Norfolk school celebrates 200th birthday in style

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St Augustine's Catholic Primary School near Norwich has been celebrating its 200th anniversary over the last year, including a Festival Finale in September and a visit from Bishop Alan Hopes back in May, reports Head Teacher Rachel Swindell.

St Augustine's finished a year of lockdown and began the new academic year with a festival of fun in September, including an archive gallery. The school was able to open its door once again to visitors. Generations of past and present pupils looked through the timeline of pictures and documents and were fascinated by the old school records, listing the first-ever pupils and day-to-day events not too dissimilar to the present day. Alumni of the school toured the building and reminisced whilst sharing their own past memories and preserved documents.

Sunshine fell upon the school into the early evening. Families and friends enjoyed a short concert of singing by the children, followed by a live DJ, food and games to properly celebrate the biggest birthday party in local school history.

Back on May 25, the school welcomed Bishop Alan Hopes to celebrate the feast day of St Augustine of Canterbury, the school's patron saint. The feast day was also a chance to commemorate a milestone in the school's 200-year history.

A special Mass was held with the UKS2 – Year 5&6 children in the school hall. Another special guest, Deacon Bill Dimelow, was able to join in with the service following a long absence due to

visitor restrictions. The rest of the school remained in their socially distanced bubbles and watched the Mass live via a ‘Zoom’ video broadcast. It was an uplifting ceremony after recent Covid-19 restrictions, enjoyed by the whole school.

This momentous event was the first Mass that Bishop Alan had celebrated with one of his Diocesan schools since the start of the pandemic and the first lockdown in England.

Bishop Alan took the opportunity during his visit to tour the school and meet each class. The children were so pleased to see their special visitor. They were warm and welcoming and a testament to the wonderfully close community of St Augustine’s and Old Costessey – a community that boasts five generations of one family that have continuously attended St Augustine’s.

It was a delight to show Bishop Alan how the school had expanded and developed since his last visit for the grand opening and blessing of three new classrooms. These had been built as part of the school’s expansion to create more admission places for the local community and a demand for families that preferred a Catholic school education. The school has finally reached its complete, full capacity – to coincide with its 200th anniversary.

Pictured, St Augustine’s has celebrated its 200th anniversary with a Festival Finale, below, and a visit from Bishop Alan, above.

