

Woodland Grange - how did it all begin?

In the Spring Term of 1991 I was appointed to the position of head teacher of a school being built on the Grange Estate. The building was not complete, there were no staff but more importantly no children, however, there was a catchment area, albeit with any children of primary school age in it already attending either Launde or Brookside schools. My brief was to recruit children, equip the school and together with the newly appointed governing body, appoint staff, all in one term so we could open on August 28th. Where to begin?!



I was released from my existing headship early and got started at the beginning of the summer term. I had two 'offices', one room at Beauchamp College and a desk behind a photocopier (my saving grace) at County Hall. After quickly designing a flyer I walked the catchment area posting these through every door and displaying them in public places, there were no websites then or email to publicise the school! At this point the only houses around the school were those newly completed in Poachers Place, Cooper Gardens and Beaufort Close, the rest of the new estate around the school was either fields or the start of houses in Newby Gardens and Wright Lane, consequently, other than three soon-to-be four year olds, I was effectively trying to poach pupils from two very effective schools with good reputations and we had none!

Soon I was being invited into prospective pupils' homes, visiting playgroups and generally getting myself known in the area, though as I had been deputy head at Launde several years before, my name was known by some. The biggest obstacle besides having no reputation, meaning parents would be taking a big gamble moving children from existing good schools, was convincing them an open plan layout (ours being the last to be built by the county before enclosed or semi-enclosed classrooms came back into fashion) could and would work.

The rest is history! We opened with 39 on day 1 just like a small village school, rattling around in a building designed for 240, were over 50 by January 1992 and then went up and up until just after three years later the first mobile classroom came on site, then another, then another. Finally in December 2000 the first extension was started on what had been the red playground, a three class unit with a music studio and teacher's work room (these have now been combined to make a library and withdrawal area). A new playground to be known as the 'blue' playground was built on the land behind it.

Having totally outgrown the original hall, in 2002 a larger one was built on the back playground. The original hall was turned into a classroom and a library (now both classrooms) and the kitchen was transformed into a computer suite. Playground space left was extended and the playing field reduced in size but eventually the area was made more interesting with the addition of a wildlife area, willow walk and dome, perimeter running track, totem poles (now gone), adventure play equipment and subsequently raised beds for gardening and play houses.

Why was the school called Woodland Grange?

After appointing me, the first job of the governing body was to come up with a school name. Although 'Grange' was an obvious choice, at that time there was a series on television

called Grange Hill which was about a school and featured some rather tiresome and challenging pupils which we didn't want to be compared to! Nevertheless we did want to stick with Grange. It was Alison Pegg's mother, Zena, a parent governor who suggested adding Woodland to it as we had two copses adjacent to the school. And so it was!

Who designed the school logo?



The saying 'as wise as an owl' was at the forefront of my thinking and together with Woodland in the school's name some sort of design incorporating both seemed apt. I worked with a graphic designer at County Hall who presented several sketches from which I chose this one, a friendly looking long eared owl which remains with the school 25 years later.

Emerald green for a uniform?

Launde had red, Brookside and Langmoor blue, Brocks Hill bottle green and we needed a woodland colour which wasn't going to be brown! As a school photographer once told me, emerald green suited everyone and it did! Initially pupils had the choice of sweatshirts as they are today or knitted cardigans or V neck jumpers embroidered with a red owl. Additionally pupils could wear a formal white shirt with a red tie if they wished which some did, but over time the red died out.

Staffing and equipping the school

Initially we started by appointing just 10 members of staff:

Miss Butcher – Head teacher
Mrs de Gaye – Deputy Head
Miss Parsons – Key Stage 1
Mrs Lane – 4+ unit
Mrs Bramwell – Secretary
Mrs Deacon – Premises Officer
Mrs Baser – Teaching Assistant
Mrs Hunt – Kitchen
Mrs Robinson) Lunchtime Supervisors
Mrs Perkins)

After 25 years, Mrs Robinson is still at the school working in the same position, what a star!

By January 1992, Mrs Clarke joined us to support Mrs Lane in the 4+ Unit and Mrs Clitheroe joined me in a job-share to take a Year 1 class as numbers rose.

Equipping the school was another major aspect, I had the delightful job of choosing all the classroom equipment but left selecting published schemes for Maths and English until I had teachers, we then all gathered in my lounge to pore over the various possibilities and come up with the best.

Furniture and equipment arrived in the summer holiday but it was like Christmas opening box after box of toys, books and teaching aids. Furniture was not such fun as delivery

vehicles had to park on Beaufort Way and we carried tables, chairs, cupboards etc. down the pedestrian paths into the classrooms, the main drive was the last thing to be finished before the school opened!

The opening

Two open afternoon were held a fortnight prior to term starting when pupils and parents were invited to visit the school. They met staff and were given maps to explore the whole building even though some areas would be out of bounds once school started.



On August 28th 1991 all 39 pupils with their parents looking on, gathered in the front playground for a photograph taken by the Leicester Mercury and then we were off.

Shortly afterwards our first whole school photograph was taken.



The official opening by the then Director of Education took place in October.

