238 Kew Road,
Richmond,
Surrey, TW9 3JX
Tel: +44 (0)20 8948 3926

UNICORN SCHOOL

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OLD UNICORN NEWSLETTER

JULY 2025

Email: oldunicorns@unicornschool.org.uk **Website: www.unicornschool.org.uk**

From the Headteacher We have enjoyed another fun and exciting year which has been packed full of wonderful things the children have taken part in and achieved.

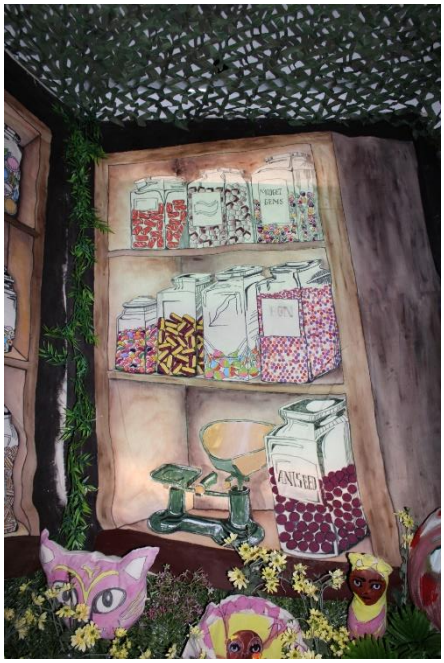
One day that stands out as particularly lovely was the children taking part in commemorating VE Day. They played lots of games that would have been popular at the time, made paper hats and dressed as they might have 80 years ago.

Autumn term saw memorable Christmas productions; Red and Orange Classes' Nativity and Yellow and Green's *'A Miracle in Town'* were both full of vibrant singing, acting, costumes and music. The Junior Christmas concert at the Barn Church resonated with beautiful singing, musical ensembles and Ultra Violet speaking their parts so confidently and clearly.

Ultra Violet deserves huge congratulations for their results and even more praise for the calm and mature way they have conducted themselves throughout the 11+ process. For a cohort of 16 children, they received 54 offers, including 7 scholarships and accepted places to:

Chiswick Community	Hampton	Kingston Grammar	Lady Eleanor Holles
Latymer Upper	Orleans Park	St John's Sidmouth	Thomas's College

Party Day didn't disappoint; whilst the Infants enjoyed '*The Gingerbread Man*' in the hall, the Juniors walked down to the Curzon Cinema in Richmond to watch *The Grinch*. All the children then had parties in their themed classrooms with UV's as a scene out of *Alice in Wonderland's Mad Hatter's Tea Party* with all the children dressed as Mad Hatters and Mr Gladstone dressed as a wonderful White Rabbit!



Loveday (on the right - daughter of OU Siobhan Boa)

Inigo (on the right - son of OU Bryony Boxer)

Charity We still carry on the tradition of the children bringing in a present for those less fortunate via the West London Action for Children and Unicorn families showed amazing charity by donating so many on Party Day.

School Committee has raised an amazing £12,700 over the last year, which will be split between our charities, Little Village, The Children's Trust and the School Bursary Fund.

Trips Blue and Indigo had a great stay at Sayers Croft, Violet enjoyed their week in Devon, UV had an action-packed stay in glorious weather in Cumbria and Violet and UV loved their ski trip to Norway. Other highlights this year have included trips to the National Archives, Kew Gardens, Houses of

Parliament, London Museum Docklands, Hampton Court, Bocketts Farm, Legoland, Orange Tree Theatre, Tower of London, Turner's House, the Natural History Museum, Gunnersbury Museum, Bekonscot Model Village, Fulham Palace, Junior Citizenship at Holly Lodge and Jeremy King's all-day STEM workshop here at school. All UV completed their Bus and Tube day challenge to get themselves from school to the fountain outside Green Park Station, a quick selfie and then back again!

