

ANN DODGSON

By John Hartley

SWCHS has had and continues to have many outstanding teachers but few if any can measure up to the stature of Ann Dodgson. I count it a privilege to have been her headteacher and an honour to say a few words about Ann this morning. If you think you have heard these words before then you have, but I hope they bear repeating this time in the warmth.

The Monday morning following Ann's passing found the whole SWCHS community of staff and many students in a state of great sadness and shock as we absorbed the not unexpected, but nonetheless terrible, news of Ann's death. Tears were shed and it was a very sad, a very flat and lifeless day for all of us. We cancelled the planned staff meeting after school, which was going to be on OFSTED preparation (not a day for that!) but nevertheless decided we should come together as a body of staff to talk, reflect and share our thoughts and memories of Ann. I said a few words and we all stood in silence for a minute or so to remember Ann, our friend and colleague. I would like to say to you now much the same thing as I said then.

As Ann's colleagues and friends, there are two things to be said. The first is what a truly inspirational teacher Ann was. Only a few days before Ann died I wrote to her to try and put into words what a distinguished and outstanding teacher she was. Very few are able to combine such high levels of excellence in terms of their teaching skills with a passionate enthusiasm for their subject and a sympathetic approach that pupils immediately warm to. In Ann's modest way I am not sure she fully realised how outstanding she was.

Talking to Campbell after Ann's passing he reminded me how very influential she had been in the development of languages' teaching at SWCHS. He was saying how Ann was THE role model, the teacher who inspired colleagues to teach with great imagination, with great humanity and tremendous enjoyment. It was Ann for example who promoted the introduction of language teaching in primary schools. He said, and we smiled over it, that Ann was indeed the secret leader of languages. It was also Ann who without it really being her responsibility made sure that Latin was kept alive as a subject within the school. She was, in my opinion and that of many others, one of the finest teachers ever to work at Saffron Walden County High School.

Ann's professional life was not just about excellence in the classroom though. She did so much more. Shortly after I arrived at SWCHS we advertised internally for the role of Professional Tutor. Several colleagues applied and we held a round of interviews. I was never in any doubt that Ann was the right person for this role. Not only could she obviously model what an excellent teacher looked like, but also she had the warm and encouraging personality which trainee teachers (like her students) would respond to. Ann never compromised on standards though, and trainees were well aware of her high expectations of them. So many teachers that Ann supported are much better professionals for the insights and encouragement she was able to give them. One of the highlights of her year was the cream tea she organised to celebrate the end of our PGCE students' teaching practice. I was always struck not only by the immense professional respect the students had for Ann but also by their great affection for her.

The wider impact she had on education was not just through the teachers she trained, but also felt in many schools in Essex, where she had worked as an Advanced Skills teacher – as always bringing that mix of expertise and supportive encouragement which teachers who are struggling so need.

But of course it was not just Ann the professional teacher who we remember today. It was Ann, our friend. She was such a kind, thoughtful, sensitive, generous lovely woman. In many respects every colleague who got to know Ann on the staff, even if they didn't know her very well, thought of her as a friend. She was so giving as a person – never a taker. She was always interested in you, in what you were doing and what members of your family were doing. Nothing was ever too much for her. If you were up against a deadline or in a tight corner, Ann would always do her very best to help you out without a second thought.

Over the last eighteen months Ann's bravery in the face of cancer has been both inspiring and humbling. Her teaching and professional life meant so much to her that she was determined to continue for as long as she possibly could - right up almost until the end students and trainee teachers were still benefiting massively from Ann's classroom expertise and from her professional support. As I put in my letter to her: "The students that you taught loved your teaching and they loved you". Ann was a brilliant teacher and a wonderful human being. In a very profound way she has left her mark on Saffron Walden County High School – the students and staff. We will miss her as the outstanding professional that she truly was, but also as a wonderful person and friend. The memories we have of Ann and the example she set will always remain with us. Ann is irreplaceable.

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