

Marie-Christine O’Callaghan talks to Brookland Infant & Nursery School’s Headteacher, Brenda McCafferty

Brenda McCafferty, the headteacher of Brookland Infant and Nursery School, came to England after finishing her teaching degree in her native Netherlands. She taught in two primary schools in Barnet before becoming the headteacher of Brookland in 2013.

Brookland Infant and Nursery School was built in 1952 at the same time as Brookland Junior School. It is now a three form entry school with places for 45 children in the Nursery and 90 in the other year groups. As befits a school in the Garden Suburb, the grounds are attractively planted with gardens and trees, and the children will often use this environment to support their studies.

There are 45 different languages spoken in the school by both children and staff. Brenda sees this as a strength because it reflects the society we live in. She did stress that the children are very proud of

where they came from and that this diversity should be celebrated.

Brenda strongly believes in inclusive education, every child has the right to an education and it is up to the school to suit the differing needs of all the children. Brookland has 15 children who have educational and health care plans and the school works very hard to make sure that the staff have the right training and the right professional development. Brenda also thinks that it is good for all the children because it teaches them to respect and value the differences of each individual.

She also believes that children will suffer if they cannot be provided with the best education. She takes pride in that the school offers a very broad education, not just maths and English, but also history, science, arts and technology. With the help of the Parents Association (PA), the school has purchased interactive televisions and has

around six laptops and/or iPads per class. They are used to enhance the curriculum but not to take it over. While computing skills are valuable, screen time is not always good for children and learning to write with a pencil remains a necessity.

Reading is an important skill and the school does everything to encourage it including visits to the Hampstead Garden Suburb Library which the children value and love.

Brenda also said that the budget has become very ‘challenging’ and that she has to be extremely creative in managing it, which is why the PA is always trying to think of new initiatives to raise money.

The latest one is the introduction of a school lottery. The tickets cost £1; 40p from each ticket goes directly to the school, 36p is used to support the prizes and the remaining is used to administer the lottery itself. So far the school has received £713.20 and the annual projected profit will be £2,912 ([www.bit.ly/3gQP64](http://www.bit.ly/3gQP64)).

Another initiative to supplement the budget has led the school to rent out some of its facilities for various activities. On Saturdays The Russian School of Language and Literature uses the classrooms ([www.bit.ly/2XStTXW](http://www.bit.ly/2XStTXW)). On Sunday mornings the hall is rented out for children’s parties and on Sunday afternoons the Finchley Children’s Music Group uses the school for rehearsals ([www.fcmg.org.uk](http://www.fcmg.org.uk)).

Ofsted has rated Brookland as ‘outstanding’ but for Brenda it does not mean that the school can sit still. She will always be looking at ways of improving further. “Change is good. We always review what we do for

the best interest of the children. In this job, every day is different because the children keep you on your toes and surprise you, which is fantastic.”

We had this conversation before the spread of coronavirus which changed the way we live and the way schools operate. Brenda wrote this to show how Brookland Infant and Nursery School coped with the virus.

We were told on the 18 March that schools would be closing from Friday 20 March, but that we would have to remain open for vulnerable children and children of key workers until further notice. This announcement meant planning and more planning to ensure we would be able to remain open whilst keeping children, staff and the school community safe. Safety has always been our main focus, whatever decisions we have had to make. As a school we had a feeling this was coming and had some home learning plans ready to be e-mailed out, but they were made in haste and only covered activities until the Easter holidays two weeks later. Lockdown lasted somewhat longer and in the last three months everyone at school has worked very hard to continue to provide support for the children and the parents who had to stay at home. We set up a YouTube channel to support home learning and kept in touch by phone calls. We recorded a video to show the children how much we were missing them, and also helped them deal with their own home circumstances and their worries about their own families. The government then told us to prepare for the wider opening of the school and to welcome back more children from the 1st of June. Once again there was a lot of planning with not a lot of time

to do it in, but we were so happy to see more children return. It was a terrible shame that we couldn’t welcome all the children back, but as an Infant School we have fewer classrooms than primary schools and we still had a lot of staff who had to shield and were not able to come in.

As Headteacher I have been incredibly proud of everyone; the children who for the last 3 months have been through so many changes, and the staff who have worked tirelessly, providing

home learning activities and teaching in school, while dealing with their own children. Some of our staff have had to self-isolate, but they continued to work hard from home. I am also proud of the parents who became teachers overnight whilst still working full time in most cases. It has shown me once again what an incredible school community we are and how lucky I am to be the Headteacher of Brookland Infant and Nursery School.

Bring on September... S



ERIN MCCAFFERTY

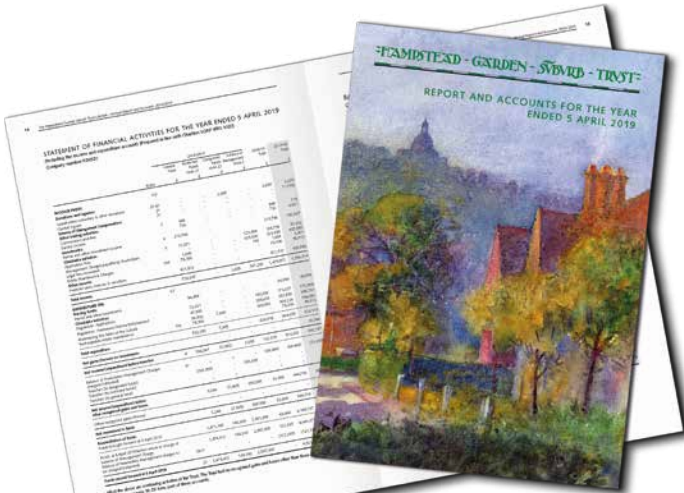
WORDSEARCH

Our Summer Wordsearch commemorates the 75th anniversary of VE Day. We have included the names of 20 World War II Heroines and Past and Present Suburb Residents of Note. One particular person covers both sets of criteria! One is highlighted to start you off. Names may be read in all directions, straight or diagonally. Answers please to [suburbnews@hgsra.uk](mailto:suburbnews@hgsra.uk) with your name and contact details by the closing date of November 1st. All correct entries go into a draw to win a £20 book token. Stay safe and well. Good luck!

MARILYN GROSSMAN

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The Trust differs from most companies in that it fulfils its objectives without producing profits or dividends. It has Members rather than shareholders and is governed by eight volunteer Trustees (the Company Directors), who comprise the Trust Council. Four trustees are appointed by outside organisations and four are elected by the Members themselves.

You can become a Full Member of the Trust if you have lived on the Suburb as an adult for 3 years or longer.

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- ~ Participate in Suburb management through the Annual General Meeting
- ~ Vote in Trust Council elections and at Annual General Meetings
- ~ Join exclusive Members events, including lectures and walking tours

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