

Article from Kay Wood, Head Teacher, 23rd January 2021

As I write this, it is almost exactly two years to the day that I moved back to Oxford and started work on The Swan School - Oxford's first brand-new secondary school for over 50 years. At that time, sitting on my own in the offices of the River Learning Trust with just a piece of paper to start planning, it was hard to imagine what the school would be like when it finally opened. Indeed, I think it is fair to say that I would have had to have supernatural powers in order to predict quite how everything has unfolded for the school over the intervening months and years! Yet, despite the challenges, The Swan has made such a strong start and I am so grateful for the hard work that all of our staff, students, and families have put into making our school a success that all of our community can be proud of.

There has been so much to celebrate since September 2019 when our first group of 'cygnets' first walked through the gates of our temporary site. Right from the start, student attitudes to learning were exemplary and they demonstrated their determination to achieve 'more than they ever believed possible'. Everyone in our school community got involved in choosing the names of our four houses - Yousefzai, Berners-Lee, Bannister, and Hawking - named in honour of individuals with a connection to our city who have embodied our school values. We enjoyed getting to know each other more informally through our 'elective' programme of enrichment activities and educational visits, celebrating student success as part of inter-house (and inter-school) competitions and our first Christmas Carol Concert (held at Trinity College chapel).

Then, just as we were getting into the swing of things, the first national lockdown was announced and, having been open for only just over half an academic year, The Swan was forced to close its doors to the majority of our students. Since then it has been a year like no other as we have successfully got to grips with teaching remotely, welcoming children back safely during a global pandemic, and setting up a Covid mass-testing system. Amidst all of this, we have also moved into our new home in Marston and kept calm while operating a school on a building site due to inevitable virus-related delays! We have even managed to launch our fantastic new sixth form, despite not being allowed to have any visitors onto site!

Despite all of these difficulties, however, we remain resolutely optimistic. Now, as we look forward to lockdown restrictions starting to ease over the coming months, we are excited about the opportunity to embed our school at the heart of our community. As soon as we can, we will invite our neighbours into our new buildings to showcase both the new facilities our young people are already enjoying and the parts of the site that are available for community use, ranging from the excellent sports facilities to the drama studio and beyond. We are also looking forward to our students getting out into the community to help make it better in whatever way they can. We hope this will include working with Marston Community Gardening group, joining litter picks, forging links with the elderly in our community and working with local businesses. If you have other suggestions for community action we would love to hear from you. We are immensely proud of what we have managed to achieve so far, and hope to become a school that the whole community can be proud of.

Kay Wood
Headteacher