## Chair’s report: Friends of Priory School Lewes

Jim Endersby, September 2021

We have, once again, had a weird and difficult year. It has been almost impossible to do live, in-person events so we have focussed on online ones. One effect of the pandemic has been to put many families’ finances under extra pressure, so we have concentrated on social events (including an online quiz night) rather than fund-raising. We also organised the *Spring Into Lewes* online festival, which provided a variety of imaginative resources, including several competitions, to encourage the school’s students and their families to explore outdoors (especially at Railway Land) during lockdown. It was difficult to promote effectively and hard to know how many people took advantage of the opportunity, but those who did reported enjoying themselves and we were able to award a series of prizes to young artists and photographers. We hope to do a more hands on and in-person version of the festival next spring. However, as soon as we were able to be back at the school, we were; Friends provided refreshments at the Open Evening for prospective parents (16 September 2021) and we have already organised some second-hand uniform sales (more to come).

The challenges of coping with Covid affected our treasurer, Adrian Keitch, rather seriously and the committee struggled to keep in effective communication with him during the year. However, we were eventually able to appoint a new treasurer, Fred Hoad, to update all our records with the bank and the Charity Commission, and, with Adrian’s help, to give Fred access to various online payment services we use. Getting all this sorted was a very time-consuming challenge, and I would like to thank Liz Webb in particular for her tireless determination to get everything sorted. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Adrian for his many years of past service to the Friends; he has helped us to raise tens of thousands of pounds for the school’s students. We wish him all the best in future.

Thanks to Liz and Fred, we have finally been able to make our financial contribution to the school’s refurbished Science Labs and were also able to fund a safe, outdoor space for the specialist Autism Facility at the school. We plan to organise a series of in-person events during the coming year and will be looking for opportunities to help the school respond to the many challenges of recovering from Covid.

Many thanks to everybody who has helped with Friends of Priory events over the last year. We have a regular committee and an ever-changing list of volunteers who help at events (and are always looking for more – don’t be shy about volunteering!). Thanks to Amanda Burgess, our school liaison link, who has been particularly invaluable this year (especially with the banking difficulties we’ve faced). And, as usual, I would like to offer personal thanks to Liz Webb, who has been a brilliant and efficient secretary for many years but will be stepping down at this year’s AGM. We’re all going to miss her and I’m sure everyone involved with Friends would like to join me in thanking her.