This year's UV in Cumbria

Blue and Indigo at Sayers Croft

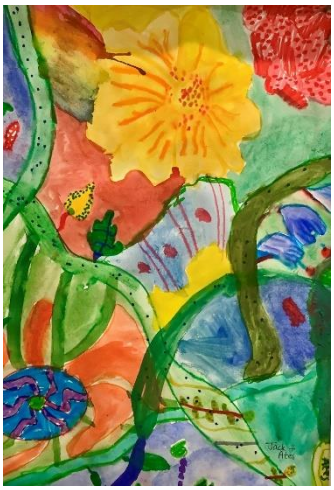
Orange Class hatching their duck eggs

Music Miss Gresson, Head of Music, has been busy. There have been tea time concerts, try an instrument afternoon, Kew Sparkle, UV and Violet Choir sang at the Cecil Court Care Home, MTB music exams held in school and many other musical delights this year. The Yellow and Green Music Concert was a triumph with Yellow Class demonstrating their first year of learning whole class Violin and the Junior Music Concert was a wonderful occasion, showcasing the brilliant singing and instrumental groups throughout the school. We have had a record number of pupils taking singing exams this year – over 70 exams have been taken with 100% pass rate from Grade 1 up to Grade 6! Many of our singers have been busy auditioning for West End shows and Musical Theatre's Spring term production of Finding Nemo was simply spectacular.

Drama, Class Assemblies and Productions Drama continues to be excellent, with outstanding performances of Violet's A Midsummer Night's Dream. The end of year UV plays seem to get better and better with no exception of this year's production of *'Olivia!'*. Unicorn really does produce some very capable, confident children!

World Book Day saw some brilliant costumes including Cruella de Vil, Willy Wonka, Winnie the Poo, Elsa, Mary Poppins, Harry Potters, Winnie the Witch, and many other great book characters!

Art truly is inspirational whether it's paintings, charcoal, ceramics or pottery, it's always of an exceptionally high standard. Below are some fabulous artworks from our Big Draw whole school collaboration which was associated with the new playground mural (top line photos below) with the children looking at the work of designer, Josef Frank, creating their own pieces in response. Arts Week's theme was 'Madagascar' (bottom line photos below) when the whole school studied all things Madagascar! Classes learnt about the extraordinary range of flora and fauna, the wide variety of habitats and ecosystems, whilst also debating the issues of poverty on the island, the effects of deforestation and how different life is like in an equatorial country.



Sport The children have participated in matches and tournaments in football, netball, hockey and cricket and also the Borough Swimming Gala, where for a small school, we enjoy many successes.

Thursday Afternoon Clubs This year's clubs on offer included Computer, Cookery, Dance, Debating, DT, Golf, Inventors, Padel, Pottery, Riding, Sailing, Sew What? and Ski Club.

Staff At the end of the summer term we say a fond farewell to **Miss Franklin**, Teaching Assistant for the past 3 years; **Miss Islay (Leeming)**, Gap Year Student and attended Unicorn as a child and **Mr Wong**, Estates Manager for the last 2 years. All of them a cheerful presence in school and hugely popular with the children and staff alike. We will be sad to see them go and wish them every happiness for the future.

Governors who are leaving, we say farewell to **Stephen Lehec,** Chair of Education and Staffing Committee for 4 years, **Aidan McLaughlin**, Education and Staffing Committee and our Safeguarding Governor for one year and **Dr Kudret**, Governor for 2 years. We thank them for their constant support and invaluable contribution over the years.

Listed below is our current cohort of staff, I wonder how many names you still recognise!

Headteacher: Mrs Fraley
Deputy Head: Mr Gladstone
Assistant Heads: Mr Jones and Mrs Langdon
Blue Class: Mr Gough
UV Class: Mr Gladstone

Red Class: Mrs Langdon (nee Reynolds)
Yellow Class: Mrs Palmer

Indigo Class: Miss O'Gorman
Violet & UV English: Mrs Bird (nee Roncone)

Orange Class: Mrs Maher
Green Class: Miss Engelmann

Violet Class: Mr Jones
Teaching Assistants: Mrs Nicholas, Mrs Gentle, Miss Franklin, Mrs Gardner (nee Adie) Mrs Chalong, Mrs Bryan, Miss Oulton

DT & Art: Mrs Daw & Mrs Washington
Computing: Mrs Walcot
Drama: Miss Timpson
French: Mrs Baghaei

Games: Mrs Young
Library: Mrs Gladstone
Maths Specialist: Miss Botes
Music: Miss Gresson

Science: Mrs Roblin (nee Stephenson)
Bursar: Mr Guy
Registrar: Mrs Rodgers
PA to Headteacher: Mrs Jones

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all staff, governors and parents for their continued support and phenomenal contribution to school life; I am grateful to them all.

