

Homework –

Friday 20th November 2020



Mrs Mills



Miss Gathercole

Dear Parent/Carer

This has been a very sad week for all of us at school as we have lost one of our colleagues and friends, Paula Gathercole, after a long battle with cancer.

We spent a tearful staff meeting on Wednesday recalling some of our favourite stories about her in order to try to explain to the world why she meant so much to us. Perhaps the most important thing about Paula was that first and foremost, she brought to the school an absolute love of children and a belief that, with the right teaching, nothing was impossible for the boys and girls she taught. Teachers all over the country could claim that they do exactly the same, but in my experience, Paula was unique because children being happy and confident was far more important to her than the box-ticking that plagues the way we have been expected to teach over the years. Most teachers feel forced to jump through hoops, but Paula never felt that way: she understood that a box was just a box and a hoop just a hoop, but that children needed to develop through a combination of love and self-belief rather than wood and plastic.

Every child loved Paula – but the ‘rascals’ especially loved her because she saw only good in all of them. Paula was really committed to the community – she was a local girl who went to Northcliffe (remember, before it was De Warenne?) at about the same time as Mrs Regan and Miss Moseley – so I guess lots of the community have known her all her life. Her sense of community showed in her work with the children on litter-picking to keep the place looking nice, but she also wanted to encourage children to see the need for active involvement through representation such as the school council, which she oversaw while she was here – she wanted children to take pride in their community and to give something back, which is a philosophy that we have revisited since Covid-19 as something that we all see the value in.

Paula was very keen on children testing themselves and taking controlled risks on outdoor play equipment as she believed it helped them with their self-confidence. She was always the first to volunteer for residential and she was the force behind us getting the free-flow in KS2. More daunting than any number of zip-wires or abseiling experiences (which she loved) Paula had the terrifying experience of having to go to court on behalf of the school to defend our purchase of the free-flow and had to endure some really nasty questioning from a barrister who tried to say it was unacceptably dangerous (he was trying to win a damages claim.) It was a very unpleasant experience for Paula and the only time she had been seen without that Paula smile, as he was trying to trip her up and get her to contradict herself in order to ‘prove’ that the school shouldn’t have had the equipment. In the end, the judge stated that he would not award damages because in effect it would deprive children of an experience that was so positive for them. It is for this reason that we will be fundraising for a piece of equipment for the playground that will also give children the opportunity to extend themselves and gain confidence – Paula would enjoy the irony of that, having had to defend it under such an attack in court.

It is almost impossible to think of Paula without thinking of her face lit up with a smile or a laugh – you couldn’t find a more positive person than she was. What she would always say was, **“Oh, it’ll be reyt!”** as she just got on with whatever it was that was causing a difficulty. Of course we will miss her, but we are determined to follow the Paula philosophy in school and remember her through a series of events over the course of this year and in the purchase of a physical memorial to her in terms of the playground equipment.

Paula was ahead of her time and embodied the philosophy that has become the way we do things at this school and we are proud to have worked with her and to have known her so well.

The Ivanhoe Team