



Photos: Spire Junior School

The sky's the limit

After his heartfelt piece during lockdown, Dave Shaw, headteacher at Chesterfield-based Spire Junior School, shares his hopes for the new academic year

As teachers we are lucky: we get to celebrate New Year's Eve twice. Once like everyone on December 31 and again on August 31, the day before we return to school.

If you look closely, it's not only the children with their new uniforms on, but also the teachers with their new dresses, suits and shoes (and often new stationery too!).

'This September is extra special though. Not only is it a return to school, but also a return to something like normality'

The new academic year begins with a new teacher, a new classroom and, more importantly, with positivity, optimism and enthusiasm.

This September was extra special though. Not only was it a

return to school, but also a return to something like normality.

No more one-way systems, no mask wearing for staff and no staggered starts. Even better – school visits, school swimming and whole school assemblies could resume.

I unlocked the gates with vigour and proudly welcomed our children back into school. The sun was shining, the children looked smart in their new

uniforms and with huge smiles on their faces.

I caught up with as many families as possible, checking in on how their summer had been. The children eagerly went to their new classes for breakfast (something we've continued from lockdown).

As the last of the parents disappeared, I locked the gates and smiled to myself; I really do have the best job in the world.

At Spire, we love our whole school assemblies, me especially so. As headteacher, I look forward to those times together when we celebrate our children and their achievements, or when we're all inspired by someone else's feats and stories.

Sadly, an assembly via Zoom and projected into classrooms does not have the same atmosphere and impact.

BACK TOGETHER

Due to my role, I don't regularly teach my own class, so assemblies are my opportunities to inspire the children and set the ethos of the school. After 18 months, I delivered my first in-person assembly on the morning of the children's return. It was both emotional and uplifting.

I discussed the Olympics and in particular 13-year-old skateboarder Sky Brown.

I shared the vision that anything and everything was possible in the lives of the

ABOVE: A class at Spire Junior School celebrate the return of sitting in groups and a sense of normality



Dave Shaw and gold award winners enjoy their hot chocolate and cake tea party, which can now resume

'Aim for the moon and even if you miss, you'll land among the stars'

young people who were sat looking at me.

I remember being told by my own teacher in sixth form that it was a historic day, and that I should take everything in. She had the TV on in the classroom showing Tony Blair walking into No 10 Downing Street after the 1997 historic landslide election victory. He was elected on a pledge of 'Education, Education, Education'. Sadly, a good education is no longer enough. We have excellent teachers and ever-advancing facilities so why don't our children always academically achieve?

I would argue it goes beyond a good education and instead say success can be based on the phrase 'experiences, experiences, experiences'.

Children cannot write about visiting the seaside if they have never been to the beach, felt the sand under their feet or heard the waves crashing.

That's why this year we have made a pledge to our children. Their academic ability

has suffered due to their 'lost learning', but we fully recognise that our children have also missed some of their childhood experiences that form the foundations for life.

Therefore, we are making a big commitment this year – every child in every year will receive a residential experience, a curriculum experience and a wider experience free of charge.

We already have things booked and look forward to sharing them with our school community. This is a big commitment from us at Spire Junior School and we must raise funds to support this venture and are asking for sponsorship/donations from businesses to assist us in this – if you know anyone who may want to be involved, please do let us know.

Even a small donation can make the biggest of differences for our children – it might cover a child's bus fare to the science centre, pay for their entry to a museum, or even allow them an ice cream on the beach!

Shortly we will be taking our Year 4 children to Whitby for a two-day residential: I'll be joining them and am just as excited as the children!

I finished that first assembly with a slide that read: 'Aim for the moon and even if you miss, you'll land among the stars'.

At Spire, every member of the team is reaching for the moon this year, and we'll see where we land. ♦



A Year 4 child, part of a group the school took to Cleethorpes in the summer. It was the first time he had seen a beach or the sea