

Interview with Mrs. Lorna Jackson, Headteacher, Maryland Primary School

Can you describe Maryland's history?

Having worked in Newham as a teacher for 40 years (the longest serving primary teacher and Headteacher in the borough) I could probably be written into the history of Maryland! The original school was called Maryland Point and situated near the station. It was demolished and replaced by this one in 1968, built as separate infant and junior schools, which amalgamated into [Maryland Primary](#) school in 1990. The opening of the school featured on a TV programme, Blue Peter, when the BBC buried a time capsule in our school garden. In 2008, Maryland pupils worked as young engineers with the designers of the Olympic park to ensure it reflected their wishes.

We have been featured in a documentary about the real 'Eastenders' called The Real Albert Square, used as a location for a Ken Loach film and on Sky TV in a programme about the impact of the Olympics.



What is the school ethos, and how is it embodied in the pupils?

My passion is sustainability and my pupils have been known to challenge the big businesses, including Michelin starred restaurants, about single use plastic. We use cardboard pens and are the designated area crisp packet recycling centre for [Walkers](#). Anyone can bring their crisp packets (any brand) as our Eco Warriors are determined to reduce non-biodegradable everyday items. Walkers pay us and we donate the money to charity. We don't use individual yoghurt pots at lunchtime, but instead it is served scooped from large tubs. We promote bamboo toothbrushes and utensils.

You can feel the ethos when you enter the school and all visitors comment on the calmness of the school. Every child here will tell you what Mrs. Jackson likes best - CALM - whilst taking a lovely deep breath in and out. We even have a Japanese Kyoto style calm zone with a large globe water feature. We are driven by our 6 school values: Ambition, Teamwork, Resilience, Respect, Courage and Kindness, in no particular order.

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Are there any unusual subjects taught or unexpected experiences offered?

We have a RHS 5 star award from TV gardener, Alan Titchmarsh, for our inclusive outdoor curriculum. This is delivered from our showpiece 'Nature's Garden' (yes, belonging to nature). Within the Garden we have built '[Negril Beach](#)' (named after the famous one in Jamaica), a mini orchard, a Mediterranean garden, a cactus garden, a living sensory grotto, herbal area, research station, nine growing beds (with unusual crops like aubergines, sweet potatoes), a pond (which hosts rare species such as the crested newt), a performing stage with AVA for impromptu showcasing of talent at lunchtime, and so on. We even grow hops and grapes, both white and purple, trailing down our walls. We have had many visitors, including other schools, who have been inspired by Nature's Garden.

But that's not all. Go around to the busy Nursery garden and you will see Cluckingham Palace, our chicken house, where we keep our 10 beloved hens, all named after 'royals' - the hens surprise our visitors when they show off their daily laying of blue, white, brown and green eggs. The Palace is run by Eggstraordinaire, a company formed by the children in KS2 (our Eggsperts) who look after the hens and run the egg business like Alan Sugar. They sell shares to any unwitting visitors!

What is the most rewarding aspect of your role at Maryland?

I love to see the outcomes of my international research projects become embedded in our curriculum at Maryland, to the point where they are unnoticeable. I have been fortunate to have embarked on educational research trips to China, Bangladesh, Japan, Finland, Sweden, the Netherlands and Singapore with the unwavering support of my governors who trust that 'she will always bring back something revolutionary'.

What is really rewarding is seeing the changes I have made, not just to lives (adults, children, animals) but also to charities, buildings, policies, attitudes, lifestyles - anything that I can have an impact on. Not to mention the educational standards that have risen in my time. When I began headship Literacy standards were low at 43% and now are consistently above national. I feel a great sense of satisfaction seeing happiness and enjoyment in action. I love to stand at the school gate and watch the children skip and scoot to school and greet the diverse mix of parents gathering for their daily chat - completely relaxed and satisfied with whatever Maryland is going to get up to with their children that day!

What are your future ambitions for the school?

We are widely recognised for being pioneers in curriculum innovation - I believe in research. I always start with a single question then my mission is to find the answer, no matter how far I have to travel, trying new things that are 'out of the box'. All who know me know that I live by the mantra "those who say it can't be done should not disturb the person doing it." I normally have to explain that one! So my ambitions are for Maryland to keep on being innovators - as long as there is change out there in the world, then there is something new to find and try out. Being brave and taking risks with change is what keeps our children engaged and enthused!

What would you say sets Maryland apart from other schools?

We are adventurers. We are only one of a handful of Primary schools in the UK invited to actually meet [Captain Tim Peake](#), astronaut and conduct an experiment for him, growing Rocket seeds that Tim had taken into space and NASA then sent to Maryland (via Kazakhstan). What a memorable experience when the children found that the seeds were affected by zero gravity! We were the first school in Newham to introduce Google Education way before other schools transferred to the platform. In 2003 we were the forerunner school in Newham to introduce Ruth Miskin's reading programme, now known as RWI, so becoming one of only two international model schools for Oxford University Press. We host delegations of teachers from all over the world. We are a 2019 Mayor of London's ['School for Success'](#) school (top 6% in London for our success with low achievers), following on from being showcased in the 2018 ['Parliamentary Review'](#) highlighting best practice as a school for innovation and research.



What else sets us apart? I don't know of many schools where the staff and pupils come into assembly dancing and singing to One Love or any other musical message that I may want to share on that day. Our adopted school song is [True Colours](#) by the Kaos Choir for deaf children. Have a look at the link to see why it inspires my pupils. I challenge you not to be moved.

Are there any pupils achievements that you would like to mention?

We very much respect competition as we like to showcase and develop talents. The headteacher of Usain Bolt's primary school in Jamaica is my namesake, Lorna Jackson. I learned that leadership should be about instilling belief and ambition, to enhance children's talents. We have won many sporting competitions, especially football, and have an England squad basketball coach on our staff so we are doing well in that area too. Our Fencing club is highly skilled so watch this space. We proudly won Newham Panathlon with our team of SEND pupils. We live the Olympic values and actually have one of the 2012 Olympic torches taking pride of place on display in our hall.

Are there any upcoming events/ programmes that the local or wider community should be aware of?

We proudly hosted Newham's Black History Month art exhibition, sponsored by the council. We were open to the public and received excellent reviews on the children's interpretation of work done by famous artists of colour.

Next week, we are hosting a delegation of 18 educators from Osaka, Japan, strengthening the close links we have with the university there. This is the 5th research visit from Japanese teachers and professors to Maryland. They refer to us as 'a most excellent school'. My pupils will of course give them a most excellent and memorable experience, as we dance into assembly.