

Back to School

Kate Todd

Business Manager of Trimley St. Martin Primary School



On October 9th 1875, Trimley St. Martin's Infant school opened its doors to receive twenty-eight boys and fourteen girls. In the absence of a qualified member of staff Mary Ann Bone, an uncertificated teacher, was in charge of the Department. But little was achieved in the first week, because of "...a want of apparatus..." and the only reported activity appears to have been the division of the children into separate classes: one for those who knew their letters; one for those who didn't. Equipment arrived in a seemingly piecemeal manner over a number of weeks and was initially comprised of Primers, reading sheets and supplies of sewing materials. During those early days it appears as if everything was provided almost after the eleventh hour had passed. The Forster Education Act had become law in 1870 making it compulsory to send children to school. Furthermore, parents were required to pay for their children's education, unless they couldn't afford it when it was subsidised. Therefore, sending children home due to lack of equipment would not have been acceptable, particularly as one suspects some parents may not have seen the value of school in the first place. The supply chains do appear to have slowly improved over the next few months but were mainly dependent on visitors from the School Board bringing them into the school.

Time has moved on. One hundred and forty-three years have passed and the provision of school equipment has improved by a significant margin. I suspect Kate Todd, the current Business Manager of St. Martin's school, would be mortified if there was an absence of any equipment at all, such is her efficiency and diligence. I first met Kate earlier this year on a cold wet day in March when she showed me around the School whilst I hunted for indications of the original school interior in an attempt to see how the school had developed. Her knowledge of the school building was impressive and she demonstrated her understanding and perception of its hidden history. Much historical architectural detail has been lost as the school has grown but here and there small objects have been retained and Kate knew exactly where they were located. As we walked around, I secretly hoped Kate might be the future subject of a Blog and was delighted when some time later she agreed to tell me about her work

and time in the school. We next met at the end of July. The cold and wet had been replaced with stifling heat as the temperature soared into the steamy thirties. Whilst we sat in a shady interior, Kate told me how she came to work and stay at St. Martin's school.

Kate's life began in Catford, South London and she still likes to return there, just for a quick reminder of everything the capital has to offer, particularly the 'Shows'. When her father's work required his transference to this area in 1983, naturally she and her family followed along, moving into Faulkeners Way. Kate told me about one important factor about her childhood: she acted as a seeing agent for her mother, who although extremely able, was blind. Kate was the practical child who described the world around them to her mother and who understood the necessity for precise and accurate information. This early use of sensory perception helped develop Kate's sensitive and sensible approach to any task which she has subsequently encountered. After leaving Orwell High School in 1988, she recognised her natural instinct for care provision, and following her first enthusiasm, she started to train as a nurse. Her ability was recognised by her Nursing Tutors and she would doubtless have achieved a senior position but life intervened. When her father's illness resulted in his being placed in the Intensive Care Unit, Kate cheerfully gave up her promising career and moved on to work for Jamieson Christie, the Financial Advisors as well as becoming the Carer for her father.

Subsequent jobs offered Kate the chance to develop her wide-ranging and significant skills including the Alliance and Leicester Building Society and The Foyer. You may recall the latter was a respected organisation in Ipswich, which closed at the start of 2017. It aimed to help vulnerable young people obtain a good start in life by providing simple housing and support. Another employer was the Wherry Housing Association, where Kate covered an area stretching from Suffolk to Canvey Island. At about the same time she became involved in active Youth Work and the Duke of Edinburgh scheme in Felixstowe, helping a diverse number of young people with mixed abilities to achieve their potential. This wider ranging and varied employment history developed her skills: financial management; kind and practical caring; engagement with young people; sensitivity and respect towards those with different abilities. And perhaps most importantly, her emotional intelligence and common sense became finely honed. All of these attributes placed her in a perfect place when she applied for her next post, that of Bursar of St. Martin's School. She started on 1st September 1998 and now, twenty years later, has become a vital component in the smooth running of school life.

