

My wife, Miren, warned me that at her school, Brentwood, the Head, Ian Davies, had kept his school report this year down to 25 minutes, and that therefore I had no business with a much smaller school going on anywhere near as long. She's absolutely right and I hope I break speed time records this year. Unfortunately in that respect we have had such a successful year that I would be hard pressed to encapsulate everything within two hours, but I promise you I will remain within Miren's time limit.

It has been a special year for our Music and Drama departments.

At the Main School it began at our Carol Service at St Augustine's in December when Ollie Bower sensitively sang the solo, whilst the Year 5 choir joined by many in younger forms confidently sang throughout the service. With the addition of members of the school orchestra on many of the choir items we in the congregation enjoyed some beautiful Christmas hymns.

During the final weeks of the Autumn Term we had also enjoyed lovely Pre-prep Christmas concerts at the Westcliff site and Junior Christmas productions here at Thorpe Bay. It was at such a Pre-prep Christmas Concert 5 years ago after watching Minnie Mouse's performance of New York, New York that I said to Mr Bertola that his daughter Adrianna would be a star one day. Even then aged only 3 her performance was completely assured and had the hallmark of stardom. Like me, many of you will have been to the London Palladium to see her unforgettable performance with Connie in Andrew Lloyd Webber's revival of "The Sound of Music". The accolade Adrianna has received has been well deserved.

Perhaps the highlight of the year was our production of "Grease". For the first time we staged our production here in The Founder's Sports' Hall. Many of you here now were there to see it with the tiered seating rising up where I stand now, drapes all down the walls, and black outs on the roof windows. The children performed brilliantly, Seb Baucutt and Ollie Bower as Danny on the separate nights and Paula Lucas and Blaise Copeland as Sandy. There were some wonderful cameo performances, I particularly remember Christian Martin and James Blomfield's plaintive renditions of "Mooning"! The whole epic scenario was an amazing team effort masterminded by Neville Carr. As ever our congratulations and thanks to Ben Aarons and his wonderful band and of course to Liz Slater, the director of the show, without whom the whole project would never have happened. I would make a special mention too about Graham Larwood and Paul Hart's two home-made American limos, which are now on hire to other schools in the town.

In June our year 6 choir participated in the grand SEESMA production at the Cliffs Pavilion. A grand setting for a grand occasion where hundreds of Primary aged children are brought together to sing en masse. What a challenge for the conductor! It was a wonderful experience for our Year 6 pupils many of whom by then were used to singing in public having contributed to the production of "Grease" in March.

In Speech and Drama Liz Slater always excels for us. Once again our pupils gained armfuls of distinctions and honours at the LAMDA exams and medals and trophies at the local festivals.

We had the privilege of enjoying some of these performances at our recent Evening of Music, Drama and Dance. It was a great evening, fast moving, with some superb performances and presentations. Many of our children were performing for the first time in public. One of the things Alleyn Court has always done well, together I know with other independent schools, is to provide our children with the confidence and eagerness to get up on stage and perform in front of an audience. My thanks to Liz Slater, Kate Baynes, Ben Aarons and our band of peripatetic music teachers for all the hard work they do in enabling our children to achieve these levels of excellence.

And then only last week we entered 2 teams into the Southend Youth Speaks Competition for Public Speaking. In a field of 6, our teams came first and second. They produced absolutely excellent performances, and I would like to publicly congratulate Chloe Byrne, Christian Martin, Charlotte Whitear, Tom Pocock, Blaise Copeland and Seb Baucutt. With no prior experience of public speaking they performed to a large audience within the potentially intimidating setting of the Council Chambers at the Civic Centre and produced presentations of excellence.

Last year in my School Report I mentioned how our Independent Schools and Grammar Schools were the bastion of Physics teaching. The situation between on the one hand the state comprehensives and on the other the independents and Grammars is becoming increasingly polarised. Whilst fewer than one in five pupils taking A-levels come from the Independent sector, half of all students gaining A grades in modern languages came from Independent Schools whilst well over a third of the Maths and Chemistry 'A's were attained by Independent School students. And you can be sure that a very large percentage of the state school proportion came from grammar schools. It simply cannot be good for the country, for our future standards of science and technology or most obviously for our young people if there is such a polarisation of results between the vast number of Comprehensives and Further Education Colleges on the one side and the limited number of grammars and independents on the other if the highest quality of education is only to be found in this small minority. We are actually very lucky here in Southend with our grammar schools and high-powered Public Schools nearby. It is a very different story elsewhere in the country.

