

Harry Pickering

January 1999 saw the start of a very special relationship between Harry and the staff and children of Kingham Primary School. Harry was an extremely bright boy but with severe physical difficulties. He couldn't walk, used an electric wheelchair and had very limited use of his hands and arms. He was also terminally ill. Right from the start, the staff at Kingham Primary accepted Harry for who he was and were determined he should be totally integrated.

Harry loved school – it was liberating for him. He had absolute trust in those who helped him, particularly his one-to-one support assistant Rosemary Klee. He joined in most lessons and activities – even P.E. and dance. As Harry's hands and arms became weaker the school kept up to date with computer equipment to enable him to write his much loved poetry and essays. This included a special height-adjustable table, keyboard guard and rotating arm rests to take the strain from his limbs.

In his two years at school Harry took part in sports days, sharing assembly and particularly loved last year's Nativity Play in which he was an angel! The love and respect shown to him by staff, pupils and parents at the school was quite extraordinary right up to the day he died.

On Tuesday 14th November (my birthday), Harry asked to go to school "because I want to see my friends". He had been off school the day before with a suspected collapsed lung. After four hours of lessons, lunch and a play in the playground, he felt very tired and was coughing again. He was eventually persuaded to go home and rest. By that evening we had taken Harry to Helen House Children's Hospice with severe breathing problems and by Friday 17th November, only three days later he was dead.

For a primary school to have to cope with the death of a child is a horrendous task and Irene Beever (Headteacher) and her staff handled the situation in the most practical yet sensitive way imaginable. On the day Harry died, lessons stopped to enable children and staff to talk as much as they needed and to try and understand what had happened. Each child was given a leaf on which to write a message for Harry. By the afternoon an assembly had been organised with the Vicar of Kingham and every child placed their leaf on a Memory Tree. (This idea had come from Harry's teacher Mrs Jarrett).

The school closed early on the day of Harry's funeral so that any pupils and staff who wished to, could attend. The Memory Tree was placed in Shipton Village Hall for the congregation to see. All the catering for the funeral was provided by parents of Kingham Primary. An array of wonderful cakes and sandwiches was served by staff and parents who then washed up afterwards! This was so typical of the school as they have helped Harry and ourselves through the last two years of our devastating journey. The sense of support and community has been quite incredible.

When our neighbour and friend Vera Case (Casey), offered to organise a concert by John Walker it seemed a fitting tribute to the school that they should benefit from the funds raised. We would love Kingham Primary to have the computer they need, in memory of Harry, and this concert will help.

Lizzie Pickering