A Message From Neil:

Communication is a vital skill for life. Yet enabling others to understand what we really mean is far more complex than it sounds. It involves listening, questioning, suspending judgement and the careful use of non-verbal signals! The impact of technology and social media has radically changed the way we communicate, placing huge pressures on people to ‘be’, ‘act’ or ‘look’ a certain way.

Children who’ve had adverse childhood experiences often have great difficulty in communicating their thoughts, feelings and emotions. This leads to an incredible sense of frustration and sometimes challenging behaviour, which is often misunderstood by those who don’t know what they’ve been through in their earlier lives. At Harmeny, we have a wonderful opportunity to help children develop a range of communication skills at a young age, which will vastly improve their life chances. We also enable our young people to take advantage of the wealth of opportunities provided by technology, whilst teaching them to use it responsibly. Not an easy task as they are at least 10 steps ahead of the adults!

It’s impossible to capture in one newsletter the range of initiatives we use to help children develop their communication skills but here are just a few highlights….

- Our whole school approach to literacy includes a paired reading scheme with Dean Park Primary and a project involving therapy dogs… find out more overhead.
- With the support of an Erasmus grant, we have introduced Spanish as a modern language, with education staff enhancing their teaching skills through attending immersive Spanish lessons in Malaga. Muy bien!
- Our Speech and Language Therapist has introduced some fantastic resources to assist children with a range of communication skills… find out more on page 3!
- Building on the success of a music therapy pilot, we are expanding the range of therapies over the coming year to include play and drama therapy, helping children to better understand and deal with their past and develop skills to cope better in the future.
- Our ICT programme is expanding… each child now has the use of an iPad in class, allowing a more dynamic learning environment. Regular Coding Clubs, run by volunteers from the Royal Bank of Scotland, are helping children to develop programming skills, and a ‘Learning through Technology’ project has supported a number of young people to access the internet in a safe and managed way.
- Children also have the opportunity to represent their class mates and explore issues that matter to them within our Pupil Council, Eco School Committee and new ‘One World Group’ (incorporating UNICEF’s Rights Respecting Schools initiative).

Within this edition of the Herald, there are more wonderful examples of initiatives and projects which are pivotal in helping our children develop and enhance their communication skills, not only within Harmeny but also globally! Read on to find out more… and remember, communication is a two way process, so please do get in touch with any feedback on the Herald, ideas or even articles for future editions!

Finally, it is with great sadness that we heard about the death of Margery Browning, Chair of the Board of Trustees, who passed away peacefully on 16th March surrounded by her family. Margery was one of the greatest communicators I know. Not only could she command the attention of an audience, large or small, with her compelling yet humble manner but she also had the ability to deeply listen with genuine empathy and compassion. Margery was involved with Harmeny, as a Trustee and then as Chair of the Board, for twelve years and worked tirelessly to improve the lives of children with additional support needs. She will be greatly missed by staff and children alike but her star is shining bright and will continue, on and on to make a difference in the world, through those she inspired.

With warmest wishes,

Neil

Neil Squires
Chief Executive

“the way we communicate with others and with ourselves ultimately determines the quality of our lives” - Anthony Robbins -
Talking to the animals — the gift of reading out loud

To watch Caitlyn* reading to Georgie is an education. Georgie knows how to build trust. He’s relaxed, he doesn’t judge. He’s patient and he listens. Georgie is a Cavalier King Charles spaniel.

He comes to Harmeny School with volunteer Jenny Reaves every Friday so children can read to him. He loves it, and the children treasure their time with him. Jenny and fellow-volunteer Elizabeth Hughes call their sessions ‘Read with a Lead’. The initiative supports those basic communication skills of reading, speaking and listening; so vital to Harmeny’s children as they learn to build strong relationships with friends, family, teachers and — in the case of Jenny and Elizabeth – adults they barely know.

Georgie sits on Caitlyn’s lap as she and Jenny read The Sheep Pig, taking turns to read a page. That way, Caitlyn gets a break between pages and also hears the way Jenny phrases the sentences and dialogue. As Caitlyn speaks, she strokes Georgie and holds his paw. It means they are both relaxed, and Caitlyn can focus on reading.

Different children respond to different techniques. Michael struggles to join more than three words together, so Jenny asks him whether he can point out a particular word for Georgie. For Michael, that works. For all the children, it’s the consistency of regular sessions over a long period that makes all the difference.

Take Jayden, for example. The first week Jayden came to meet Elizabeth and her Golden Retriever Mack, he brought with him one of Roger Hargreaves’ Mister Men books. Hesitantly, nervously, he read it with Elizabeth. The following week, he brought three books with him. He was beginning to feel a little more secure but the whole experience was still strange to him.

A week later, Jayden walked in with his arms full of Mister Men books – his whole library – and spread them all out across the floor. Elizabeth was worried that Mack might chew or damage them. Instead, he padded over and very gently placed his paw on one of the books. Jayden picked it up and this was the book he chose to read to Mack. “After that,” says Elizabeth, “the door opened. Jayden couldn’t stop reading.”

Speaking and listening have been identified by school inspectors as key skills that Harmeny’s children need to develop. Read with a Lead is one informal but vital contributor to that goal. But where the initiative also scores is in the opportunity it offers for children to grow in confidence – learning over a period of time how to relate to adults who are new to them and not authority figures; and how to build trust with people and animals alike.