Our 11+ results were again very good this year. For the second year running a pupil from Alleyn Court achieved the top marks in Essex in the 11+ papers. Seb Baucutt also won an advance Scholarship to Tonbridge School, one of the academically higher-flying schools in the country. This is the first time anyone from this school has won an advance scholarship to Tonbridge or for that matter to anywhere and we are very proud of Seb's achievement. All in all pupils from Alleyn Court will be going on to 9 local secondary schools, maintained and private, whilst Emily-Jane Wakeman-Reynolds will be joining a private boarding academy in France. Having learned all her French at Alleyn Court Emily successfully conducted her entrance interview entirely in French as she will of course be studying all her subjects from September onwards in French.

As you know, I teach English in Years 5 and 6 and one of the items of English I insist on the children learning is the grammatical structure of English. When teaching verbs and in particular verb tenses I naively used the example, "In the sentence 'I am handsome', what is the tense of the verb? One unnamed pupil who clearly had taken in much more than I had realised promptly replied, "Sir, I think you should have

used the past tense of the verb 'was' and probably modified it with the negative adverb 'never!'. But it does go to show that my pupils learn!

Thank goodness the excellence of our sport at Alleyn Court has given me something to take my mind off the bitter disappointment of Southend United's prompt descent back into the First Division. However, on my office door I still have a poster of Freddy Eastwood's unforgettable winning goal against Manchester United. That night was the greatest in my life time of support for the Mighty Blues. You may remember in my school report of last year how I said that the second of my aims on becoming head of Alleyn Court was to make sure that all our pupils became Southend United supporters. Well, on the evening of that memorable match you would have thought I had succeeded. Wherever I looked I seemed to be seeing Alleyn Court pupils and parents. The following morning's Assembly was wonderful. Denys Wilcox leapt on to the stage dressed in full Southend United kit and holding his scarf aloft all to the assembled pupils' roof raising chant of "Freddy Eastwood duh, duh, du, duh". Tout s'a change.

On the sporting front our Year 5 Rugby Team won the Visteon Cup for the 7th year running and our Year 6 team for the 4th year in a row. One new Rugby record I am delighted to reveal is that every single boy from Year 3 to Year 6 has represented Alleyn Court at either Tag or Contact Rugby. This is a remarkable statistic and is testimony to Mr Hart's enthusiasm in making sport something to be enjoyed by everyone. Our Year 5 and 6 Contact Rugby teams played 12, won 12 and scored a total of 96 tries whilst conceding only 6.

Our Under 11 A and B Football teams also did the school proud. In a total of 12 matches they won 7, drew 2 and lost only 3, whilst the Under 10's won 5 and lost 4, with the Under 9s winning 3 and losing only one.

In the ISA 5-a-side championships the Alleyn Court team won the East Anglian Regionals and then went on to the Nationals held at Stoke College in Suffolk. I was lucky enough to be there to see our boys eventually placed third. This is the highest position any football team from Alleyn Court has reached in its 102 year history beating opposition from London, Liverpool, Yorkshire and Devon. Thank you to Mr Lockhart for his fine coaching and congratulations to the boys for doing so well.

Our Basketball teams continue to go from strength to strength. We were the winners of the Southend Primary School Tournament and in the 13 matches played by our Year 4,5 and 6 teams the only two we lost were against senior school opposition from Southend High School for Boys and St Thomas More School. One player I would like to pick out is Blaise Copeland who was chosen to play for Southend Swifts in the Under 14 National Club Final Fours. The team eventually finished as runners-up and Blaise was the youngest player of the court. I would also like to congratulate Joe Hart, a former pupil who learnt his basketball here at Alleyn Court, for being selected to play for the England Under 15s.

Our Cross-country teams continue to thrive. For the 4th year running our Year 4, Year 5 and Year 6 boys teams were East Anglian champions with Laurence Willmore Year 4 Boys Regional champion, Aston Kirby Year 6 Boys' Regional Champion and Blaise Copeland Year 6 Girls champion. In the Nationals within a vast field from all over the country Blaise went on to come 6th. Well done, Blaise.

