

I first met Alex Johnson when my husband and I viewed Linden School as a place for our son and daughter to attend. It was obvious, from the outset, that he was devoted to his school and his pupils. It was obvious, too, that the children in his care would have followed him to the end of the world and back again - and not only for the infamous chews that always filled his pocket!

Later, when I was privileged to join the staff of Linden School, I saw at first hand how well the children responded to his 'firm but fair' approach and the excellent results every year spoke for themselves. His aim was for each child to maximise their potential and it wasn't only in the classroom where they learned. He converted the old school in Barlow into an adventure centre where the children enjoyed themselves immensely, and he liked nothing better than showing the older ones how to make bows and arrows, climb trees and recognise some of the wonders of nature in the nearby woodland, where he himself had played as a boy. When we, as teachers, took a party of children to Barlow it wasn't uncommon to have Mr Johnson call in to see everyone early in the morning and perhaps enjoy some breakfast with us all.

Another highlight for the children was when Mr Johnson would call in to a lesson, taking close interest in what was being taught and asking them questions. He was always delighted to see a roomful of hands going up striving to provide answers and he took great pleasure in rewarding the children with a chew or two.

As a younger man he had enjoyed playing sport and in turn he was keen that the pupils, too, had opportunity to participate in physical activity. The annual sports day was eagerly awaited and Mr Johnson was at the centre of everything, cheering and clapping the efforts of the children. The following day he would visit every class, commenting on performances and handing out lollipops to all.

He also had a keen sense of humour and this was freely displayed in the school plays which he wrote and which the children performed with great enthusiasm. Budding actors of all ages enjoyed being on stage and the confidence they gained undoubtedly helped them in their future careers. Every year there was a fête in the summer and at Christmas and Mr Johnson was always there encouraging everyone in their efforts. The only time his spirits seemed to drop were as the holidays approached and he realised that he wouldn't be seeing the pupils every day - they were like family to him.

Over the years, I, along with other teachers, greatly valued his unwavering support and the low turnover of staff was testament to the happy atmosphere within the school - perhaps helped by strong tea he prepared each break time, a spoonful for each person and one for the pot!

Happy memories indeed!

By Sheila Malcolm