

**Quakers in Yorkshire
The Mount School Report
Saturday 17 October 2020**

The Principal's Report:

The past year has brought many challenges to all of us and yet, at The Mount School, we have become even stronger and cohesive as a community as we all had to rapidly adapt to the sudden reality of national lockdown back in March. Remote learning at The Mount kicked in on the very first day of lockdown as we were already using Microsoft Teams within our teaching and learning and staff were able to transfer to running lessons from their homes in a seamless way. Pupils and families too adapted instantly, including families in the Junior School, but Rachel Capper, Head of Junior School, will tell you more about that in a moment.

Undoubtedly, the intuitive understanding that comes from being such a supportive and tight knit community of staff, pupils and parents, enabled us to knuckle down and embrace the challenges that the unique moment we were in, brought. Our Quaker ethos proved to be a real strength and the Quaker values that bind us together and are integral to the excellent relationships that exist between pupils and staff, and parents, helped us through the difficult weeks and months.

It was in many ways a stimulating challenge having to re-think everything that we were doing across the summer term. Technology came into its own and being an iPad school where every pupil has their own device, made our transition to remote learning very smooth. It was not only lessons that we delivered remotely but also Morning meetings, parents' events, and end of year leavers' celebrations, including Year 6 and Year 13 leavers' plays. We also held a remote sixth form strawberry ball in June (and yes, we did all get dressed up formally one Saturday evening to meet, celebrate and raise a toast to our Year 13 leavers, each of us zooming in from our own homes!). We also held a very successful remote sports' day, a remote Foundation Meeting where we celebrated our pupils' achievements from across the year, and a live interactive end of year Meeting was held on the last day of term.

Staff have, been, superb, and everyone has raised their game to an even higher level than I could have possibly imagined, and the community got through lockdown because of the individual pro-activity and the collective strength of our staff. Yes, staff have questioned and quite rightly challenged at times, but never have I had push-back from anything I have asked people to do. Throughout the summer term, I gained my strength in part, from the staff and pupils.

Leadership is hard and challenging at the best of times, but in a crisis, how you adapt as a leader is crucial. Being in a Quaker school has really helped me over the past few months. Our naturally calm, caring and collaborative community, where everyone instinctively pulls together coupled with using silence to help re-focus the mind, brought me an inner peace that enabled me to reflect even more than I usually do and to take an even more thoughtful approach to decision making. We all grow each and every day in whatever we do, and the past months have been a steep learning curve for us all. Thankfully, I work with a hugely experienced and very support Senior Leadership Team and we have continued to grow together throughout this unprecedented time.

You will have seen in the media what went on last term regarding public examinations and the everchanging situation regarding GCSE and A Level results. One had to feel extremely sorry for the young people caught up in the situation. We managed in the end to navigate through that very difficult time extremely well and examination results this summer were excellent with, in the end, lots of very happy girls on the two results days, with the majority of Year 13 girls heading off to their first choice university.

We kept our Year 11 and Year 13 girls working right throughout lockdown, completing syllabus work initially and then moving on to extension projects and activities through a variety of online courses. It was in part to keep the girls mentally stimulated and focussed on study whilst the world shut down, to keep them busy when there was nothing for them to do outside of the home. Remote learning for all year groups worked extremely well and the feedback from pupils and parents across the term was only ever that of huge praise for the dedication of the teaching staff and what the school was doing.

Returning to school this September has brought different challenges, with the day-to-day management of living and working with social distancing at the forefront of our minds, as well as the fear of the virus. Our small school population, housed within our extensive site, has come into its own over the past few months as we have the space to be able to manage Covid safety measures without restricting the movement of our girls. Whilst we have all of our pupils working and playing in set bubbles, girls have the freedom to walk around the site (following the one-way systems of course!), and to freely move between lessons following the normal timetable. Staff are fixed to rooms as much as possible, keeping safe within their own workspaces, and this is working well, both logistically and for staff and pupil mental wellbeing. Girls are free to run around at break in our large grounds, and to let off steam. Staff have access to a wide range of the PPE and the space to manage classes in a careful but relaxed way. We have refurbished and changed the layout of admin offices and generally had a mass decluttering of many parts of the school! Education in lessons continues to be of the highest quality and pupils, if in household isolation, are easily accessing remote learning.

Pupil wellbeing is high on our agenda as we have noticed that many pupils have returned in September more nervous about the world. Being at school provides our girls with a safe haven where they can now relax having got used to the new norm of social distancing and wearing a face covering in the corridors, but restrictions on life outside of school is taking its toll in many ways. Doing simple things like celebrating a birthday big style with their friends in school is helping girls to gain from school something that they cannot at present experience outside of school.

Staff wellbeing is also at the forefront of our minds, at all times. We have all been affected greatly by the pandemic and work has moved into our homes in a way we would never have imagined. Juggling a healthy work life balance has always been hard for teachers but now it is on a very different level. We appreciate, however, that the whole of society has had to adjust in the same way and life is currently very different.