Best wishes

Polly Fraley

POLLY FRALEY
Headteacher

Old Unicorn Staff

The Mottley Crew, a group of retired Unicorn Staff who live locally, continue to meet for lunch, laughter and lively conversation. Judy Mott, a much loved teacher who died some years ago, was a founder member, hence the name.

In September last year we had another excellent lunch at Royal Mid-Surrey Golf Club. There was a good turnout and following a flurry of checking and noting mobile phone numbers the Mottley Crew has at last moved into the 21st Century with our own WhatsApp group!

We visited the Isabella Plantation in November to say goodbye to Garry who is retiring from his post after many years. For the last 15 years he has arranged for us to have trees named in memory of past staff and taken us on tours of the plantation.

On this occasion the autumn colours were amazing and the tour fascinating as Garry has so much information about the trees and all that is happening in the Isabella. We also checked out the trees in memory of Judy, Shena and Jil - all trees flourishing. Afterwards we presented Garry with a book "Ten poems about Trees" and a chocolate cake for him to enjoy with his staff. We also made a donation to Holly Lodge.

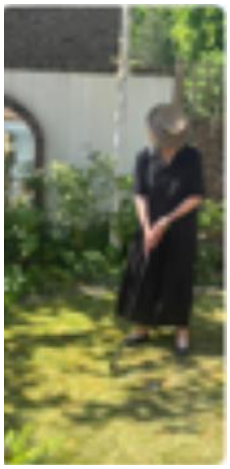
It was a pleasure to meet Selina, Garry's successor, a Kew Gardens' graduate who seems to be the perfect person to take over from Garry.

The Isabella Plantation - Christine, Selina, Monica, Fiona, Pearl, Julia, Garry, Judi, Gill

Garry with his gifts

In May the Mottley Crew met for a picnic in Kew. We were fortunate to have beautiful weather and several of the crew took part in a game of Clock Golf. We were very impressed that Claire (92 years young!) joined in; her skills as a golf player came to the fore. Could this become an annual fixture?! It was fun to celebrate Pearl's big birthday, a big surprise to all but the secret was let out of the bag by one of our number!

We all had such a jolly time that in the absence of Margaret T, our In-House Photographer, we forgot to take photos, however, a few days later some sneaky pics appeared on WhatsApp.



Instructions from the host on the complexity of Clock Golf!

We enjoy sharing news at our get togethers but we are aware that most Old Unicorn news is exchanged on various social media platforms these days, so the majority of you keep in touch in this way. Many of the Mottley Crew and older Old Unicorns still enjoy the printed word and glean much from articles and announcements in the press: features about past pupils who lead interesting lives and from the Register, the hatches, matches and dispatches lists!

OUs also pop up on radio and television regularly, these include performers and a number of producers.

It is thrilling to go to the theatre and concert halls in London as well as locally to watch OUs who have followed their hearts and achieved great success in their careers in music and theatre.

A recent contribution from OU Alex Cooke was exciting to read:

"You might have seen all the news about the EU Reset and Summit this week (in May). A quirky feature is that one third of the members of the core negotiation team on the deal are Old Unicorns. I lead the lawyers working on the project and Hermione Gough, from the class below me at Unicorn, leads the policy makers. We worked out the connection while waiting for a Eurostar to Brussels. We are very proud of our efforts but totally shattered."

The Mottley Crew's next lunch will be held at RMS Golf Club on Wednesday 24th September at 12.30pm. This will be a splendid opportunity to celebrate Unicorn's 55th Birthday. Other past staff will be very welcome to join us. Full details will appear on the WhatsApp Group, but do contact me by email if you are interested in joining us.

With all good wishes to past Unicorns and their families,

FIONA TIMMIS
Headmistress 1988 – 2004

fiona.timmis@btinternet.com

Current children of Old Unicorn Pupils

We currently have 11 children from 7 families where a parent attended Unicorn as a child:

Alford (nee May)
Donne (nee Ellen)
Martin (nee Boxer)
Somerville Waters (nee Waters)
Thijs (nee Boa)
Trotter (nee Stone)
Verwey

Obituaries:

We were sad to hear of the deaths of three remarkable people who were early Unicorn parents.

