

Friends of St Mary's Chair report 2020/21

Covering the school year ended 31st July 2021

Welcome to Friends of St Mary's – a Parent, Teacher, and Friends Association.

Aims and purpose of the organisation:

Friends of St Mary's is a registered charity. Our purpose is to fundraise to ensure the children at St Mary's can engage in activities which support and enrich their education and assist in the provision of facilities and items not provided from statutory funds. We have a secondary function which is to develop and strengthen relationships between staff, parents and the wider community.

Background:

I joined the group in September 2018, along with many of the other committee members, after the PTA disbanded and reformed as 'Friends of St Mary's'. I took over the role of chair in September 2019 supported by the outgoing chair Nicola Campbell, and have continued the role in 2020/21.

Summary of the year:

Challenges due to Covid restrictions across 2020/21 have meant we have had to be creative with our fundraising and community efforts, as the usual fairs and gatherings could not take place. Despite it being a very difficult year, the community pulled together and managed to raise some much needed funds for the school, with a focus on low effort fundraisers and on providing enrichment for the children. As far as possible, we try to allocate and spend the money within the school year it is raised, so the families who contributed to it will benefit from the funds.

The Willow Garden has been our main funding focus for the year, and the project group has made great progress. At the 2020/21 AGM the school put in bids for funds to update the lower Willow Garden, pond area, and outside classroom. (The school also bid for funds for reserve Chromebooks and Wifi dongles, but ultimately these were not required). In the 2020/21 school year, Friends of St Mary's have provided £5,748.32 towards the clearance and hard landscaping of The Lower Willow Garden, and have pledged a further amount up to £4,800 for work in the Willow Garden over the summer and autumn. The pond area is also on the list of works, but renovation will not begin on that until the Willow Garden work is complete.

In terms of progress, the statue of Our Lady is now installed (kindly funded by a donation from Farthings Funerals) with steps leading up to the grotto. The children have decorated pebbles which will surround the statue, and it's hoped they will be added to by each year group as a lovely memento. The hard landscaping has been completed and a raised planter installed so that the children can grow their own vegetables.

Over the summer break, the main areas have been landscaped with bark chippings, they have purchased and installed a circular eucalyptus bench around the willow tree, there will also be natural seating to form a prayer / learning circle underneath the tree. We also hope to have a wildflower/bee friendly area, bug hotels, lots of plants, a pontoon for the pond. All suggestions are welcome – we really want to support different outdoor learning opportunities to broaden their options for lessons and playtime.

Community interaction has been limited as well, the Reception parents have had a hard introduction to the school due to not being able to go on site. Friends of St Mary's usually aims to welcome the new Reception families, in July 2020 we sent out a welcome letter to the new parents, and offered to host a virtual coffee morning via Zoom in September 2020. Feedback indicated the offer was appreciated but not enough people were keen to pursue it so the idea was shelved. For 2021 we hope to be able to host a coffee morning for those families in KS1 and Reception. – note 11/10 we did this and it worked very well.

By way of **enrichment**, Friends of St Mary's organised screenings of both a Christmas and a summer pantomime for all children to enjoy, funded classroom gifts of 'rainy day' supplies, toys and games for all classes, and provided Santa messages and a small gift for all children. We also funded the Year 6 leavers books and festival catering, which will benefit each child once they reach Year 6.

Charity status - There have been updates to Friends of St Mary's paperwork this year – the charity commission now accurately reflects our status. Our constitution has been updated as per the AGM in 2020, reflecting the updated name and other established practices. We now have a Go Fund Me and a PayPal account and have almost completed the process of registering as a charity for gift aid purposes.

Many thanks to our treasurer, Lauren King, who has worked tirelessly to keep us organised and legally compliant, and who also organised and ran the virtual summer fair. Thanks to vice chair Naomi Gornall who has been a significant support to me and has greatly helped with the Willow Garden project. Thanks to Denise Lavender for her considerable hard work running the second hand uniform.

Special thanks to our secretary Barbara Pink, who is moving schools. Barbara has given many years of hard work to Friends of St Mary's PTA, she will be greatly missed and we wish her and her family well. We also say goodbye to Claudia Marco in 2021, with best wishes and many thanks for her years of great contributions to both the school and the PTA.

As well as the aforementioned, thanks must also go to Anna Dixon, Emma Dowsing, Lizzy Redshaw, Libby Griggs, Lucia Verona, Victoria Miles, Elena Biondi, and Eva Yap Ramos for their help organising the Christmas festivities and for their support throughout the year. Thanks to Mrs Berry and all the school staff for your assistance as well.

