

Interview with the Head

Lets find out about our new Head, Karen Edwards. For those of you who have had the pleasure of meeting Karen, I'm sure you'll agree she is very personal, approachable and inspirational individual, and we at The Heights believe she is more than capable of helping us to realize our vision. But for those of you who have not yet had the opportunity to meet her, we interviewed Karen to find out answers to all those important questions. Here's what she has to say:

Tell us why you became a Head Teacher

I never dreamed of being a Head - I always thought I wanted to stay in the classroom because that suits my hands-on nature. But when our local primary Sacred Heart, where my children were at school, lost their head teacher, I felt drawn to the challenge, as I wanted the best possible primary education for them. I was Assistant Head Teacher in a secondary school at the time, and felt that I had the transferable leadership skills needed for the role of Head Teacher.

What do the children at Sacred Heart say about you?

I am known as the fun-loving Head who likes to dress up as a meerkat!

What made you decide to leave Sacred Heart to join The Heights?

I am so excited by the prospect of setting up a new school in Caversham Heights, and being part of such an important community project, but it was a really tough career decision to make because I have had such a wonderful seven years as Head of Sacred Heart. I currently have the privilege of leading a school with very strong community links, and the school sits in the very heart of the community. I know how pivotal a school can be to the local community and I really want to build that for the community and the children of Caversham Heights. This is a unique opportunity to grow a school from the beginning, and a chance that will not come again.

What values will you bring to The Heights?

As The Head, I expect to get to know all the children in the school by name, to understand them as individuals and to develop a nurturing relationship with each child.

I think it is important for all pupils to leave their primary school with life long skills; to be caring towards others, to contribute to their surroundings, and with the confidence to stand up and speak in front of the whole school.

I feel it important to give children responsibilities from a young age and at Sacred Heart all 9 to 11 year olds can apply for a role as a prefect, for which they have to be interviewed by me. Our prefects are required to answer the telephone among other responsibilities. We also have a buddy system where older children take responsibility for ensuring our newest arrivals settle into the school and have someone to look out for them. We instil in our pupils the same values that you as parents instil into your children; politeness and good manners, for example we expect pupils to hold doors open; we encourage respect for our school – we have strict uniform rules and expect pupils to wear their uniform properly and with pride. By instilling the same values that you as parent do, we create a home-school partnership, and this helps to consolidate those values into the children's attitude and has a positive impact on their behaviour.

The Height will be an all-inclusive school, and will accept pupils with a range of needs across a wide academic and social spectrum. Throughout the school day we will keep a balance between lively interaction and quieter calm times, in consideration of children with SEN. I have personal experience, as a teacher and as a parent, indealing with Autism, and I am very aware of the needs of children with this and other conditions such as Aspergers' syndrome and Dyslexia. We will be able to personalise learning for those with greater needs at both ends of the spectrum. At my current school we have pupils ranging from level 2 to level 6 within 1 class, and with the use of learning support assistant we can tailor our teaching to meet the very different needs within that class.

I am proud to say that Sacred Heart has a reputation as a very nurturing school, and pupils have transferred across as a result. I will endeavour to ensure The Heights becomes as nurturing in its approach to enable our children to become caring, confident and happy – I believe these are underrated qualities, but ones that make such a difference to our ability to reach our potential.

Can you describe your typical day?

At 7.30am I arrive at school – I could be gritting and shovelling snow as there is no caretaker!

At 8.15am I have brief staff meeting on a Monday, other days I send out briefing minutes so everyone knows what is going on (visitors, days out, etc)

At 8.35am I'm out in the playground, meeting and greeting pupils and parents

At 8.45am I put up my hand, and school starts

I start the week by leading a whole school assembly on Monday mornings, but the rest of my week can be very varied. I have meetings with my secretary regarding administrative matters to be managed, I cover lessons for staff off sick or on training, I do daily observations, informal and formal, to keep in touch with how my staff are performing and to appraise their teaching style.

At the end of the day I either have meetings with parents, staff or governors, or I am running an extra-curricular club.

I like to keep a sense of fun within the school. We routinely have 'tidiest desk' and 'tidiest classroom' competitions to encourage a sense of pride in one's surroundings. Although this is intended for the staff, all the children like to get involved too.

What would you say are your greatest strengths?

I am as passionate about education and working with children as I was 23 years ago. I have a very hands-on approach. My ethos is spend as much time with children and parents as possible. I don't take myself too seriously and I have boundless energy.

What is your vision for The Heights?

The Heights' vision - ASPIRE – provides a fantastic base upon which I can build, to ensure that every child has the opportunity to grow as a unique individual and develop at their own paceand be well rounded, caring individuals.

How do you intend to get to know the local community?

I intend to visit pre schools and primary schools in the area, churches and local businesses and be as physically visible as possible in and around Caversham.

How will you keep in touch with parents?

We can set up a system to use email and text as a way of keeping parents informed with last minute notices (e.g. hockey has been cancelled!) as well as parent mail for newsletters/updates. I will also be highly visible in the playground if any parent needs to talk to me.

What is particularly important to you?

I have a particular interest in sport and the outdoor environment, and when our site has been agreed, I will be looking for opportunities we may exploit in creating outdoor learning opportunities. Our school may be a new-build or a conversion, but whatever it is, I will be ensuring that the indoor classroom environment is set up appropriately, as this is essential to effective teaching and learning.

I would like The Heights to provide a holistic education, with teaching in both sport and the arts and music considered alongside the academic curriculum. We will be looking to provide extra curricular activities in all these areas.

Do you think it will be challenging having no older children at the school as role models?

All children, no matter how old they are, can rise to the challenge of being 'the oldest', and many thrive on this challenge. It is good for them and can increase their confidence and helps them to develop their leadership qualities. We will instil into our Year 3's that they are the role models within the school. They will have a unique opportunity to be 'leaders' throughout their time at The Heights. In our first year, we will introduce buddy systems between all our classes, as all children will be new.

What do you think will be the key challenges?

The biggest challenging will be preparing the site – we have much to do before September to ensure our classrooms are appropriately designed and ready – so getting agreement with the EFA is our key priority. After that, recruiting staff: secretary, teachers and assistants, and a business manager with experience in education. In this unique situation I need all my staff to be particularly flexible, adaptable and hands-on.

What are you most looking forward to?

My first day, seeing eager faces, and not just on the children!

What makes a good teacher?

A good teacher motivates engages and inspires children to want to learn. It is difficult to articulate the qualities, but they need to have an absolute love for what they do.