



To all members of the school community 2006-2023,

I first announced my plans to take early retirement on Tuesday 8 November 2022 and at that point Friday 21 July 2023 still seemed a long time in the future. All of a sudden, two and a half terms have gone by in the blink of an eye and today is my last day as Headteacher of Byers Green Primary School.

It's almost impossible to encapsulate in a few short paragraphs my thoughts and feelings about Byers Green Primary School and being its Headteacher for 17 years. My time at Byers Green amounts to more than a third of my whole life so far and almost two thirds of my career in education. Although it all seems a distant memory now, between 1997 and 2006, I also taught in three other schools - Trimdon Junior, New Penshaw Primary and Cotsford Junior (where I was Deputy Headteacher).

I started my role as Headteacher in September 2006 at the beginning of a time of huge change for Byers Green Primary School. The old school building, which dated from 1914, had certainly seen better days and, just prior to my appointment, the construction of a new school had been agreed by Durham County Council. Overseeing the building of the new school was challenging, especially for a new Headteacher, but also a great privilege. I will never forget the smiles on the children's faces as they entered the new building for the first time on 27 February 2008. The official opening ceremony followed just over a year later on 27 March 2009 as we formally celebrated the transition from old to new.

However, our school is so much more than just a building – everyone who visits Byers Green comments on our positive ethos and caring nature. I've been fortunate enough to work alongside so many amazing people in school over the last 17 years – teachers, support staff and governors – who have all shared my ambition of continually providing the very best opportunities for all of our children. I'd like to put on record my thanks to all colleagues and members of the governing body, both past and present, as the success of our school has always been a team effort. The relationship between home and school has been one that I've tried consistently to nurture and I'd also like to express my gratitude to parents and other family members for all the support they have provided both for their children and for our school throughout the years. The links with the local community – church, chapel and village hall – have also been very important to me and I want to convey my appreciation to everyone connected with the aforementioned organisations.

I couldn't reflect on my time at Byers Green without mentioning chess. Since 2006, over 200 children have learned to play chess and taken part in the school-based stage of the UK Chess Challenge. Dozens of children have also gone on to represent our school at the regional Megafinals in a variety of locations. I am so proud to have been able to give our children this opportunity and I will always look back on this aspect of my contribution to Byers Green Primary School with great fondness.

In recent months, I've been asked many times what I'll miss about school when I retire. Of course, I'll miss the Harvest assemblies, the Christmas performances and the beach days but what I think I'll miss most of all are the normal days when it looks like nothing particularly special is happening. However, on those days, if you walk down the corridor and go from classroom to classroom, you'll see that just below the surface something almost magical is happening – learning! Children learning to socialise, to read, to write, to do maths and so much more. I feel remarkably proud and extremely honoured to have seen eleven groups of children move all the way through our school from Reception to Year 6 and, for me, seeing the progress the children make over that seven-year period is what has made it all worthwhile.

While I do feel very sad to be leaving my position as Headteacher, I am so glad that I am able to pass on the responsibility of this most important of jobs to Miss Dodds. I know that under her leadership Byers Green Primary School will continue to go from strength to strength. I wish her and all members of the school community every success for the future!

Thank you and farewell.

Mr W. Kirtley
Headteacher