

THIS IS
YOUR
(SMITHDON)
LIFE

Mr Hirst

A new beginning

...



After 3 years as Headteacher at Smithdon High School, Mr Hirst is retiring this summer.

Mr Hirst stepped into the role of Smithdon's Headteacher in September 2019. He was already a familiar face around the school as he was a part of the West Norfolk Academies Trust and therefore supported the school with the transition into the Trust. Mr Hirst settled in quickly with bold ideas, including the controversial and newsworthy plans to place cameras in the toilets - for safeguarding purposes.

Working with well-established staff, as well as some new staff, Mr Hirst began to make his mark. With a constant stream of big ideas, renovation plans, planned re-builds and twitter feeds, Smithdon started to make the local news.

But the first real obstacle the school had to hurdle under Mr Hirst was the Ofsted inspection which was anticipated and expected yet was still nerve wracking for everyone.

The 2019 Ofsted report concluded that Smithdon High School 'requires improvement'. But the report also highlighted the immediate impact that Mr Hirst had.

The inspectors said, "Pupils told us that they feel that their school, lessons and pupils' behaviour are rapidly improving. Parents and carers are noticing these changes too. The school is growing in popularity. Pupils said that the new headteacher has introduced rules that are 'strict but fair'. Pupils like the fact that adults notice and reward their good behaviour. We saw that very many pupils are responding splendidly. They take pride in their appearance and conduct themselves well."

And so with a positive determination and a new motto, **Work hard, be kind and smile**, Mr Hirst set his sights on turning our little, coastal high school into a cultured, high-profile, quality education setting that students and staff could be proud of.

"We are all committed to ensuring every student at our school has the best education possible. The fact the inspectors highlighted the changes and how we are growing in popularity is a testament to the hard work of every member of the Smithdon family. There is no room to be complacent and we will not be standing still in our endeavours to continue improving our school each step of the way. We have taken on board the results of the inspection and look forward to a bright future."

The year the world locked-down...



2020 began with the news that a virus had been found in Wuhan. Over the next couple of months, cases were rising outside of China. Italy was suffering but we still didn't imagine that it would come to our shores. Posters from the NHS started to go up in the classrooms and communal areas telling us to catch our sneezes and wash our hands regularly. It still didn't seem real when cases began rising in the UK and the students started whispering about school closures.

At the end of March, Mr Hirst stood in front of the staff and told us that we were closing the school, that we would open for vulnerable and key-worker children only. We joked that he was like the Prime Minister, delivering the bad news from the podium, the jokes trying to lighten the mood during an uncertain and scary time.

The saddest day came when we had to prematurely say goodbye to the Year 11s. They had been a fantastic year group and we were disappointed for them that they wouldn't be having the opportunity to sit their exams, have a leavers day, celebration assembly or prom. On their final day we gathered in the hall to wish them well. There were tears and hugs and singing to 'Sweet Caroline'. It was such a bittersweet day and we were all so proud of the way they handled the situation.

The lockdown and school closures meant that many of the staff had to work from home whilst on a rotated-timetable to look after the key-worker children. As Mr Hirst said "the students had the run of the school" and they remember Mr Hirst being there joining in some of their games, making sure they were well looked after and having fun in the strange situation. There must've been a razor shortage as well as toilet roll as Mr Hirst's beard grew and grew!

Despite the quiet slow-pace of life at the school in those hot days, there was major works being undertaken. The extensive refurbishment of C Block (Art, Food and ICT) which was renamed, The Pendall Building.

September 2020 arrived with new rules and restrictions, one-way systems were in place, masks were worn, year groups were in bubbles. Regular covid testing was expected and despite that, Mr Hirst himself was one of the first members of staff to have a positive covid test. Luckily, he was asymptomatic and was quickly back to school, raring and ready to go.

With a new Interactive Virtual Tour of the school, potential students and their families could safely 'visit' the school. The world was certainly changing!

"I know that plenty of work is being produced by students and I would like to use this opportunity to thank all staff at the school who are working hard to support our young people. I feel I should also thank parents and carers at this time as well, as homeschooling is not an easy task, or at least that is what my wife tells me! There are positives coming out of this time, however, with families being able to spend more time together and participate in community actions like the NHS clap each Thursday."



"A guilty pleasure of mine, which takes me right back to childhood is the FAB ice lolly, which I have had too many of recently!"

Lynn News

MP sees Hunstanton school's £1 million revamp

14 July 2020

Around £1 million has been spent on the project to improve facilities at the Smithdon High School in Hunstanton.

