



Change is in the air

Dear Parent's & Carers

As I write this letter to you I am able to glance out of my window at a beautiful cherry tree and some lovely fields beyond that. This is in stark comparison to the view from my office at Dorset House, this afforded me the daily site of builders, delivery trucks, Parking Attendants and of course the rather grand Mecca Bingo. Change is wonderful. However change can also be frightening and disorienting.

I love the autumn, it is my favourite season of the year (not just because it contains my birthday). I find the changes in nature during this time of year to be enthralling, the change of leaves from sappy green to bright golden hues is just beautiful. The poem 'Ode to Autumn' by John Keats is perhaps the lovely description of this time.

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run;
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,
And still more, later flowers for the bees,
Until they think warm days will never cease,
For summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells.

I love it. Maturing sun, load and bless, ripeness to the core, budding more, and still more. These are wonderful phrases that capture the productivity of the season, the time of year that in previous generations was so closely linked to the idea of harvest. These days our food is harvested throughout the year from countries all over the world. This is another conversation all by itself, one that I won't get into right now. So autumn is a time of great bounty but it is also a moment in our year when things change in our landscape.

This weekend whilst walking the dog, my wife and I came upon a magnificent horse-chestnut tree. On the ground scattered all around were spiky shells, breaking open to reveal shiny brown conkers. Is it just me or does this make anyone else feel slightly wistful for bygone days. As a boy I would cycle miles to find a great conker tree, I would soak the conkers and bake them in the oven to harden them for the conker fights that would take place at school. Sadly this no longer grabs our children's imaginations, it might be a health and safety issue, however I believe it has more to do with technology replacing these ancient rites of passage.

This then got me thinking about things we have lost as a society, and then I came across an incredibly sad tale in a book called 'Landmarks' by Robert McFarlane. Early in the text he goes through a list of words that had recently been taken out of the Oxford Childrens Dictionary, these were: acorn, adder, ash, beech, bluebell, buttercup, catkin, conker, cowslip, cygnet, dandelion, fern, hazel, heather, heron, ivy, kingfisher, lark, mistletoe, nectar, newt, otter, pasture, willow and they have been replaced by attachment, block-graph, blog, broadband, bullet-point, celebrity, chatroom, committee, cut-and-paste, MP3 player, voice mail. It's enough to make a grown man weep.

Change is good, it is how we grow and develop as humans and I want to encourage you to provide as many opportunities as possible to change in a positive way. But some change can be detrimental to our children. I would encourage you to not give up on playing with your children, don't stop reading to them, don't give up eating together around a table. Some things are worth holding on to, maybe forever.

Have a wonderful half term, enjoy the changing of the season.

Ian Golding