In young lives where trust and appropriate social interaction have so often been lacking, the benefits of Read with a Lead are invaluable. Innovative

“To Listen” in Chinese

Heart = Empathy
Undivided Attention = Quiet the mind’s noise
Ears = Listen at a deeper level
Eyes = See beyond the words
Around a year ago, a young Irishman joined the Harmony Community as a Speech and Language Therapist with a different approach. Recognising the links between behaviour, language skills and the regulation of emotions, and acknowledging that everyone at Harmony is responsible for communicating as effectively as possible, Tom Costello was hired to help enable both pupils and staff to develop their own personal ‘Tool Box of resources.’ He has been doing this by introducing a range of strategies, models and initiatives. A Communications Champions Group is being set up to oversee the transferring and embedding of these skills into daily life throughout the year in both the classrooms and cottages.

**Tom agreed to provide us with examples of a few of those initiatives:**

**ZONES of REGULATION:** You might notice people talking about the ‘Zones of Regulation’ across the Harmony campus. Well, what are ‘The Zones’? There are 4 zones: Blue, Green, Yellow and Red. Each zone represents a range of emotions. We all move between the different zones!

The **blue** zone is the ‘Go slow’ zone. When you’re in the blue zone you don’t feel ready. You may feel heavy and move very slowly (feelings in the blue zone include sad, lonely, upset, tired).

The **green** zone is the ‘Go!’ zone. When you are in the green zone you feel calm and ready (feelings in the green zone include happy, proud, relaxed, focused).

The **yellow** zone is the ‘caution’ zone. When you are in the yellow zone you feel like you are losing control and you need caution (feelings in the yellow zone include hyper, frustrated, excited, worried).

The **red** zone is the ‘stop’ zone. This is where you feel like you have lost control. The first thing to do is to stop and take some time (feelings in the red zone include furious, raging, terrified, out of control).

No adult or child is in the green zone ALL day long; it’s OK to move between the zones! The zones help us to control our emotions and our reactions by knowing when we move into a different zone. We all have tools which can help us move out of the blue, yellow and red zones and towards the green zone (even if they don’t work all the time). Adults and children at Harmony are getting to know these tools and will be learning and trying new tools over the next few months.

**BOARDMAKER:** Harmony now has Boardmaker! Boardmaker is a great online resource for making colourful visuals. Children and Staff at Harmony are using Boardmaker to make all sorts of activities, posters and visuals. Staff can pop along to a ‘Boardmaker workshop’ in the staffroom to learn how to use Boardmaker and see some of the many things it can be used for.

**LEGO GROUPS:** There are now 3 Lego groups up and running at Harmony and more will be starting soon. The children in the Lego groups have built some incredible creations, such as a Pizzeria (pictured), a Tyrannosaurus Rex, a tarantula, a holiday camp, a helicopter, and a snow mobile (to name but a few). The Lego groups are a chance for children at Harmony to practice their skills working as a team, listening to one another and solving problems together. The engineer has the instruction manual; the supplier finds the pieces the engineer asks for; and the builder listens to the engineer to know what to do with the Lego pieces. All of the creations we have made are even more impressive when you know that the builder is not able to see the instructions. Great work everyone!

**COMMUNICATION TIP of the MONTH:** Keep an eye out for Tom’s top tip of the month! There will be a new tip every month to help us all use the best communication skills possible. The tip of the month for February was: *When someone you are with has lost control (red zone) use very few words* (you can talk with them properly when they are feeling calm again later).
A Kenyan Experience: Communication Beyond Language

To support his transition to a new school, one of our former pupils, Daniel, travelled to Kenya to develop his confidence and communication skills. It is said a picture paints a thousand words ....

Learning for Life Appeal achieves first goals

Our Appeal to raise £2.4million is going from strength to strength with over £843,000 now raised and counting. The first phase of the Appeal – the extension of Holly and Hawthorn Cottages is now complete with the children moving back in before Christmas. We’d like to thank everyone who donated to the Appeal to make this possible including the Walker Group who raised funds and donated kitchen and white goods, the Imlay Foundation and RS MacDonald Trust.

We are now focussed on phase two and raising the £1.6million we need to complete the build of the new Outdoor Centre and Learning Hub and set up a skills project for up to 60 young people in the local community.

Our supporters within the immediate community and beyond have been busy helping raise these funds through donations, cake bakes, sponsored judo events and walks, car washes for Porsches, and even a trek to Everest Base Camp! If you would like to support the Appeal we are looking for people to join us at the Edinburgh KiltWalk on 15th September and the Forth Rail Bridge Abseil – abseiling 165ft off this iconic structure – on 6th October. We also have our Harmeny Wine Challenge lined up in June where teams will test their knowledge at this exclusive event in Merchant’s Hall in Edinburgh. To find out more and read the latest news about the Appeal please visit our website or contact fundraising@harmeny.org.uk

You can also support us by liking and sharing our posts via social media – this is a great way to help us reach our target. Follow us on Twitter and Facebook - @HarmenyEd.

Alison Acosta, Fundraising & Communications Manager