

“The best teacher ever”

There will be few families in Bridge of Allan who have not had a child taught by Mrs Lesley Christie, who is to retire from the staff at the primary school this Easter, after teaching there for 34 years.

An Aberdeenshire “quine”, brought up in the village of Blackburn, Lesley decided to spread her wings and move south to the big city of Stirling once she had qualified. She arrived in Bridge of Allan to teach in 1975, after five years at St Mary’s, Bannockburn.

One of her earliest pupils was local resident Sally Russell, with whom she soon became a favourite: “She even gave up her lunch-times to teach us country dancing!” Now seeing her as a parent, Sally says she hasn’t changed a bit.

Lesley’s reputation was soon established, and most parents who heard that she was to be their child’s teacher were always delighted. Mrs Val Pettit, whose children were in her classes in the nineties, described her as “a delightful person to deal with at every level, professional and supportive, especially in preparing P7 pupils for the challenging move into secondary schooling”.

Which qualities, then, made her such a much-admired teacher? Firstly, everyone mentions her bubbly personality - she emanates a sense of “joie de vivre”, always giving 100% to her teaching. A good teacher has to be a good actress, and Lesley personified this. She has a qualification to teach drama, and she always tried to incorporate this into her teaching. Aware too of her limitations, she readily admits that the IT revolution passed her by.

But to make a real impact, such vivacity has to be underpinned by a strong moral core. Lesley brought this from her own family upbringing, and her involvement in the church remains important to her. Different generations will remember her work in Teenscene and other



Lesley with her final class

youth clubs and her continuing role as a church elder.

Lesley has always shown similar commitment beyond the classroom in her involvement in the extra-curricular side of education. PTA work, taking pupils to play netball or to participate in country dance competitions: she has done the lot.

For many years, too, she has been involved with the P7 residential trips, always enjoying seeing her pupils in a different setting. The feeling was mutual as one boy commented at the end of one hectic dance: “I can’t believe you can dance like that...and you’re quite old!” She still recalls - with a frisson - trying wild water canoeing near Newtownmore: “Water and I are not natural companions.”

Every good teacher also has to have a “hinterland” - an intellectual background

which enriches her teaching. With her regular visits to the theatre, concerts, Scottish Ballet and Scottish Opera, with her love of reading and talking about books, Lesley had much to offer pupils here too. Her idea of a perfect holiday was always a city-break, which provided her with a fund of information far beyond the ken of Miss Jean Brodie.

Finally, she always took a keen interest in the philosophy of education, so the obvious question to ask her was about education then and now. “Well, it was never the good old days,” she says of her early teaching experience. Then, there was much more drilling and rote-learning: “We concentrated on literacy and numeracy,” sometimes to the detriment of self-expression which she herself always encouraged.

The emphasis was more on the acquisition of knowledge, whereas now the focus is all on encouraging pupils to think and learn independently. Treading delicately, she observed that it is very hard work to focus on the individual needs of 31 pupils, though she enjoyed the breadth and spread of the modern curriculum.

And retirement? With a person of such energy and vim, a quiet seat at home does not seem a likely prognosis. She would like to contribute in the voluntary sector - “There is so much need” she says. There are also plenty of friends who will continue to delight in her company.

And having always lived in the village, Lesley likes nothing better than chatting to former pupils. So if any of you spot her strolling along Henderson Street, be sure and stop to have a word.

HANNAH FORBES

I am eager to learn about my mother’s life in Scotland. Born in Allandale, Bridge of Allan, to Alexander Forbes (postman) and Elizabeth Thomson Forbes, she was one of many siblings. Her first husband, Thomas Grieve, died from war wounds in 1941. Married in 1943 to my father, Harold Ward, she then lived near to Manchester, England.

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