In Athletics we achieved regional and national honours with no fewer than 7 East Anglian champions. Our Year 6 Boys team were champions for the 4th year running and our Year 4 Boys Team was placed first for the second year in a row. Blaise went on to become National Champion at the Roundersball Throw beating her personal best by a colossal 5 metres whilst Aston Kirby and Laurence Willmore won the silver medal in Year 6 and Year 4 Boys 600 m. Andrew Bevan gained the National bronze in the Cricketball Throw.

Our cricket teams too have done very well. Our U11s have beaten Chigwell, Brentwood, and Felsted, fine scalps all, losing only to Widmore Lodge and St Aubyns. There have been fine batting performances from Christian Martin, Hassan Mazhar and Toby Gibbons with some excellent bowling from Hassan Mazhar, Andrew Bevan and Denys Wilcox.

In between Matinee and evening performances of "Grease" our Girls' Netball Team took part in the Southend and District tournament finals at Southend High School for Girls. Having won their individual league by winning all 7 matches against local opponents, the team went on to play in the knock out finals. Amazingly given that almost the whole of the team had to rush straight from the stage to the netball court and then back on stage again and with our star, Sandy, having to miss the very final match Alleyn Court were runners'-up.

This Summer we are sad to be saying goodbye to Mrs Carr and Mrs Staples. Shirley Carr has been at Alleyn Court for over 20 years, in which time she has been central to the success of our Academic Support Unit. We thank her for her loyal support to Alleyn Court in those years. Louise Staples took over from Mrs Wilcox in Year 1. She has been a fine teacher and our young children will miss her warmth and kindness. We also say goodbye to Ines Vara-Cobo, our dear and excellent Teaching Assistant in the Thorpe Bay Pre-prep. We wish her well in her new post as TA in the pre-prep of a top International School in Marbella. Also leaving us will be Mrs Sheelah Evans, who has done an excellent job in teaching Kindergarten Rupert Bear, our extra Reception class at Westcliff.

Miss Jolyn Rush will be our new Year 1 teacher in September. She comes to us from Hamstel School and will work together with Mrs Yapp. We welcome her to Alleyn Court and wish her many happy years here. We welcome back from leave Mrs Beale at our Westcliff Pre-prep and also Mrs Seaman.

This has been the year of the Pavilion. From the very start of the year a decision was made by our PTA that money would be raised to rebuild our ailing pavilion. The school pledged to match pound for pound whatever the PTA could raise. To that end most of us in this hall have enjoyed an amazingly busy schedule of social and fundraising events: a quiz, meals at local restaurants, the Summer Ball, 4 Book Fairs, The Bouncy Castle Sponsorship Day, Ladies' Evening, Christmas Fair, Summer Fair, the netball and football matches between staff and parents – I have no comment on the results except to say that the staff teams were very unlucky to lose. The matches were hugely enjoyed by spectators and participants alike, and we look forward to getting our revenge next year. The Bouncy Castle Extravaganza yesterday was a great success, despite the surrounding storm clouds. Funds have also come in from a variety of activities ranging from children's handcrafted Christmas cards, Christmas and Easter turkeys, to the sale of bedding plants and flowering baskets. From all these hugely enjoyable events the PTA has amassed from this year alone a grand

total of over £17,000. With the school contribution that means £34,000 to the Pavilion cause in just one year! For all this I want to thank you, the parents, for your participation and contribution, and in particular members of the PTA Committee who have tirelessly worked throughout the year arranging this tremendous programme. The school intends to make a start on the pavilion project during the coming year.

At school the children have also raised money for other needy causes, namely Jeans for Genes, the NSPCC, Guide Dogs for the Blind Association and Shoebiz for Blue Peter.