And the North West Norfolk MP, James Wild has now been to the Downs Road site to see the work for himself.

He said: "It was a pleasure to visit Smithdon High School and hear about the progress the pupils are making academically and through extra-curricular activities to realise their potential.

"Education is key to opportunity and the school's ethos is all about giving young people chances to learn and develop and be successful.



"Now we can look forward to schools reopening fully in September and young people learning once again."

School leaders hope the visit, which took place on Friday, will encourage Mr Wild to help them make the case to government for more significant investment in and development of the site.

Headteacher John Hirst said: "We are all committed to ensuring every student at our school has the best education possible. We can't wait to have people come and see all the improvements we've made. In October we're planning open activities, and we look forward to welcoming more visitors then, so they can be like Mr Wild and see all the good work we're doing."

Former teachers remembered as Hunstanton school opens redeveloped buildings

4 October 2020

A familiar name from a West Norfolk school's past is now part of its future after newly renovated buildings were named in his memory. Eddie Pendall taught English and geography at the Smithdon High School in Hunstanton in five different decades from the 1950s to the 90s.

Now, the school's new art and ICT suites have been named in his honour as the Pendall Building, following extensive refurbishment work during lockdown. His widow, June, opened the new-look buildings.

And the school's current headteacher, John Hirst, said his example was still a source of guidance today.

He said: "He sounds like a great character whose energy I for one, envy. I think his values of dedication, community and creating opportunities for young people are those shared by the leadership and staff of Smithdon today."

More than £1 million was spent on a major revamp of the Downs Road site during the shutdown triggered by the corona-virus pandemic.

In July, the school revealed most of its buildings would be renamed after figures from its history.

The main teaching block is being named the Shaw building after former headteacher Catherine Shaw, who was in charge when it opened in 2000. And the building housing

the maths department is being named after Chris Holt, who was recognised by the Lawn Tennis Association earlier this year for his work as secretary of Hunstanton's annual lawn tennis tournament for more than 40 years.

Mr Hirst said: "It was a little nail-biting to get the building finished in time for the students' return, but that was achieved and the impact on the learning and well-being of all who use it has been truly transformational."

North West Norfolk MP James Wild, who also attended the ceremony, added: "The improvements the school has made both through these buildings and the progress of students is impressive." Investing in education will help create more opportunities for young people at Smithdon to realise their potential."



A hopeful year...



2021 began with another national lockdown and school closures. Online learning was different this time around with students expected to log on to lessons throughout the school day. Those still attending school were now in bubbles.

"After speaking to the teachers and support staff at Smithdon, I can only report back that we are so impressed with how our students are attending and working in this new online world. Although it is not perfect by any stretch of the imagination, teachers are managing to cover the curriculum and students are completing the work asked of them."

Our second lockdown didn't stop Mr Hirst's redevelopment plan, with the Library Computer Suite being designed by Mr Hirst and built by our site team. This was a proud moment as it had all been done in-house and had added another dimension to the library. The vision and hard work paid off as the project won a prestigious award for its innovative redesign, The Education Business Awards for the ICT Facility category. The library was also treated to new carpet, furniture, lighting and a repaint.

Once again we were back at school and what we didn't know was that behind the scenes Mr Hirst had been working hard to get Smithdon on the government's 10-year school rebuilding plan and we were all surprised when the news was announced that he had been successful and that Smithdon would have significant investment in the

next few years. Mr Hirst was happy that at last our school was being recognised and that we now had the funding to go ahead with all the major works that needed doing on the listed building.

The rest of the year was a busy time. Restrictions were loosening and so we were able to go ahead with a 3-day Sports Day; a Fun Run; Pleasurewood Hill trips; summer school; a Year 11 leavers' day; a very busy open-evening and even a visit from the High Sheriff of Norfolk!

A horse walked into a bar and the barman said, "why the long face?" - Mr Hirst, Red Nose Day joke, 2021



"After receiving the good news at the end of term regarding the government investment into the school buildings, it is even more satisfying to see the rewards of so much hard work translated into outstanding grades and such promising futures."

Hunstanton school gets a lockdown makeover

16 February 2021

When all pupils finally get to head back to their classroom at Hunstanton's Smithdon High School they will be in for a pleasant surprise. They will find that while they were away parts of the school buildings have been given a major makeover including the hub of learning, the school library. Over the last year, around £1 million has been invested in purpose-built new classrooms, roofing and windows across the site, and a major refurbishment of the sports hall.

