

ONE WORLD LINK

The Day of the African Child, 2016

On Thursday 16th June St Anthony's Primary School in Leamington Spa was host to 500 children celebrating the International Day of the African Child.

The participating children came from 15 primary schools in Leamington and Warwick, each of which has a partner linked school in Bo (Sierra Leone). The links are made possible through local charity One World Link (OWL) which has been promoting friendship and mutual learning between Bo District (Sierra Leone) and Warwick District for over 35 years. The school links are maintained through activities such as annual teacher exchanges, children sharing work and projects, pen friendships, school clubs, teacher and children's friendships and teacher training delivered in Sierra Leone.

The Day of the African Child celebration saw children enjoying a joyous day of workshops to learn more about Africa and celebrate their links with schools in Sierra Leone. After a grand parade round the field in which the children processed with flags and banners proclaiming their school links, the children participated in a number of workshops - singing, dancing, music, sports, art and African storytelling. After a picnic lunch everyone gathered in the marquee for a Skype link with the Day of the African Child school celebrations in Bo. It was a special moment when 500 children here started waving and cheering as they saw children in Bo on the 40inch TV which had been set up specially for the video call. They heard a Bo school child delivering a speech about the value of the school partnerships, then sang a popular song in the Krio language called Tel am tenki.



As part of the Day of the African Child, schools had also participated in the 'Send My Friend to School' initiative which campaigns to give every child the education that is their right. At the end of the day everyone gathered in the marquee for the grand finale where all the children joined in the songs and dances they had learned during the day. MP Chris White received the pupils' campaign messages, eloquently expressed by some Year 6 ambassadors from St Anthony's.



The Day of the African Child celebration this year is extra special as it was also a chance to celebrate the reopening of schools in Sierra Leone after the Ebola crisis. During the crisis the Sierra Leone schools were closed and the whole education system was thrown into turmoil. However, the school links and friendships were maintained throughout Ebola. Schools here were able to make contact with their link teachers by txt, sending messages of sympathy and support, and many of the Leamington and Warwick schools held fundraising events for their friends in Bo (including a 'Boogie for Bo' outdoor disco!) to help with post-Ebola support. With Sierra Leone now declared Ebola free, it is hoped that OWL will soon be able to send another group of teachers to Bo under the "Connecting Classrooms" scheme of the British Council with return visits by Bo teachers in September 2016 and June 2017.

Liz Garrett (OWL Teacher Co-ordinator) says, "It is unique and incredibly special to have so many Leamington and Warwick primary schools linked with schools in Sierra Leone. Strong bonds and friendships have grown between school communities and it is a joy to see children and teachers from the UK and Africa learn from each other and work together mutually."

