

Heritage Block - official opening - SH remarks -The Journey

It's a huge pleasure to be here today for the official opening of the Heritage Block, and to celebrate another exciting chapter in the growth and evolution of our wonderful school.

It's also a source of immense pride to stand here, and think about how much these bricks say about the determination of so many of you here today, and many other who can't be with us, to provide the very best foundation we can for our children to learn together and achieve great things.

Let me briefly take you back to 2010, before any of the Year 6 children who are now learning in this building were even born. When the crumbling state of our school buildings was so bad that the council condemned them and promised to build a whole new school. Sadly, austerity put paid to those promises. But Mrs Heritage and the governors of the day didn't take it lying down. They lobbied hard and secured vital improvements to the Benton building. Over subsequent years the team kept fighting and gradually won investment for replacement roofs in Manser and improvements in Copper Class as well, putting an end to our teachers having to put up with waterfalls down the walls.

Fast forward to October 2015, when our pupil numbers stood at 258. With new housing developments springing up all over Chinnor, we could see the tidal wave coming towards us of increasing pupil numbers. But our classrooms were already full, and in fact we were effectively using a corridor as one classroom. We needed more space. So under the leadership of my predecessor, Simon Pollard, we began another campaign, engaging with Oxfordshire County Council to secure agreement for St Andrew's to expand in a planned way.

Together we embarked on a journey that first led to us being approved to expand to fully two form throughout the school - with a new capacity of 420 pupils. But we still needed the space for them to be taught safely and creatively. So we worked with OCC to secure planning permission for two new classrooms.

But even then, the path ahead wasn't straightforward. All manner of hurdles lay ahead, including needing to get approval from the Secretary of State for our school to grow. Perseverance was again our watchword, working collaboratively in partnership with OCC and their contractors to first secure the best temporary classrooms we could have hoped to have, and then finally, this time last year we broke ground on this new building.

Over the last five years, we've grown from those 258 pupils, through celebrating our 300th pupil, and then our 400th. Today, we're home to **409** children and over **60** members of staff. And today, we celebrate not only these fantastic new classrooms, but more importantly the tremendous teamwork that they represent.

There are so many people we owe our thanks to: Simon, Wendy, Annette and Jo, Andy from OCC, Anna, Laretta and all our fellow governors and of course, our staff and pupils. In [almost] the words of our school motto, we've worked together and I think we've achieved great things. We've shown that we are a restless school, we never give up, and we strive for what we know is right. Watch this space for our next ambitious goals!

For now, please join me in thanking everyone involved in helping St Andrew's reach this exciting milestone. It really is a moment to cherish.