When I asked her what her work involves, I knew I would encounter several shorthand terms and initials as education is full of acronyms, which wax and wane as priorities change within the school environment.

"I'm 'Mrs Red Tape'" she told me, "and I now cover a much broader spectrum than when I started. National regulations take up plenty of time. I have to keep up to date as things can change on a regular basis. Most of my work in the Spring term is organised around the Health and Safety requirements and I'm also the E.V.C. for the school."

What is an E.V.C. you may be asking? It's an Educational Visits Coordinator. Learning outside the classroom has always been important for children's studying but latterly the Health and Safety legislation means any off-site visits have to be risk assessed by the E.V.C and as all parents know, it is now a necessity these are conducted before any educational excursions take place. As part of the Senior Management Team (or S.M.T), Kate is also responsible for helping to set the Budget. Not an easy task when you consider the contemporary strictures surrounding school finance and as part of this Team, Kate contributes to the examination of the key needs within the school curriculum, for example, Literacy.

A fresh responsibility landed on Kate's desk earlier this year when, along with many other organisations, the G.D.P.R. (General Data Protection Regulations) became a legal requirement in all school. Schools handle large quantities of data involving the whole school population of Staff, Students, Governors and job applicants. At a time when Social Media is becoming pre-eminent, it is important schools ensure there are no data breaches and that all staff conform to Data Protection. Schools must demonstrate compliance and appoint a Data Protection Officer, who in this instance is Kate. As failure to conform to legislation could entail a hefty fine for schools, you can immediately surmise the depth of her responsibility. It is her duty to understand what is required and pass on the information to the Staff and Governors thereby ensuring they also understand and conform to the legislation.

As if this was not enough, Kate oversees I.C.T. (Information and Communications Technology) along with the school's I.C.T partner. Technology moves at such a pace it is a challenge for any school to stay abreast of developments, let alone get ahead of the game.

"The school has changed in the last twenty years. We had an I.C T. room built in 2000, when centralised computers were seen as the way forward. Then we moved to Classroom computers, followed by interactive whiteboards. Now there are tablets in every classroom." said Kate, adding ruefully, *"Wi-fi is always a battle."*

I think many people would agree with her last sentence.

In the midst of all this organisation, data handling and administration, it is easy to forget the children. But of course, they are in abundance and at the heart of everything which occurs in the school. Kate likes working with the children and easily relates to those who may have difficulties in their lives or just need a sympathetic ear.

"It's the children who make the job worthwhile. I watch each individual grow as they move through the school. The 'Thank you' cards are lovely, especially when they say things like, 'thank you for taking care of me when I was ill.'"

She gives them time, talking to them whenever they appear at her doorway or office window. Perhaps it is because she has fond memories of childhood that she believes the children should be as innocent and happy for as long as possible, wishing other children to have the same experience as herself. She takes a practical, sensible approach to the children's safety. Surely we all hope our

children have a happy and carefree childhood but as with all members of school staff, she has been trained to be alert for signs of abuse and neglect. Even twenty years ago, child protection was not as developed as now but protection is vital and non-negotiable.

I suspect Kate's days are busy and full as she moves between supplies, I.C.T., Finance, Health and Safety, Children and Staff. It is her responsibility to induct new Teaching Assistants and Midday Supervisors and also instruct new members of the Teaching Staff how things operate in the school. None of this support was available in 1875 when the Teachers, certificated or un-certificated, had to organise the whole endeavour themselves. Even fifty years ago, administration was conducted by the School Secretary. Those days are gone and Trimley St. Martin school now employs a talented Business Manager who prides herself on delivering everything on the nail. Kate told me her father once said,

"You're resourceful. If I was marooned on a Desert Island, I would choose you as my companion."

It is Kate's common sense which makes her an invaluable asset, principally because it really isn't that common.



Trimley St. Martin Primary School 2018

If you have any comments or observations, you may contact me at:

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