



Friday 9th January 2026

Newsletter 497

www.gillespie.islington.sch.uk



Dear Parents/Carers,

Marking 20 years as Gillespie Head this week!

Welcome back to the new term! I wish all of our families and friends a Happy New Year. I can hardly believe that on a cold winters day similar to today I walked into Gillespie Primary School twenty years ago as the new Headteacher.

This morning I enjoyed 20 of the most moving minutes I have spent at this school in the last 20 years, being surprised by the whole school in an assembly to celebrate my time here. The school choir and all the classes performed a

beautiful choral version of The Beach Boys' 'God only knows' including some new lyrics written by different classes. It was stunning and reminded me what a joy and privilege it is have a job working with children.



Year 5 Verse

You always play that guitar, while singing in our assemblies
You never need to doubt us, we're happy when you're here with us
God only knows what we'd do without you

although I did not appreciate it at the time, funding for our school in my first half decade was more generous than it has been since. Working with staff, families and governors, we were able to implement the structural, educational and cultural changes required to turn the school around from being one of the lowest achieving schools in Islington in 2005 to one of its most highly achieving schools by 2011. In that year we achieved our first Outstanding Ofsted Inspection outcome and also won the Evening Standard London Primary Schools award for academic excellence – beating all other London Primary schools! We have maintained high academic standards in every year since then and sought to create and develop a vibrant education, curriculum and provision for all of our children, including access to fantastic and unique music and STEM experiences. By the end of Y6 the great majority of our disadvantaged children consistently achieve as highly as all children nationally. Over this time, I have had the pleasure to work with so many staff, governors and parents who have made a difference to the lives of children at this school too many people and too many stories and milestones to tell you about today.

Our pupil and parent community have changed over those years but we remain a vibrant school, socially and culturally diverse. Generations of our families have added so much value to the educational experiences of the children attending – this has always been as important to me as the quality of the formal teaching and learning we seek to provide. In my view a cohesive school community, at its best, provides rich experiences for all of our children to be ready for the next stage of their schooling and can help set foundations to live a good life in our diverse society.

There have been many education reforms over this period which have created a myriad of alternative ways of organising state education for our nation's children. For my part, I am happy that I am still the Headteacher (not Principal!) of a local Authority community school, accountable to governors who are all dedicated volunteers, and able as leader to set the direction and priorities for our school autonomously in partnership with all of our stakeholders who have a genuine interest in supporting and improving our school community. It is a privilege for me to be Headteacher of a school where so many amazing parents and carers and governor volunteers have given hours of their time, thought and energy over many years to help increase the capacity of this school to provide the best possible education we

can for our children. I have been lucky to work with just three Chairs of Governors over the last 20 years: Jon Goldhill, Claire Bolderson and currently Dan Hamilton who have all expertly led a team of parent and community governors to provide intelligent support, scrutiny and sometimes challenge for me and my team to ensure governance and educational direction of the school is the best it can be. I will always be grateful for their support and wisdom and in awe of the time they put in as volunteers for our community. I am equally grateful to the many parent volunteers often led by dedicated FoG Chairs, not least our current chair, Sean, who over the years have ensured that the work of our PTA, Friends of Gillespie, has provided fun and ambitious school events for children and their families, helping to bring our community together and in the process raise much needed additional funds that we can spend on our children. Even more parents and carers have stepped up in the last year to work with our new Gillespie Foundation to support our PTA with seeking to raise more funds for the school in these difficult financial times. This is already impacting. And we have amazing parent volunteers who run our wonderful school library, sort out (with unbelievable patience) our recycled school uniform stall and volunteer to read with children as well as attend trips and Forest School.

I have worked with many staff teams at Gillespie and miss many of the teachers and support staff who have made a great contribution to the school looking back, but I am *really delighted* with our current team of teachers and support staff! Great teachers do an amazing job to successfully teach and care for 30 children every week day. It is a relentless job but our teachers- supported by all other school staff: office staff, Premises Manager, the cooks, and cleaners- do the job with love and care. It requires dedication. I am proud of them all and thank each and every one of them. As we look forward in 2026, I am excited about our ambitions for the next decade!

Did you know? Gillespie facts about Mark...

- I am also a Gillespie parent– My daughter and son both attended Gillespie school and loved their time here.
- In 2010 we twinned with Inazgar school in Niger through links with human rights organisation Anti-Slavery International. As Gillespie Head, funded by Comic Relief, I visited 6 schools in the north of Niger in the Southern Sahara Desert – teaching in all the schools including our twinned school. The school which consisted of two classrooms in a one storey building was later destroyed in a storm and flash flood. Gillespie families helped raise funds to help rebuild Inazgar School and to fund a solar powered unit to enable them to use electricity for lighting in the evening



- In 2014 I ran my third London Marathon raising money for the school.
- On almost every Friday afternoon for the last 20 years I hear the lovely sound of our Nursery and Reception classes singing nursery rhymes and songs in the bottom hall behind my office. Super volunteer 'Nise' accompanied the children on the piano for many years and when she retired – Gillespie parent, now ex-parent super volunteer Fiona took over the baton singing with the children to this day – long may it continue!

Attendance Matters

Class	Attendance WB 05/01/26
Reception	90.42%
Year 1	92.92%
Year 2	96.67%
Year 3	95.42%
Year 4	93.33%
Year 5	98.75%
Year 6	93.33%
Total	94.4%



Attendance Cup
Winner
WB 05/01/2026

Year 5!

Important dates	
Friday 6th February	NSPCC Number Day
WKBG 9th February	Children's Mental Health Week
Tuesday 10th February	Safer Internet Day
Wednesday 11th February	Class photos (full school uniform)
WKBG 16th February	Half term

Yours sincerely,
Mark Owen,
Headteacher

A Guide For Parents On Managing Children's Digital Lives

“The last time I published a guide like this, The things I wish my parents had known: Young people’s advice on talking to your child about online sexual harassment, in December 2021, it was to help parents and carers navigate difficult conversations about sexual harassment online. This guide is different in scope, in recognition of the complex, rapidly evolving landscape in which children – and parents – are navigating. It focuses on the challenge of managing children’s everyday online habits.

This guide was written with the direct involvement of children in England. It is a reflection of their views. My office visited schools to speak to teenagers, and spoke to my Youth Ambassadors and Youth Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Panel to get their expertise on what works and what doesn’t work between parents or carers and children in the 21st Century.

When I speak to children about what they would do differently when it comes to being online, with the benefit of hindsight, I ask them: would they give a smartphone to their own teenager? Almost unanimously, they tell me no. They want to be protected from it as long as possible.

As educators and leaders, you play a vital role in supporting parents and carers to navigate these challenges. Responses to my recent school survey show just how concerned school leaders are about their children’s safety online, despite most already taking steps to limit or ban devices from the classroom. Children are clear that they value firm, informed and protective boundaries when adults have concerns about the content they are accessing online.

As parents, carers, and educators, our job must begin and end with our children’s care and safety. It’s what they expect and what they want from you.

As one young person told me: “Don’t be afraid to be firm... If you are worried [that] your child is seeing harmful content and you don’t know what they’re watching and it’s affecting the behaviour, just take it that you know best – they don’t.”

I hope this guide will be a useful resource for your school community, and I encourage you to share it with staff and parents where appropriate.”

Yours sincerely,
Dame Rachel de Souza
Children’s Commissioner

<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/resource/what-i-wish-my-parents-or-carers-knew-a-guide-for-parents-and-carers-on-managing-childrens-digital-lives/>