"We always look for positives in anything, even school closure," said head teacher John Hirst. "With many fewer children in school, it has meant that some of the things we had planned for the summer we can get done now. This has meant anything from essential groundwork's, through to the refurbishment of the library."

The library redesign includes capacity for one-to-one learning, space for a full class, a quiet reading area, and the school's fifth computer suite, with room for an entire class of students.

Mr Hirst added that while immediate concerns of the pandemic era had been taken into account, the new look was designed for the challenges of the years to come.

"It's very much future-proofed. What we are really trying to do is look beyond the pandemic and reconfigure and imagine spaces in different ways to enhance the students' experience and ensure that Smithdon is well equipped for the new demands and challenges it faces over the next few years. The changes we have made will support the highest quality learning for many years to come."

Hunstanton's Smithdon School celebrates news of rebuild

19 July 2021

Smithdon High School, at Hunstanton, has been included in the Government's ten-year school rebuilding programme.

News that it is one of six in the east of England to be selected has been greeted with delight by the school. Headteacher, John Hirst, said: "I'm delighted with this significant investment in education in Hunstanton and West Norfolk. Once our school has been rebuilt, it will make a huge difference to our students, where their talents can be identified and nurtured in an outstanding twenty-first century school mirroring the great teaching and

support that already takes place at Smithdon. As a school and a Trust, we have worked really hard in the background to lobby for this investment to make sure our children continue to learn in the best possible environment long into the future, and I feel today's announcement highlights the confidence at Government level in the leadership of Smithdon and the West Norfolk Academies Trust. I am extremely grateful for the teamwork that has taken place in the Trust to get to this stage, and we're looking forward to meeting with the Department for Education next week to further discuss this project and the next steps."

West Norfolk secondary school scoops prestigious award to redesign its library

25 July 2021

There have been further celebrations at a West Norfolk secondary school after it scooped a prestigious award for a major project to redesign its library. Smithdon High School took the top spot in this year's Education Business Awards for the ICT Facility category after the refurbishment impressed judges. Celebrity presenter Jeff Brazier made the announcement at a virtual ceremony that staff were able to watch online.

The award is made to a school in England which has made outstanding progress in the provision of a first class environment for the teaching of ICT and related subjects – and this year it was given to the Hunstanton school, a member of the 11-strong West Norfolk Academies Trust.

This award comes after Smithdon was named as one of 50 schools in the country to receive a multi-million pound investment to be rebuilt.

Head teacher John Hirst said: "This is more good news for our school and comes as we are celebrating the fact that we are now on the list of schools in-line for the government's building programme.

"We have a great deal to look forward to. We knew how much difference our programme of work this year has made to the school and this affirms that we did exactly the right thing for our students. Winning an Education Business Award is very tough, and we are all very proud of the achievement."

The programme of improvements also included a major refurbishment of the sports hall at the school which is seeing increasing numbers on its roll and growing demand for places.



2022 held the promise of so much more to look forward to. Covid seemed to be on the decline, the restrictions at school became more relaxed and we were opening up. Trips were planned, bubbles were burst and the first Smithdon Literary Festival, which Mr Hirst wanted to make an annual event, was being planned to coincide with World Book Day.

As much as Mr Hirst is a lover of all things historical - being a history teacher - he is also a huge advocate of all things literacy. He has raised the standards of the library space, he has supported Accelerated Reader and the Reading Ambassadors Programmes and wants a festival to celebrate literacy!

Of course we couldn't create a festival in his name without him being involved in some way.....

And so he was put on the spot on Journalism Day. He was papped by the 'photographers', hounded by the 'reporters' and eventually conceded to a 'Press Conference'. He was cool and calm under pressure, he answered questions and offered information and all those that witnessed the conference thoroughly enjoyed the interactions that he had with the students. The conversation between them flowed and in the end we had to bring it to an end as we were

running out of time to get the final article written up. The festival continued with author visits from Hayley Long and Chris Priestley, a world book day with the teachers dressed up as book characters and an academic visit from Dr Claire Wilkinson from Cambridge University.

And so the year felt like everything was back to normal. A whirlwind of events, trips, visits, clubs, exhibitions and rewards. Year 11 had the leavers' experience they deserved. DofE completed their Bronze Awards, Year 10 went out in to the world of work experience and sports dominated the school calendar.

And in the midst of all this frenetic activity came the announcement that Mr Hirst had taken the decision to retire. We were shocked, surprised and saddened.

And so the 2021/22 academic year comes to a close with sunny weather, transition days, curriculum enhancement days and Pleasurewood Hill trips.