Finally thanks to Farthings Funeral Services, Sainsbury's (Woodbridge Road) and Poundland Ipswich for the kind donations they have made throughout 2020/21 school year. We appreciate your support.

Fundraising activities this school year (specific details in treasurers report):

- ❖ Christmas Fair in a bag – Christmas was the first proper chance for a celebration and Friends of St Mary's collaborated with the school to throw a 'Christmas Fair in a Bag'. It was more of a 'fun day' than our usual Christmas fair set up, with non-uniform and activities including panto, games, crafts, and Santa. We wanted all children to enjoy the day so made parental donations optional. We were delighted to see that this approach proved successful, with people giving what they could afford.
- ❖ Virtual Summer Fayre was also a popular venture, we ran it as a competition and charged a small entry fee, all prizes were donated so it was cost neutral, and it made over £100 for the school.
- ❖ Your School Lottery – We launched a professionally run school lottery in April 2021 and it has been a steady income stream for us. The school gets 40p of each £1 spent, and there's a guaranteed St Mary's winner each week. There is also the option to donate your winnings which some families have chosen to do. The more tickets sold, the higher the prize pot, so we'd love to increase supporters across the 2021/22 school year.
- ❖ 'Click through' fundraisers – we have continued to promote both Easy Fundraising and Amazon Smile, which generates income for the charity when people click through whilst doing online shopping. Please use if you can.
- ❖ The Ink Bin – empty inkjet printer cartridges – has been set up in the school office. HP and Canon inkjet cartridges can give school up to £1.10 each.
- ❖ Second hand uniform – all donations gratefully received, we charge a token amount for fundraising. We've enabled families to access affordable uniform and worked with the school to assist those in need. Particular thanks to Denise Lavender for overseeing this throughout the year. Anyone with issues accessing uniform should contact us via the school office, we may be able to help.

Forward look for school year 2021/22

Volunteers – We will lose some key committee members across the next couple of years, so it is important that people come forward to shadow or take on the roles, in order for the PTA to continue operating. The most pressing need is for a treasurer, Lauren has only agreed to continue on the proviso she can hand it over across 2021/22. This means that we need someone to take this on in order to continue operating.

Community – Friends of St Mary's have a class rep for each year group who takes responsibility for forwarding PTA messages and gathering feedback from parents. They are often the parents that set up the new What's App group, particularly in Reception year. In 2021 we sent out a welcome letter to the new Reception parents in May, and plan to hold a coffee morning in the first month of school, government restrictions permitting. Miranda has kindly volunteered to organise this and it will take place on October 8th for all Reception and KS1 parents.

Events and fundraising – Lauren has continued to promote Amazon Smile and Easy Fundraising, and I have continued to promote the school lottery, both of which are excellent low effort fundraisers.

Pre Covid we did a questionnaire which revealed a good appetite for events such as fairs, playground car boot sales, discos, and coffee mornings. We're really keen to work on the community building side of things this year, and if they can be combined with low effort fundraisers then so much the better.

Miranda has kindly offered to look into running a school disco with support from other volunteers. We will discuss the feasibility of a Christmas Fair or outdoor event and consider the government guidelines at the time. Non uniform days are a good fundraiser and I would like to get some in the calendar.

If there is an appetite to put on events then the PTA will need support from the school community including the teaching staff. Lesley Mudd has been in contact so that we can compare calendars and avoid clashing dates with the school's fundraising committee.

Willow Garden /pond area – we hope to raise enough funds to have this fully completed this school year. It would be lovely to have an open day/afternoon so that parents can come and see the finished product.

Year 6 leavers –FOSM contribution needs to be fairly consistent in order to equally benefit all children. Pre Covid there were discos which the three primary schools in the academy took turns to host. Unless there is a great appetite from the three schools to revisit these, we propose that:

- FOSM continues to fund the leavers books which has been a consistent expense of around £100-£120 (Mrs D-N kindly organises these so it is just a matter of paying for them).
- An amount between £100 and £200 (depending on class size and nature of celebration planned) to be allocated for a Year 6 celebration. Any celebration will be organised between the Y6 parents and the school - in 2021 they held a 'Year 6 festival' which the children loved. The FOSM provided funds for pizzas and ice creams at a cost of £130. Mrs D-N very kindly planned and organised the festival, and the Y6 parents organised the catering between themselves.

Funds to be allocated – see treasurers report for full details.

Finally a huge thank you to everyone who has worked so hard, volunteering or supporting Friends of St Mary's fundraising this year. Your contributions have been very much appreciated.

Marge Jessop (Chair)