Mary Scherer died on 8th March aged 91. Mary and her husband Paul, who died in 2013, were a hugely influential couple, part of the steering committee who founded Unicorn and enabled the group of parents and friends who with Fi Law and Julia Chappell realised their dream of starting a brand new school in Kew.

The Scherers lived in Kew and their children Jonathan, Clare, Joanna and Lucy all came to Unicorn. Planning meetings took place around the dining table of their home in Kew, a house that was subsequently bought by past teacher families, the Napiers and later the Watsons. Still the same dining room, different table!

Mary and Paul Scherer

Julia Chappell and I went to Mary's funeral and afterwards met all the family as well as OU Victoria Combe Whitwam and her mother, a very sprightly and good friend to Mary Scherer since they were both Unicorn mothers! Victoria is now teaching at Hampton School.

Mary's departure marks the end of an era; those early Unicorn days will never be repeated.

Rosemary Sandberg who died on April 2nd, aged 85, was a huge supporter of Unicorn in its early days and a governor for many years. Obituaries of Rosemary appeared in the Telegraph and in The Bookseller and more recently in the Times. This is reproduced below. Julia Chappell attended a party to celebrate Rosemary's life, held at Riverstone in Chiswick where she and her husband Robin lived. Julia was delighted to see Rosemary's daughters Mary and Alice and Old Unicorns Polly Anderson and Natasha Mekie as well as Natasha's mother Diana (Mekie) Crawfurd who also lives at Riverstone.

Natasha, Julia, Polly, Alice

Julia and Mary

Register

Rosemary Sandberg

Publisher who helped to found the Puffin Book Club with the glamorous editor Kaye Webb and went on to start a literary agency

Rosemary Sandberg was working for "an old bat on Woman's Journal" when she heard that Kaye Webb, the formidable editor at Puffin, was looking for an assistant to help her to start a book club for young readers. It was 1967 and children's books were entering something of a second "golden age". Webb had the bright idea of building a community of young readers and encouraging a generation to read through a magazine called Puffin Post, which would publish short stories by members (and articles from Webb's writer-friends) as well as reviews and news of releases.

What Webb needed was young talent. Sandberg, a 27-year-old language graduate, was summoned to her residence in north London where she was greeted with: "Come in, darling, I'm just sorting out John's sock drawer." Sandberg had worked for the advertising agency J Walter Thompson and asked if Webb had any marketing reports on children's sales. "Darling, what are you talking about?" came the glib reply.

Webb was on "a different planet from us", Sandberg recalled of working with the ebullient, glamorous publisher, yet she soon realised that Webb's vision for The Puffin Book Club — slogan, "Nuffin' like a Puffin" — was a far more powerful marketing tool than any focus group. "Canny thing, she had the idea to start this club which would give her all the market research she needed."

On March 23, 1967, Puffin Post was launched. On a cover designed by Jill McDonald, two puffins chatted: "I say old boy, shall we join this new club?" "Good idea. I hear they have some p'super prizes." Membership forms began flooding in. After two months there were 20,000 members, including the offspring of famous writers such as Roald Dahl; some went on to become celebrated writers, artists or publishers. A 12-year-old Emma Thompson wrote a two-line verse in Puffin Post titled *Lines Written by an Aphid Landing on a Rose* that read: "too pink/ I think".

Sandberg set up a mailing list and distribution centre, organised "Puffin Parties" and was sent to London's East End to source cheap competition prizes including a draw for members to see real puffins on Lundy Island. The day they sailed was stormy. "Water was coming over, the children were thrown about, we tied them all up with rope," Webb said. She was lucky no children drowned, Sandberg later observed, "and as for health and safety, none of us gave it a second thought".

Sandberg grew used to Webb's haphazard demands such as "Ring Vanessa Redgrave and Stirling Moss and ask what books they read as a child", or "Find out the times of trains from Hampstead to Godalming" (there was no such train). It wasn't always a democracy. Webb was "queen bee", she recalled. "She made all the decisions and, yes, you could make some suggestions, but she usually changed them." The office was a small, chaotic room in a Penguin warehouse. Sandberg began bringing in her newborn baby and stashing her in a cot under her desk.