The whole school community will miss Mr Hirst's stories, jokes and spontaneous history lessons. But we wish him all the best and hope that he can be proud of all he achieved in his three years of leadership and friendship.



"I have enjoyed my time at Smithdon and have been so impressed to see the pupils develop into mature young people with the world at their feet. I now look forward to a restful, albeit active, retirement."



Mr Hirst's favourite winter joke:

What did one snowman say to the other...?

Can you smell carrots?



Hunstanton high school launches new literary festival during World Book Day celebrations

4 March 2022

A new literary festival has been launched at a West Norfolk secondary school to coincide with yesterday's World Book Day. A week of activities, including visits by leading authors and academics, has taken place at the Smithdon High School in Hunstanton, including visits by authors, and writing competitions. And the main day itself was also celebrated - with teachers dressing up as various literary characters. School leaders are planning to stage the festival annually as part of broader efforts to inspire a culture of reading.



The festival also included the launch of the Carnegie Shadowing Award for Year 8 and 9 students.

Smithdon Shadowers will read and review Carnegie's six shortlisted books over the course of three months. They'll meet regularly to discuss and reflect on the texts, as well as engage with videos from the authors of the texts and participate in competitions.

competitions.

Among the guests this week were author Hayley Long, who writes teen fiction and has been shortlisted twice for a Costa Book Award, and held sessions with Year eight students on Thursday.

Children's author Chris Priestley, who wrote the popular Tales of Terror series and the award-winning Mister Creecher, also held a series of sessions for year seven pupils. And Dr Clare Wilkinson from Cambridge University closed the festival by holding fun poetry sessions with Year 9 and Year 10 students.

Amanda Wright, Smithdon's head of English, said: "We are proud of reading culture at Smithdon, and we always celebrate World Book Day. "This year we decided to go big, taking advantage of being able to bring guests in to share and discuss the written word. We intend to run a Literary Festival every year, to coincide with World Book Day. She added: "We want to inspire a love of literacy in our students. We want students to feel empowered when they pick up a book or a pen - they are the content creators. We are creating in school opportunities for all Key Stage 3 students to work alongside published authors and to participate in workshops. These opportunities will help students to see the significance of English in the wider world."

Hunstanton Smithdon High School students give Easter food bank eggstra help.

26 April 2022

Students from Smithdon High School in Hunstanton ensured that less fortunate members of the local community did not miss out over the Easter weekend by donating 119 Easter eggs to the food bank at St Edmund's church in town.



Towards the end of last term, the collection drive was discussed in assemblies and in the classroom, before students brought in their donations to be distributed at Easter.

"We have collected for Christmas over the last few years

and so the charity is not unknown to the students, and now we are coming out of lockdown we have the opportunity to discuss doing more with them,"

Smithdon High is a well-known landmark for its internationally renowned brutalist post-war architecture, and underwent a major rebuilding and refit programme during lockdown. This year, it has

established the Smithdon Business Outreach Programme to link local businesses and charities for mutual benefit, and also to help students prepare for life after school.

Hunstanton high school holds its prom!

1 July 2022

A horse, a HGV truck and a unicycle - just some of the ways Year 11 students from Smithdon High School arrived at their prom last night.



Some 87 students enjoyed a fantastic evening of food and dancing at the Hunstanton high school's annual event held at Knights Hill Hotel in King's Lynn.

An array of beautiful dresses and stylish, extravagant suits were on display as parents watched the procession of vehicles at 6.30pm drop off excited students, in anticipation of their final congregation as one whole year group.

Joined by many of their teachers, the Year 11 students enjoyed a three-course meal and a disco.

Mr Chapman, Smithdon's assistant headteacher, said: "Colours chosen for the theme were black and gold with the tables decorated with black and gold balloons. "Our head boy and head girl designed an appropriate laminated ticket as a souvenir

of the event."

He added: "It was great to celebrate our student's end of schooling at Smithdon High School.



"Mr Hirst takes part in races but he's not a racer" - Ms Wright

Dear John,

Thank you for all the support you have given both the staff and our department during your time here at Smithdon. Having your support and passion for seeing sport at the school thrive has enabled us to run more clubs and fixtures and given our students more opportunities to be physically active and healthy.

We wish you the best in your retirement.

The PE Department



One of Mr Hirst's plans for retirement is to have the time to be more active. He enjoys running and has been training to take part in a triathlon.

Photo Album



With June Pendall in the newly refurbished Pendall building.



