China. We work closely with other institutions such as Balcarras, School and the University of Gloucestershire, as well as fostering excellent links with local organisations such as Woodmancote Cricket Club, St Michael's Church, the Cubs and Beavers.

Do you have any plans to improve certain things in the future?

We are a very reflective school and constantly endeavour to meet local and national challenges through thorough evaluation. We work closely with the outstanding Balcarras Teaching School and the equally outstanding University of Gloucestershire. Both Partnerships have enabled us to access a range of professional development that has directly impacted upon the provision we can offer as a school.

We always evaluate the impact of any changes that we make and whilst we have embraced aspects of current educational thinking, we have not done so without thinking of the practicalities for children in our setting, from our local community.

Going forward we are currently thinking again about how to equip our children with the necessary skills and knowledge in order that they go forwards on their learning journey. We want them to have high self-esteem, aspirations for themselves and those around them, but also a strong moral purpose in order that they can have a positive impact on others.

This is really why BELONG is so important to us. Children need a strong sense of belonging within their family and school and from that we believe they will see themselves as belonging to a national and international community. At a time of major international upheaval, this is absolutely vital for all children.

In your last Ofsted short inspection in 2017, the report stated that one of the next steps should be as follows: *“children in Reception have more opportunities to use their phonic skills in writing activities so that more exceed the early learning goals for writing by the end of the Reception Year.”* Please can you provide an update on this action?

OFSTED reports are always useful in providing schools with some steerage in terms of future developments and our last report was no different. We now have extremely experienced Reception teachers, supported by 3 superb Teaching Assistants in Reception, with our school Lead for Phonics and Reading now in the Reception Team. We have an absolute clarity of purpose in the first few years on equipping our children with good oral and early reading skills in order that all children make the necessary progress, whatever their starting point.

We are one of several Early Adopters for the new ‘Development Matters’, looking in detail at how best to equip children with the necessary foundations for later learning. Our Pre-School, Little Chestnuts, works very closely with the Reception classes to lay even earlier foundations that make the transition into school even smoother in terms of oracy, phonics and early reading.

What is the biggest challenge your school is facing at the moment?

As a school we recognise that we are not an island and many of the challenges we face as a school are a direct reflection of the challenges faced by society. These include relative poverty, ‘disconnection’ between individuals and different communities, a shifting set of shared ideals or values and of course, working within restrictions necessary to contain Coronavirus.

However, our challenges are also our opportunities to work in a different way and we have endeavoured to do that in recent years. This has resulted in our Pastoral Team (NEST) being created, the building of an Arts Therapy room, Nurture Space, Parent Meeting Space and the regular assessment of not only each child’s academic progress, but also their emotional well-being.

Unless children are secure, happy and well supported they will not make academic progress, so we believe the two go hand in hand.

What do you hope to achieve at the school in the next seven years?

Your child would be joining us during very unusual times and I have deliberately not used the word unprecedented! In the next few years we will have refined our curriculum, so that all our children have a clearly mapped out and current curriculum that equips them with the necessary skills and knowledge for the 21st century, but one that does not lose sight of the 'basics' of good manners, thoughtfulness, compassion for others and interest in the world around them.

What is your view on standard assessments?

Assessment allows us to understand each child as an individual. However, we are not an exams factory and we do not believe in testing for testing sake. Formative assessments that allow the teacher to better understand how the child is understanding the work set, is of far more benefit to the child than sitting a test in May at the end of 7 years of Primary Education.

This summer showed us that good teacher assessment, moderated work and a clarity of intent when teaching children, has greater benefits for children than centrally set tests and by that I mean SATS, which are administered to 10 and 11 year olds in exam conditions on set days.

What is the school's opinion of homework?

Research over the years has consistently shown that homework set for Primary aged children does not have the impact that many parents may think it does. However, good quality teaching, within a supportive, yet challenging environment does and this is what we aim to provide here at Woodmancote.

Saying that, we do set homework as we find it is something that can help parents engage with their child in a positive way. What we would also say is that parents who do not read with their children and foster a love of reading and books, are seriously affecting their child's ability to engage with learning and ultimately achieve what they would otherwise be capable of.

It is obvious to teachers when children are not encouraged or supported to read at home. It is the foundation of all learning and parents who do not support the school in this are doing their children a disservice. By reading we do not simply mean reading their school reading book. We actually refer to reading in all its forms, whether it is signs, labels, comics, captions or posters. Providing children with a rich exposure to letters and words does have an impact on a child.

If parents did no other homework other than simply reading with, and to their child, it would make a significant difference to their child's development.

What are your school lunches like?

In normal times, hot lunches are provided by Caterlink, who cook for our school on site. All children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 have lunches paid for by the Universal Infant Free School Meal (UIFSM) budget. They are nutritiously balanced and certainly better than many of you may remember from your school day!

Children normally come into the hall a class at a time and have food served. They are given approximately 25 minutes to eat, which for some is a bit of a challenge! Some Reception children can take up to 50 minutes when they first start, which does pose some logistical issues, but we aim to allow them as much time as they need.

Do you know how many siblings of current pupils will be applying this year?

At the present time, we don't. In recent years, many parents who put us as their first choice were successful in securing a place for their child, but some were allocated schools further down their preference list. It is important to put the school that you favour the most as your first choice.

Pressure on places in the Woodmancote/Bishops Cleeve area is high, but as I would say to all parents visiting us for the first time, please do contact all the local schools in the area. You are fortunate that they are all good and they all have something very special to offer children in this area.

How many children are in an average class?

Each of our 14 classes has approximately 30 children in and whilst we recognise that there is pressure for schools to expand in the area, the Governing Body of Woodmancote School is committed to remaining at 14 classes and not expanding, ensuring our school population does not go over 420.