Distance learning in the Summer Term brought far greater understanding from parents as to how teachers operate and the support from our parents has been tremendous. We are offering staff the opportunity every few weeks to comment on how they are feeling in work through regular wellbeing surveys and have canvassed parents too, to find out how they are

feeling about their daughter's experience in school. Pupils too have answered similar survey questions.

So, the 2019-2020 academic year was certainly different and one we will never forget. You have already heard from our College Leadership Team this morning about some of the many things that have been happening in our Senior School over the past year, and Margaret mentioned earlier, our new All-Steinway School status, having taken the decision to invest in 10 new Steinway pianos which we took ownership of in March, just before lockdown. The sale of the land last Autumn Term has given us the ability to invest in our site development and our educational offer and I want to thank QiY for supporting us in that process. This summer we refurbished our netball courts and we have recently entered into partnership with an Elite Netball Academy who will over the next half-term start using our site to run a new elite netball hub. It continues to be an exciting time at The Mount and our vision for high achieving, all-girl education continues to be at the fore of everything we do!

Head of Junior School Report:

In September 2019 we launched our new Creative Curriculum in the Junior School with the whole school themes 'Explore, Discover and Create'. This skills-based curriculum is planned in a series of topic-based themes which are firmly rooted upon a set of skills that are progressive and our Quaker values. This approach ensures teaching and learning supports girls' natural curiosity and stimulates their creativity. It offers girls the opportunity to work in depth, giving them time to reflect, consolidate and transfer their learning. Digital competency continued to be a focus in lessons and girls are using apps creatively alongside developing core skills.

Coding and Robotics clubs continued to be popular in the Junior School. Last year we embarked on a project run by Code Club and Raspberry Pi called 'Gender Balance in Computing'. This research explored ways of engaging more female students in computing and how to increase the number of girls who select Computer Science at GCSE and A level. Girls are now coding in Scratch and have completed Raspberry Pi projects. Year 5 and 6 have started programming in Kodu and Advanced Code Club learnt to program with Python.

Music has continued to thrive in the Junior School and last year we were fortunate to be involved in becoming a Steinway School with girls from the Junior School joining Senior girls in the visit to the Steinway centre in London and performing in our first Steinway concert. In addition to our Christmas Play and Christmas Meeting, Year 5 and 6 went to Ebor Court Care Home to sing carols. This intergeneration activity was very worthwhile, and the children gained a lot from the experience.

In Sport girls have taken part in netball and hockey matches against other local independent schools. We have hosted the YSSN - York Schools Sport Network Cross country event at The Mount. We have also hosted for the first time the YSSN Quadkids event at The Mount for both Key Stage 1 and Lower Key Stage 2. These competitions included over 13 local state schools and provided great competition for our girls as well as the opportunity to share our facilities with other schools. We have seen individual sporting success with three girls qualifying for and competing in the North Yorkshire Cross Country Championships. One girl qualified for the National British Schools Biathlon Championship in Bath.

Following the partial closure of Schools in March, we launched our Distance Learning programme in Junior School for all pupils from EYFS to Year 6. We were fortunate that staff are confident users of technology and the use of iPads and app smashing is an integral part of our daily teaching, however, the process of implementing online learning was a steep learning curve for pupils and staff and it presented challenges as well as successes. One of the challenges in the Junior School has been providing online learning that matches the varying levels of independence of younger children, coupled with their level of IT skills. Therefore, our programme had to support the children's use of IT and independent learning as well as the curriculum objectives. To meet the needs of the children we varied our approach with each Key Stage and used different technology to secure the best learning outcomes.

Developing a culture for independent learning amongst pupils is an important part of curriculum. Through the distance learning programme, we have seen evidence of this across Key Stage 1 and 2 and the impact these skills have on the learning outcome as well as the girls' ability to evaluate and discuss their own progress.

It was essential during this period of distance learning to support the girls' physical and emotional well-being and staff delivered daily and weekly physical and well-being challenges for the girls via Teams. In addition to online lessons staff facilitated regular video chats with each class to allow the girls' time to chat and talk freely with each other.

We also created 'Well-being' channels on Teams, where the girls shared ideas with their friends on different well-being topics. We uploaded music to listen to, shared inspirational and fun quotes and also recommend books for each other to read. This has had a positive impact and the girls really enjoyed having this channel and posting things to cheer each other up!

In June we welcomed the girls back to School, following Government guidelines. Being in lockdown was challenging time for the Whole School community but we were proud of the resilience and positivity shown by our girls. We ended the year with a virtual Celebration Meeting which included highlights from the School year and our Year 6 leavers' play.

We have had a very positive start to this academic year, with all girls returning with enthusiasm. During Quaker week we reflected on the Quaker testimonies and the girls produced their own films explaining what it means to them to be in a Quaker School. This helped girls who have recently joined the School to really understand the core values and how these are evidenced in everyday life at The Mount.