In the days of masks and visors, Mr Hirst was always the first to remind the students to wear their masks...



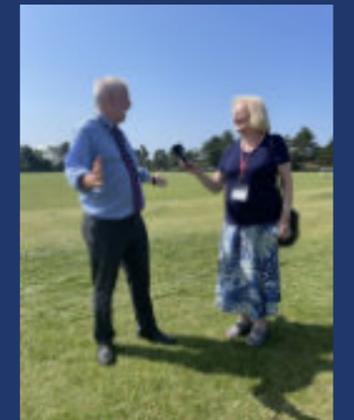
Mr Hirst had a meeting with the Department of Education to discuss the new plans for our exciting new building plans.



Getting involved in one of Mrs Pike's Science Events...



Can you spot Mr Hirst behind the Christmas tree?



Chatting with Jill Bennett from BBC Norfolk about the school rebuild!



When the High Sheriff of Norfolk visited - we have a Sheriff?



Presenting 'The Immortal Instrument'...



Retirement will be handy to flex those green fingers...

Staff Messages...



I think we all know that stories are Mr Hirst's 'middle' name. I have enjoyed hearing these over the last few years. The one that stands out for me is the 'shipwreck' story told in assembly last year. My form were visually shocked stating, "where is this going?"

He has been a highly supportive Headteacher and colleague who believes in all the students and staff that he works with. I wish him every success for the future.

Mr Chapman

It's been great working with you, especially during Y10 ASDAN!

Wishing you all the very best in your retirement.

Best Wishes,

Mrs Nash

Waterstones. A word that will forever remind me of Mr Hirst. His vision for the library re-design was very specific. A tribute and reflection of the iconic bookstore, Waterstones. Whenever he showed visitors around, the word echoed around the room. Waterstones. Your legacy, in my eyes, a beautiful, award-winning LRC, reminiscent of yes, Waterstones!

Enjoy your freedom... I hope you finally get to travel to New York!

Thank you for having the belief and trust in me to bring your vision of the library, school magazine and Literary Festival to life - you certainly challenged me!

You will be missed!

Miss Taylor

It has been a pleasure working with you and witnessing first-hand how Smithdon High School has flourished under your leadership.

I really enjoyed the trip to Walsingham!

Best wishes for a long and happy retirement.

Miss Stewart

Having to bid farewell to you is an incredible loss for the school!

As our Line Manager, you have constantly supported and given positive direction for the department. I will miss our weekly meetings (or story-telling sessions!) – thank you for listening (and doing as you're told! 12)

Wishing you all the very best in your retirement.

The Maths Department



Mr Hirst has been an inspiration to all of us in the History department as he has a love of all things history. I have really enjoyed him walking into my classroom and using his catchphrase "I have a story about that" and then off he will go both educating the pupils and entertaining them as well.

Mr Corder

English Pen of the Week has become something of a Y11 institution, when Mr Hirst arrives during the Friday lesson to present a special pen to one member of the class, who has been nominated by their teacher for outstanding English work. His visit is always entertaining and lively, however, the start of the tradition was a little rocky in one particular class.

Mr Hirst arrived, not expected by the class, and began to introduce his topic in the most solemn but theatrical typical Mr Hirst manner, saying he was there to make an announcement about an extremely important matter; it was, he said, something of national interest, would no doubt be reported in the press etc, etc... As he continued, I could see from the faces of this class, who were always very thoughtful and well trained to look for deeper meaning in language, that they did not realise this was a Mr Hirst joke - they thought something terrible had happened, so bad the headteacher had to be brought in to tell them! By the time Mr Hirst arrived at the announcement of English pen of the Week, the person to whom it was being awarded was truly upset and no class award was going to dispel that in a hurry.

By the following week, everyone knew what to expect and was laughing about what had happened, but Mr Hirst certainly looked a bit embarrassed when he arrived with the weekly award. We shall certainly miss the drama and excitement he has brought to our Y11 English lessons.

Mrs France

I have really enjoyed working with you and am very grateful for what you have done to move the school forward. You will be very much missed. I wish you all the best in your retirement.

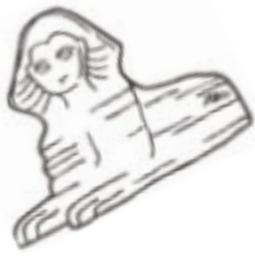
Mrs S Robinson

Dear Mr Hirst,

Thank you for all of your encouragement of performing arts during your time with us as Smithdon and for the help in building more opportunities for the students. We wish you the best of luck in the next stage of your adventure and a happy retirement.