Because of the general drift of my Newsletters some parents joke that I have a two track mind: football and in particular Southend United, and birds. In some ways that is sort of true. But I like Essex County Cricket Club, the theatre, good fiction, languages, history, politics, cooking, flowers, Classical Music, ballet, travel, Spain and much else too, but I have to admit that from boyhood I have had a penchant for birds. Growing up by the side of our shoreline somehow always filled me with joy. To this day hearing the distant calls of the curlew and oystercatchers far out on the mudflats excites me. Well, natural history has properly invaded our school, and I am not referring to the myriad of rabbits and the consequent countless well fed foxes that live amongst us here. Last week the kestrels, nesting in the skylight on the Tomlinson Building roof, brought their single chick down to the Junior Playground where it sat on the palings whilst its parents brought it voles and mice and whatever else they could find. Because of the chick's vulnerable position we had to move the children to another playground at breaktime, but they were able to watch from a short distance. It was a wonderful sight and just goes to show how lucky we are to be living and learning on this beautiful campus.

A very sad event took place this year, the death aged 90 years of Mrs Phyllis Wilcox, who had lived as an integral part of the school for over 60 years. Phyl Wilcox lived in the house at the Crowstone Road entrance to the Westcliff site where in fact she had lived on and off for well over 60 years. She has a very special place in our hearts as she was the daughter-in-law of the founders of Alleyn Court, Theodore and Ruth Wilcox. She was a direct link to our foundation and she lived her life immersed in Alleyn Court. On a personal level I had known Mrs Phyllis Wilcox for over 40 years and I would be hard pushed to find a more charming and kind person. All who knew her will cherish her memory.

Our Pre-prep continues to thrive with its excellent staff and facilities. It is now so popular that next year every class on both sites is full. It is testament to our superb Early Years staff that Alleyn Court is so popular. You parents whose children have passed through our Pre-prep know exactly what I mean. The Montessori method combined with the expertise and experience of our staff gives our Alleyn Court children a kick start unparalleled elsewhere in Southend. It is therefore ironic that once again the government has reorganised the Early Years curriculum and assessment programme as well as qualification requirements. All I can say is that whatever the government through Surestart throws at us, we will question it, but we will meet it head on.

As it is, beyond the normal curriculum the Pre-prep has enjoyed its Harvest Festival, the Christmas Production, a variety of trips, and its Teddy Bears' Picnic this coming Thursday. This is a special moment because on that day we will be commemorating the 100 years anniversary of Montessori education. Maria Montessori was an Italian

doctor, in fact the first woman at the University of Rome. Her philosophy was that through giving children some freedom in a specially prepared environment that was rich in activities, children would learn to read on their own, choose to work rather than play most of the time, love order and silence, and develop a real social life in which they worked together instead of competing against one another. The basic Montessori concepts are pretty well known by now. The teacher must pay attention to the child, rather than the child paying attention to the teacher. The child proceeds at her/his own pace in an environment controlled to provide means of learning. Although what we do at Alleyn Court is a somewhat diluted version of the original principles, those same principles are at the heart of all that happens in our Pre-prep. As Maria Montessori often reminded teachers in her course, "When you have solved the problem of controlling the attention of the child, you have solved the entire problem of education."

As many of you will know our Montessori Pre-prep has been teaching our children to read through the phonic method since its inception. The trouble with English of course is that that method only applies to a certain number of fairly basic words. Which reminds me of the story of when a Polish plumber came over here and thought he should have a few basic English lessons. By his ninth lesson he was getting confident, but he was struggling through the pronunciation of certain awkward English letter groupings. When confronted with the 'ough' words he first mastered 'enough', then 'thought', then with increasing difficulty 'cough' and finally 'bough'. He thought he was finally getting the hang of all English anomalies until sipping a latte in his local Costa Bar he picked up the Evening Echo and saw a worrying headline. He immediately took the paper to his tutor, Mr Reeder, moonlighting as a TEFL teacher. "I am fed up. I can't do zis language no more. You told me zat I had learnt all difficult rules of English and yet I read zis in ze paper "Alleyn Court Summer Fair pronounced success".

Our whole school has continued to thrive with every year now full with waiting lists to boot. Next September we are due to start with 320+ children, a record in the history of Alleyn Court. The credit must go to our staff who are hard working, caring, prepared to give of their time, and inspirational in the classroom. You only need to visit our classrooms to see what a stimulating learning environment our teachers have created for the children.

I am proud of what the children and staff of this school have achieved this year and during the time of my tenure of the headship, and I very much look forward to next year building ever more upon the successes of the past. We are forever moving forward as enshrined in our motto. Alleyn Court is set fair to continue as a beacon of excellence in South East Essex.