

It's often said at the start of a new term 'It doesn't feel as if we've ever been away' but this year we have all benefited from the extraordinarily hot, dry summer holiday we have had. Pupils are eager to learn and genuinely refreshed.

However, I make no bones of the fact that I believe our approach to school holidays needs an overview and wrote a short piece in TES to that effect in 2013 <https://www.tes.com/news/long-long-holidays> which was in response to a questionnaire given to primary school pupils about their holiday experience. One had responded that the first three weeks were good but after that it got boring, a second respondent said that the whole holiday was boring and one cheeky chap replied that there should only be school holidays and no school. If you have any thoughts on this issue I would love to hear from you. My personal belief is that holidays should be broken down throughout the year so that pupils are actively learning in school for no more than 6 weeks without a break, followed by a short break of at least a long weekend up to a week to be able to absorb and assimilate learning and to prepare for the next 6 week block. We do all need a break in the summer, but 4 weeks would be plentiful if other holidays were spread out more evenly.

I met with Stuart Gibb from East Lothian Council who has a role as Area Manager to oversee the Area Partnerships to whom we had made a request for funding for Art Therapy. Our Art Therapist, Linda is very much part of the Meadowpark staff team and works for Cross Reach. Cross Reach have previously provided family therapy in Knox Academy, but since working with Meadowpark pupils, Linda has generated a safe place for pupils to be able to express themselves in a way that is so hard for many of them in relation to Autism. I was fortunate to be able to see some of the artwork last Friday and was moved to see just how demonstrative and expressive pupils can be when using art as a medium. One pupil who has had issues with self-esteem and confidence has been using plaster of Paris to create a structure that has steadily been growing in height reflecting his own journey as his physical, emotional as general health and well-being has improved over the months. He recognises that his place at Meadowpark has become real and meaningful for him, offering him the opportunity to find his place in the wider world. Another pupil had experienced a period of frustration before Easter and conveyed to Linda that didn't feel he had choice. His artwork was angry and Linda described how he would tape his work to the table and carefully choose the right tone of red paint to express his feelings. Again this reflected a time for him that was beset with challenge and uncertainty. However, just before the end of term this pupil had started a piece that was on rolled paper to allow for continuation which was no longer taped to the table, expressing to Linda that he felt he now had choice and was happy. Cross Reach has committed to 1 clinic until Christmas but we are desperate for this to continue and indeed expand to 2 or more clinics. Although we were unsuccessful in securing funding for Meadowpark from Haddington and Lammermuir Area Partnership because our pupils come from across East Lothian I will be resubmitting this bid, having discussed this with PT Inclusion and PT SfL as a means of offering Art Therapy to Knox Academy pupils. Please keep fingers crossed!

Have a peaceful weekend.

C. Prime 24.08.18