Miss Miller, Miss Brown and Mrs Proctor





History lessons have been so appealing,
The facts you have taught, most revealing,
From battles and armies, kings and queens,
Witchcraft and slavery, death and disease.



*"Everything has a story
behind it"*



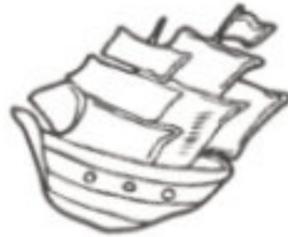
More gruesome the better to keep our attention,
Hangings, be-headings and drownings to mention.
Along with flogging, and torturous acts,
Filling our heads with memorable facts.



Revolutions, inventions, declarations galore,
Reformations, abolitions, more than one bloody war!
The New Model Army, Cromwell's soldiers the best,
Successful and thorough, until Cromwell's death.



A journey through slavery, the middle passage,
The cruelty and conditions were bitterly savage,
Enslaved by their captors, chained to each other,
Death and disease to man, child and mother.

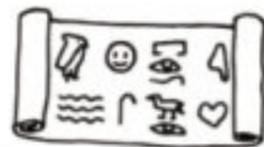
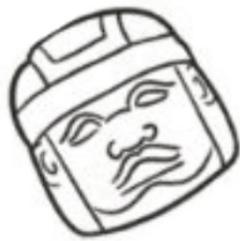


The East India Company gave Britain its wealth,
Only Britain could trade and nobody else;
Spices and dyes, opium and tea,
Shipped over to England across stormy seas.



Mr Hirst your lessons have been just the best,
You captured our minds with great interest,
We've loved all your stories, experiences galore,
So, we wish the best and we'll miss you for sure!

By Mrs Kirby



I thought I knew what we were getting in September 2019 and I prepared for the 'Hirst'. As a self-proclaimed 'Smithdon lifer', I already worked under a number of headteachers and I thought I knew the type. However, Wright can always admit when she's wrong.

Over the past three years, you brought stability, positivity and progress to Smithdon. You galvanised the staff and motivated the students. You practised what you preach: work hard, be kind and smile. Well, the smiling was sometimes forced, but such is the role of a headteacher. Navigating us through Ofsted, a pandemic and curriculum changes, I admired your steady patience and genuine support for our students.

And who could forget 'Pen of the Week'? The English team enjoyed writing tongue twisters for you to read to our classes when you popped in with a vino bag filled to the brim with pens. My favourite deliveries were during lockdown: you would burst into the Google classroom, interrupt muted mics and faceless screens to deliver messages of celebration. I also distinctly remember when we recorded a Pen of the Week announcement and you dabbled on the drums in the music room, as well as your BAFTA worthy performance of Inspector Goolle. Despite the circumstances, you made every effort to ensure staff and students enjoyed their experience at Smithdon.

We'll continue with the Pen of the Week tradition, so your legacy endures. I look forward to updates on your step count totals and all the ways retirement can be enjoyed. All the best for relaxing, productive days and an easy life!

Ms Wright

Dear Mr Hirst,

Thank you for all your help in championing our subjects and pushing them to be more visible. Students have been given more opportunities as a result of your support and encouragement.

Happy retirement!

Miss Phelps, Miss Ruskin, Mrs Dibble, Mrs Birks and Mrs Coe

Here is my funny story about John...

At Christmas 2020, the DT, Art and Food department decided to have a socially-distanced bake off at the end of term as COVID meant no parties. Just as we had put the finishing touches to the baked goods, John appeared at the door, attracted by the baking aromas that had wafted up the corridor. He was keen to try what we had made and took a huge bite from a spiced bun. He complimented the baker on how delicious it was and went on his way. It was only after he left that we tried them ourselves, only to find that the spiced buns had not fared well, when the flour was substituted for a gluten free alternative, and they were in fact like eating compacted sand! Ever the diplomat(!?), he's never mentioned it to any of us since!

Mrs Birks

We hope that you have enjoyed reading 'This is your (Smithdon) life', a very brief outline of your time with us and that you can remember us with fondness, laughter and pride.

Everyone here at Smithdon: staff, parents and students send you warm wishes and all the best for your active and adventurous retirement.

We thank you for all your hard work, dedication and commitment and for all the stories that have made Smithdon a joy to work and study in. We all look forward to enjoying the benefits of the re-build and our new 21st Century school that you strove so hard for.

*Happy
Retirement,
Mr Hirst!*