



### **Building and Sustaining a Shared Ethos.**

It is difficult to define ethos and trying to describe what it looks like in a school context reminds me of trying to catch a kite in the wind. One can see it and know it's there and even touch it occasionally but capturing it and holding on to it is a far more difficult task. Similarly with ethos one senses it first and visitors to a school instinctively know and understand what a school is like by how it 'feels'. However there is a danger that over time we can take for granted that the ethos in our school is both shared and operating in the way we think it is.

I was struck by the comments made by a visiting student a few weeks ago who said 'As soon as I came into this school it felt right. I love being here'. Why? What is right? Can we keep it right? How? These are questions we need to ask ourselves if we wish to avoid becoming complacent over what we have, or if we cease to do the things that contribute to our identity as a school. Conversely identifying practice too precisely and trying to control and replicate it could be counter productive because the task of managing the system might then become more important than the goals and outcomes the system is meant to achieve.

With this dilemma in mind Anita Jaswal (Pastoral Assistant Headteacher) and I set out to have a conversation with our school community and to revisit what we believe is our shared vision for the school. It was agreed that we ensure that children experience educational provision most suited to their personality and abilities to help them realise their full potential academically and as members of the wider society. We have systems in place such as School Council, various mentoring systems, curriculum voice, Green Club, Young Leaders, Young People's Parliament, ICT buddies (for children to help staff) and Cherry Chat editors. There are of course many other opportunities for learning much of which can be located on our website. While proud of our practice we are very aware that none it is unusual and is shared in different forms by many schools. Therefore what determines our identity? What is the spirit of our school?

When Anita and I discussed the answers from our community we realised that everything we do is from the perspective of raising the self-esteem of those who contribute to our organisation. In particular we aim to give the children an understanding of citizenship and their place in society. Listening to the children and community is at the heart of all we do.

We constantly praise and tell our children that they can make a difference. They both know and have the confidence to act on what they believe in. One way we know this is because we asked the children what was important to them about being a citizen of Cherry Orchard School. The following are typical replies:

'Children have freedom of speech so that they are inspired to learn.'

'Children have a right to say what they think about the school.'

'Children are listened to and can make changes to the school such as the garden and at lunchtime.'

'We lead assemblies and make a difference.'

Finally, paraphrasing the words of Tim Brighouse, we want 'to be the best that we can be.' We aren't there yet but we will keep trying by providing opportunities for all to develop, accepting mistakes but learning from them, and improving within a climate of trust.

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