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Focus: Wood Farm looking ahead to big changes (From Oxford Mail)



Schools Focus: Wood Farm looking ahead to big changes

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By Liam Sloan »

WOOD Farm is a changing school.

In 2012, it will be unrecognisable, thanks to a £10m rebuild funded by the previous government.

According to headteacher David Lewin, who arrived at the Headington school four years ago, a lot of change has already taken place.

He said: "The school has been growing since I have been here, and there will be huge changes with the new building. When I started, Wood Farm was a good little school but there were things that needed to be worked on and improved in terms of teaching and learning.

"We have made quite a few changes in the curriculum and our approach to how children learn.

"One thing I am really passionate about is creating really exciting learning opportunities for the children. We want them to come into school thinking anything could happen that day."

For each of the pupils' termly projects, the school hosts special events to grab the children's attention.

One day last year, a mysterious, sealed crate appeared in the playground, and pupils spent the day investigating what it was.

For Key Stage One pupils, the playground was transformed into a beach, complete with ice cream van.

Such initiatives enthuse and engage children for far longer than the day itself, Mr Lewin said.

Most exciting of all is the £10m rebuild under way. Among new facilities will be a community cafe, a rebuilt Slade Nursery School, Wood Farm Children's Centre, an art studio, drama facilities, a food technology workshop and a new school hall.

Visitors will even have their own observation suite to watch lessons and learn from best practice.

Mr Lewin said: "The 1950s buildings were tired and out of date. The new site is going to be fantastic. We will have a brand new two-storey building full of the most up-to-date teaching facilities.

"There will be a wonderful outside area designed by a consultant working with the children and members of staff."

Children are taken on regular tours of the building site, and watch their future school take shape from special observation areas.

Currently, lessons are being held in a specially installed pre-fab block built by the school's playground.

The pupil population is diverse, drawn from across Oxford, and includes a much higher than average percentage of ethnic minority students.

Mr Lewin said: "One of the things we are most proud of is we have children from all over the world.

"Some are brought up in Wood Farm, some have arrived in the country and do not have very much English.

"They come with many, many different experiences, but all come together here."

Sarah Pugh has taught at Wood Farm for five years, specialising in overseeing outdoor learning.

The rebuild makes her role particularly exciting: alongside children, she has helped design the new grounds, which are to become an essential part of teaching at the school.

The designs include an outdoor workshop and classroom, complete with running water and central heating, where lessons will take children into the wild.

Tree planting will also let the Forest Schools initiative, which teaches pupils basic bushcraft, into the school grounds.

The Year One and Two teacher said: “I’ve found outdoor learning has built confidence and self-esteem in the pupils, and extended their speaking and listening skills.

“They also learn the intelligent assessment of risk when they are outside, and that is a huge advantage nowadays.

“Being outside has become a fundamental part of the curriculum.”

Mrs Pugh, who is also a teacher-governor, said: “Wood Farm is a fantastic school, and moving forward all the time. We are always looking ahead at how to make the curriculum really relevant for children.”



David Lewin

Teacher Sarah Pugh with some of the pupils