



# *St Mary's Catholic Primary School*

*Headteacher: Mrs Helen Armstrong*

*Diocese of Plymouth*

3<sup>rd</sup> July 2017

Dear Parents and Carers,

I would like to take the opportunity to update you on the life of the school this week.

Firstly I would like to thank everyone for the huge amount of support and encouragement that was shown as we built up to the visit to the school of illustrator and author, Duncan Beedie. This visit came about due to a series of lucky breaks in our respective schedules and, despite the very tight time constraints, Duncan's publishers managed to supply us with a good quantity of "The Bear Who Stared" and "The Lumberjack's Beard".

Starting in Foundation, the children learnt the story of Big Jim Hickory before making living beards as homes for their own menageries. As always in Foundation, imagination ran riot. Duncan gave the children a lesson in illustration and then they were off...with absolutely everyone engaged. The list is too long to go into here but I particularly enjoyed seeing a giraffe, a scorpion and a unicorn among the many other animals seeking shelter in the fuzz on Big Jim's face. On the other side of the beard the children collected adjectives to describe their animals. Duncan was astounded at the level of Foundation's vocabulary and the perceptive questions they asked him about his working life.

Next up, Year One. This time the children were challenged to copy Duncan's characters accurately-no mean feat as he draws incredibly quickly without ever pausing to rub out or reassess-and the children had to keep up. They did, however, and again the standards were very high. More excellent questions followed before we moved to the next job which was signing copies of a lot of books. My deepest thanks to you all for getting behind this experience and making it so rewarding; Duncan gave up his time free of charge and seeing him with a mountain of books to sign was very encouraging for both of us.

After lunch Year Two then took the challenge further. They interviewed Duncan again before taking part in their own illustration class using the characters from "The Lumberjack's Beard". Then, however, they created their own character to extend the story further. Again, Duncan was amazed at the creativity and focus of these young children on a stuffy Friday afternoon towards the end of term; he really felt it was a privilege to work with them and I would wholeheartedly agree.

Finally, everyone came into the hall and listened/watched as Duncan narrated the book using a range of voices for the fed-up animals on their way to Big Jim's cabin. It really was a fitting end to a fantastic day of learning.

Duncan is currently working on his third book "The Last Chip" which, as we found out, takes about a year to complete from idea in head to edited book on sale. He is currently working with the charity "Shelter" to donate a proportion of each sale directly to them and we hope to have him back at St. Mary's this time next year. I hope too, to extend the scope of the visit to include KS2 children as well.



**Creativity – Love – Respect – Spirituality**

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Thanks to all who supported this idea from the outset –PTA, office staff and many others behind the scenes; not least of which my marketing team who did a great job of raising the profile of the event despite inclement weather.

Next week I hope to be writing to you with regard to homework changes for next term. I know there has been some delay in this but I am sure that, working together, we can improve the process for pupils, parents and teachers.

Finally, please remember that this Friday the 7<sup>th</sup> of July is a non-school uniform day in exchange for prizes for the fayre later that day. Again, my thanks to the PTA who have been working behind the scenes on this event for a long time.

With thanks again for your support over the last week,

*Richard Howard*

R. Howard

Acting Headteacher.