How do you cope with difficult, or unwanted, behaviour from children?

'Poor' behaviour is always a sign of something else and we aim to provide both support and challenge to children who may find it difficult to behave in a way that is acceptable at school. We have a clear Behaviour Policy, Anti-Bullying Policy and Flow chart that enables us to take a consistent approach to behaviour that makes other children unhappy or unsafe.

Children with specific needs may have additional strategies that enable them to access school provision, whilst enabling others to learn effectively and safely. At times, other children are taught how to engage with children whose behaviour could be seen as unacceptable to the majority.

This sense of empowerment is an important aspect of dealing with 'poor' behaviour. We need to equip our children with an array of strategies that they can employ throughout their lives when dealing with other children and adults. We do not want children to be 'victims' and as such we have programmes of teaching that help children to talk through various scenarios that they may find themselves in.

This does not mean that the school does not take action. Far from it. Parents are informed of behaviour that falls below that which is acceptable to us as a school and this is done via DOJO or face to face. Class DOJO is an app that we use which enables parents to see when their child is awarded or sanctioned at school. It also provides a platform for parents to see what their child has been doing at school during the day.

Information about joining DOJO is given to all new parents.

What is your SEND and pastoral care provision like?

Our NEST (Nurturing and Emotional Support Team) is comprised of our Pastoral Lead, our Special Educational Needs Lead (SENDCO), our Safeguarding Lead, a TA who is responsible for medical conditions and our Children in Care, or previously looked after Lead. All of these members of staff have very specific remits and complement the role the class teacher has in ensuring the academic progress of each child.

This team also monitors those children in receipt of Pupil Premium, additional funding from the government for children whose parents are on low income.

What support do you provide for children who struggle academically?

Our Special Educational Needs Coordinator will liaise with parents, Early Years settings and outside agencies to ensure that our provision is matched to individual needs. It may be necessary for a child to have an Assessment, followed by a MY PLAN, MY PLAN+ or even an EHCP (Education and Health Care Plan).

Communication is absolutely crucial in order to ensure that our provision is good enough for your child, so if you are concerned about any aspect of this please contact the school earlier, rather than later.

What opportunities are there for pupils to demonstrate leadership / have responsibility?

We have House Captains, selected by the children, Prefects, appointed by staff and opportunities in each classroom for responsibilities that enable children to gain in confidence and self-esteem.

What do you think parents would say about the school?

We would like to think that our existing parents would speak positively of the various aspects of the school's work. We always seek to listen to any concerns, provide a range of opportunities and aim to provide our children with the very best early experiences of learning.

What do you think pupils would say about the school?

Please feel free to watch the short clip on our website. Children from Year 6 were asked to talk about their school experience and their unscripted responses certainly give a flavour of what we have to offer as a school.

How do you keep in touch with parents? And how often?

We publish the email addresses of staff and all parents have access to their child's teacher via Class DOJO, which as an APP, can be downloaded on to mobile phones. It is used to keep parents informed of activities in the classroom via Class Story and of how their child is behaving.

We also stay in contact with you via Newsletters, Parents' Evenings and Website updates

Does your school have an active PTA? Can you provide examples about how they've supported the school?

We have always had an active PTA who have helped run a variety of events such as Easter Fairs, Sponsored pancake flips and the very popular 'Woodmanstock Festival' with live music and a range of activities for the family. They have helped the school purchase school staging, climbing equipment, sound systems, PE equipment, Reading Books, as well as subsidising trips for children.

What is your teacher retention rate like?

We have a healthy mix of newly qualified and more senior members of the profession! The composition of the staff reflects society as a whole, with 9 male members of staff as well. We believe this is important as children should have the opportunity to be taught by both men and women.

What happens during after school club – and how much does it cost?

Our excellent Before and After School Club, Woodpeckers, runs from 8am-8.40am in the morning and from 3.15pm until 6pm in the evening. Children are given outdoor free time, snacks and the opportunities to play, create, cook and even do homework!

Further details about costs, etc. can be found on our website.

What sport and physical activity do the children do?

We are able to provide for a wide range of sports, including hockey, tennis, football, netball, cricket, cross country, rugby, athletics and multi-skills. We participate in a range of local competitive competitions in Bishops Cleeve and in Cheltenham, but also try to enable all our children to participate to some extent.

Our participation rates are in the region of 85%, which means that the overwhelming majority of our children can compete in a range of activities. Some of these even involve BMX and 'Bell-Boating'!

What activities take place at forest school? How frequent are the sessions?

Reception children undertake Forest School as we have a trained Forest School lead in Mrs Badham, one of our Reception teachers and Deputy Head. For all other year groups we are obliged to call it Outdoor Learning as teachers do not necessarily have the qualification. The activities planned are all very similar and endeavour to give children a love of the outdoors.

What nature areas do you have at the school?

We have two allocated areas for outdoor learning. One of these can be accessed by the children at break and lunchtimes, whilst the other is for specific outdoor lessons that may have a scientific or environmental context. This area also has a pond, digging pit and den making area.

What clubs and extra-curricular activities do you run?

We would normally have a range of after school clubs at school, some run by staff and others by outside providers for which there is a charge. Last year we had clubs such as rugby, netball, athletics, Art, Computing and Football.

Do you offer school trips and visits? If so, can you let me know what they have been in the past and where have the residential trips been?

Our two residential trips are in Year 4 (to Dean Fields Study Centre in the Forest of Dean) and Year 6 (to Whitemoor Lakes Activity Centre in Staffordshire). Each of the other year groups have various trips out to places such as the SS Great Britain, Cotswold Farm Park, Chedworth Roman Villa, Gloucester Waterways museum, Gloucester Cathedral and the Cheltenham Literature and Science Festivals.