



Making the difference

Chairman's Report

November 2015

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT to the 2015 AGM

I will make this report, my third as your Chairman, as brief as the complex business it relates will allow!

As we will see later there has been some unavoidable turbulence in our senior staff. Two therapists left our North Devon team and three left Vbranch House for domestic or career reasons. Dr Susan Mitchell who had been with us for 12 years has gone back into academic work having contributed with great distinction to our Occupational Therapy work. Clare Webber had worked for us for 13 years and ended her time with us as our Wheelchair expert because she wanted to explore other professional opportunities. It is always a sad thing when employees leave us because they always give so much to the charity and become friends in all our day-to-day working lives. That said, and it is said with sincerity, we are very lucky in the calibre of the new younger generation of staff who we have found to replace them. At this point I would like to mention a remarkable employee and a friend to all the staff, Mrs Jackie Rowe. Jackie had worked for the charity for 26 years and right up to April this year was part of our training team for FunFit – the program run in schools to help children with gross motor difficulties. In April Jackie was diagnosed with cancer and sadly died in October. It is right that you should know that your charity supported the family with the first payment of a cash sum from our Death in Service benefit.

I think you would like to hear that we value our staff so greatly that we became, as far as we know, the first employer in the South West to pay the National Living Wage set for April 2016 – and to exceed it by nearly 9%.

Our Financial performance remained strong this year despite the fact that income has remained stubbornly difficult to develop. Our Chief Executive will report on the details but I understand that by some financial wizardry costs have been controlled with no loss to service quality – in fact in such a way that life for the staff and children has continued much as always.

In late July, just two weeks before the end of term, we had a snap Ofsted inspection. I am delighted to tell you that in the six areas that were inspected,



the school was graded with four “goods” (the second highest grading) and two “outstandings” (the highest). The overall grading is “good” which means we do not – for the 5th inspection in a row – have to send a remedial report to the Department for Education and we will have the longest possible interval before the next inspection (three years).

At this point I have to tell you that our excellent Head Teacher, Viktoria Pavlics had been quietly shouldering an enormous burden and the strain of this inspection proved too great to sustain. In the interests of her health and of her young family she asked to resign. We have much to thank Viktoria for. Although her time as Head Teacher was short she invented a novel timetable for delivery of the curriculum which was much admired by Ofsted. We worked rapidly to fill this important post and have appointed Pearl Barnes – an ex Chairman and President of the National Association of Special Educational Needs (NASEN). Pearl started work on a one-day a week “read-in” basis in October and will commence her executive work and take her place on the Management Team in January. In the meantime we owe a great debt to Kate Moss, our Head of Therapies, who has continued in her main occupation of managing our therapy teams whilst simultaneously looking after the School – which hasn't missed a beat in all that it does!

I am sure you would all wish to join me in thanking our outstanding staff for delivering yet another year of high-quality work. In every area of what we do, all the services have exceeded the national performance standards set for them. This is a truly remarkable achievement and we should be proud of it.

Julia Tolman-May
Chairman

