

This is a very strange article to be writing. Usually, when I put pen to paper for The Chimes it is to celebrate the achievements of our children, staff, the PTA, governors or parents and this one starts by talking about me, which feels very odd!



Recently, I had the privilege of attending the King's Garden Party at Buckingham Palace, having been kindly nominated by The Right Honourable Charlotte Townshend. I have, on several occasions, taken my own children to visit Buckingham Palace as a tourist, but I never in my wildest dreams imagined I would one day have the opportunity to go beyond the gates myself.

Arriving at Buckingham Palace and walking through those famous gates was an extraordinary and slightly surreal experience. As I passed the King's Guard and entered the magnificent gardens, I felt incredibly grateful to be there. At the same time, one thought stayed with me throughout the day: it felt rather strange to be the only person from Stickland's attending.

There are three Royal Garden Parties held each year, bringing together people from all across the country who have made

contributions to their communities in a wide variety of ways. Throughout the afternoon, I had the opportunity to meet and speak with lots of different people. Listening to their stories was both incredibly humbling and incredibly inspiring. It also served a powerful reminder that the greatest achievements are rarely individual ones; they are usually the result of people working together towards a shared purpose.

As the afternoon continued, I enjoyed the delicious tea and listened to the bands playing. My partner Chris and I did queue to greet the King and Queen and I, very surreally, now have a picture of the King as my screensaver! We then went for a walk around the beautiful gardens which were much, much larger than I had anticipated and it was at that point that I was very glad that I had chosen to wear flat shoes!



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While the invitation was addressed to me, I was very aware that any recognition attached to it is not the result of my efforts alone. Schools are built on teamwork, and every success that Stickland celebrates happens because of the dedication, commitment and care shown by so many people. Standing in the gardens of Buckingham Palace was certainly a memorable moment, but I felt proud not of a personal achievement, but of what we continue to achieve together.

The Garden Party was a very special occasion, one that I will never forget. I felt and still feel immensely thankful for the opportunity to represent our school and incredibly grateful to Charlotte for the nomination but above all it served as a powerful reminder that the real privilege is being part of such an

exceptional school community. I am very fortunate to lead such a dedicated and caring team and, although only one invitation arrived, I firmly believe that the recognition belongs to all of us. It is a testament to the kindness, hard work, resilience and commitment that I see every day from staff, governors, families and children alike.