

Walter – Valediction on leaving Gateways School

Walter is coming to the end of his second stint at Gateways, one that has lasted four years. He has taught English to all age groups in the High School and has been sympathetic to all their different needs – he has challenged the most able but has also demonstrated an understanding and humanity that has made him a firm favourite with the less able.

I have never heard a pupil say a bad thing about Mr Swan – and I've done my research, I have asked around. Older pupils have told me that he quotes endlessly from Macbeth, adores the character Pip from Great Expectations, never lets a lesson go by without completing a crossword clue and is an inveterate story teller.....many of which begin with lines like: When I was at Oxford or in my current novel or I've got an idea for a film script.

The younger pupils that I spoke to said, in a variety of ways but put simply, that Mr Swan is a very nice man who inspires them with ideas. One of the really interesting things that Walter does, and is in some ways a measure of the man, is to have his pupils creative work bound together in glossy booklets – there's a whole stash of them in the library, full of creative work, with titles like 'Why were her toes like that?' In a very real sense his pupils were able to say that they had had their work published.

Walter has always been a supporter and encourager of creative activities outside the classroom: Lower School drama and poetry competitions have benefitted greatly from his input; after the departure of Andrew, Walter rebranded the Magical Mystics and started the *Wordsworth* group, the simple aim of which has been to explore, to enquire and to share a love of words. In a school of our character it takes some doing to run a group that offers no obvious reward and Walter worked really hard to make the Wordsworth group a creative hub of philosophical enquiry – much appreciated by those who attended.

It's easy to forget that Walter has been a part-time member of staff. He has always been ready to support whole school events. From my point of view, Walter showed an early interest in the cycle tour of Yorkshire and has given unstinting support ever since – even last year, when he couldn't attend the ride itself, he attended many training sessions and again this year he has attended twice a week. I'd like to thank him for that commitment and I'm sure I'll be buying him a beer next week.

So, Walter is a top class teacher who is fulsome in his approach to school...but more than either of these he is a good man; kind and warm-hearted; he has a gentle sense of humour and is always convivial company. He also grows impressive beards, looks good in a linen suit, packs a punch in his cycle shorts and loves nothing more than a good pun – in fact, I once heard him telling his pupils that to write with a broken pencil was pointless.

Walter, we wish you every success with your writing projects. Thank you for all you have done for Gateways; I know *that to show an unfelt sorrow is an office that the false man does easy*, but you will be missed. Adieu.

Quentin Sands