The job pulled her into Webb's glamorous literary life. At Sunday lunches in Webb's north London abode, Sandberg sat next to a flirtatious Laurie Lee, a "silent, solemn" William Mayne and, on another evening, Noel Streatfeild. En route Sandberg's husband Robin, an industrial engineer who designed the Puffin Club's first exhibition, complained that he was missing Chelsea's cup final replay. On arrival they found Streatfeild sipping a Bloody Mary in front of a screen: "Come in and sit down. I'm watching Chelsea."

Sandberg often selected authors after observing children reading their books

Sandberg would be the first to leave the Puffin family when she was poached by Sir Billy Collins, who wanted a slice of the children's book market for his imprint Collins (later merged into HarperCollins). Webb was furious, but Sandberg was ready to make her own paperback list and after four years with Puffin she knew instinctively what children wanted to read.

She set up the hugely popular paperback imprints Lions and Picture Lions, whose logo of a smiling lion on a circus podium is instantly recognisable to anyone who grew up in the 1970s and 1980s. On the launch list was Shirley Hughes's *Dogger* — Hughes had been underpaid at Puffin and switched allegiance — and a reprint of Judith Kerr's *The Tiger Who Came to Tea*. Sandberg published only about a dozen titles a year but 90 per cent stayed in print, including works from Quentin Blake and John Burningham.

Her authors were chosen on a "hunch" and from the experience of watching children read and talking to teachers, librarians, booksellers and parents. Sandberg had two children of her own, which helped her to understand the market. "The importance, the necessity, of having books around a child so that they are as familiar as the teddy bear — this came to me every day," she wrote. "My first criterion became to imagine reading the book to a child on my lap at bedtime, when the child is maybe a bit gritty; on the first page the book has got to capture the imagination — the child's and mine."

She was born in 1939 in Blackheath to Leslie Northcott CBE, a metallurgist and director of the government research laboratory at Fort Halstead, and Constance (née Eley), a teacher. She read French at King's College London and was working as a freelance journalist when she was picked up by Webb.

After being made redundant from HarperCollins in 1991 she founded her own literary agency, representing children's authors and illustrators such as Babette Cole and the *Horrid Henry* creator Francesca Simon, who described her as "quite unique and impossibly glamorous, the Lauren Bacall of children's books". She is survived by Robin and their daughters Mary and Alice.

When Puffin Post was tentatively revived in 2008 — more than a decade after Webb's death — Sandberg was unenthusiastic — "It's a manufactured project," she said — but she held fast to her belief in the power of literature for children. "The protagonist they trust in a book can underline the value of the young person as an individual, can offer a reason for behaving in one way as opposed to another, can restore a little hope."

Rosemary Sandberg, children's publisher, was born on December 16, 1939. She died on April 2, 2025, aged 85

Obituary from The Times

Heather Boxer It was with huge sadness we learned that Heather Boxer died in January this year. Heather was an amazing person whose life was filled to overflowing with her support for others. Her three children Bryony, Christopher and Kate all came to Unicorn and also four of her grandchildren; Casper, Theo, Elodie and Inigo who leaves this summer.

A strong supporter of the school when her family attended and ever since, Heather was active on many committees and always ready to help out in any way. She involved Unicorn in the work of the charity West London Action for Children and each child brought in gifts at Harvest Festival and Christmas for the families that WLAC looked after. Unicorn still has strong links with this charity.

The Chairman of Trustees of WLAC wrote:

It is with great sadness that we write to let you know that Heather Boxer, Chief Executive of West London Action for Children, passed away last week.

Passionately dedicated to supporting local families, Heather was a beacon of light in the charity sector who worked tirelessly for children, young people and families in West London.

Having joined the organisation as a volunteer in the 1980s, she served as Chief Executive for over fifteen years, providing a welcoming and non-judgmental therapeutic space for those who needed it most. Heather's huge contribution to West London Action for Children, as a kind, compassionate and inclusive leader, who achieved so much for so many, leaves a legacy that will shape the charity for years to come. She will be sorely missed.