

Sophie makes a new friend

“Attention, attention... attention please!” squawked the principal of Storey Street Public School, Mr Peabody, using the squawky voice he always used when he was cranky. “Attention!”

You would expect that the children would be paying attention by now, but Mr Peabody was not talking to children. No, no, he was talking to his teachers in a staff meeting, in the school library. That’s strange isn’t it—teachers are always wanting children to pay attention, but they don’t do it themselves. Not really fair, is it?

Now back to Mr Peabody, the grumpiest principal in the high country area. “Teachers,” he finally began, “I have noticed that too many children in our school, when asked to write something, just can’t seem to think of any ideas. The other day, in Year Five, little Thomas said his brain wouldn’t work. Well, what stuff and nonsense!” Mr Peabody’s face was turning red all over, and bright pink in some parts, even on top of his bald head.

“So I have invented the solution—it’s the Peabody-Brain-Whacker”. The principal held up a piece of cardboard about 30 cm long and 5 cm wide. The teachers started paying attention because they thought the principal was going to play ‘show-and-tell’, a game everyone likes.

“And all you do,” continued Mr Peabody, pleased the teachers were now looking at him, “is whack the child on the head ten times. It doesn’t hurt but it does make the brain think better. Every teacher has to use my clever intervention from now on, in every writing lesson. And I will be visiting classrooms to see the improvement.”

And so that’s what happened to the students at Storey Street Public School. Some children went home with a headache because they were whacked so often. Many of the teachers started to enjoy it, completely forgetting that Mr Peabody had said they were only to whack children ten times.

One girl that did go home with a headache was Melissa, in Year Five. Her mother was extremely angry, and said that teachers should not be allowed to whack children, and besides that it was a very stupid idea, and Mr Peabody was super stupid for thinking of it. One thing was certain—the children at Storey Street Public School did not seem to write any better. Mr Peabody said that teachers and students had to be more patient. He explained that it takes time for ideas to work, even amazingly clever ideas like the Peabody-Brain-Whacker.

Well Melissa’s mother was not going to give Mr Peabody’s idea any more time. Melissa’s mum and dad put Melissa into the back seat of the family’s big 4WD. Melissa liked the new car because she could see out the window, and because she was very high up she could spy on other children sitting in the back seats of their cars. It was surprising the funny things she saw. Melissa’s mother told her to mind her own business, and start learning how to find the way, and doing other useful things like working out how many kilometres the car had travelled.

Now where did they drive to? They wanted a nice school for Melissa, one where the principal and the teachers didn’t have stupid ideas. Melissa’s mother asked everyone, and everyone agreed that the nicest, most clever school of all was Holcombe Public School. And, as we know, and this is where Sophie was a student.

When they arrived, last Wednesday morning at ten o’clock,

the principal of Holcombe Public School, Mr Bean, was very nice—perhaps this is why the school is so nice. Melissa, and her mum and dad, and Mr Bean, and one of the lady teachers, all sat down in Mr Bean’s office, and had a wonderful morning tea. There were lovely chocolate lamingtons and beautiful hot scones. The grown-ups had tea, served from a silver teapot, and for Melissa there was a tall glass of delicious pink lemonade. Melissa and her parents were quite absolutely certain they had come to the right school. Mr Bean explained that all the children at the school were very clever at everything and that some of the teachers got headaches trying to keep up.

By this time it was nearly recess but Sophie’s class was still working hard at reading comprehension. “Now who can tell me,” asked Sophie’s teacher, “what dinosaurs eat? Which part of the story tells us?” Sophie’s hand shot up straight away and everyone knew she had the answer. The teacher was just thinking which child to choose, when suddenly there came a knock at the door. It was Mr Bean, with a new student. The children immediately started staring as they walked into the classroom.

After everyone had chimed “good morning” Mr Bean said with a smile, “This is Melissa. She has come to join us and I’m sure you will all make her feel very welcome.” And that was it—Mr Bean and Melissa’s mother started walking off in the direction of the car park, leaving Melissa standing at the front of the room, near the door. But Sophie’s teacher quickly arranged a desk for her and a copy of the story. And then she asked, “Sophie, would you like to look after Melissa for a few days? You can show her where everything is and help her to make friends with everyone.” Sophie wasn’t sure she would like to do this but Melissa looked like she could be nice, and Sophie could hardly say no.

The next day Sophie’s class was taken outside for a science lesson. “This never happened at my old school,” said Melissa. The teacher divided the class into two groups and each group went to a different part of the school fence. The children collected small sticks but only one group was allowed to bang on the wire part of the fence. A-ratta-tat-tat! Bang! Bang! A-ratta-tat-tat! Bang! Bang! The other half of the class put their ears to the wire and heard the sound come through it. Magic! Then the two groups changed over.

In fact every day something interesting happened, and Samantha and Melissa became friends. Melissa’s father worked in the city and had to drive there most days. Her mother was a nurse and worked at the hospital. “What’s it like having your mother be a nurse?” wondered Sophie.

“Well,” answered Melissa, “it’s no good pretending that you are sick when you don’t want to go to school. Because Mum is a nurse that would never work.”

“Yes, but what about when you really are sick?”

“I suppose then it would be good,” replied Melissa, screwing up her nose a little.

On Wednesday after recess the class always had physical education or PE as the children knew it. It had to be at this time because the equipment was shared with the other classes. Today Sophie wasn’t chosen to help get out all the blue mats—which was a good job because you were out of class a long time. Little did Sophie know she was soon to get a much more

important job.

After warming-up stretches the children were lined up to do roly-pollys, which of course some children did better than others. The last child in the line was Frederick, who was large for his age—mainly the result of trips to the new McDonald’s near the highway.

Sophie’s teacher told Frederick he could just walk through if he wanted. But then unexpectedly Frederick charged at the mats, put his head down and went straight into a roly. He just went roly—splat, right onto his back and his head. Melissa started to laugh but Sophie gave her a kick to show her how to behave.

Everyone expected him to get up very slowly—but then he didn’t. He just lay there, like a stranded whale on a beach of blue mats. Suddenly Sophie called out, “Well at least you tried, Frederick.” And some children started to clap. Most of the children, deep down, actually respected Frederick for his good qualities, like helping the younger children with maths.

Sophie’s teacher knelt down next to Frederick, who was looking pale, holding his head and murmuring something which sounded like “dizzy”. She quickly sent the class captain to fetch Mrs Nightingale, the Year Five teacher and the best teacher at first aid. She soon appeared, huffing and puffing. Teachers always look funny when they try to run.

After only a minute Mrs Nightingale announced that she would telephone for an ambulance. Sophie’s teacher by this time had the children lined up in two lines and the class started to return to the classroom. Mrs Nightingale’s class was taken by the principal, Mr Bean.

There was one more thing to do though. Two responsible children were sent to the front gate of the school to wait for the ambulance and show the driver where to go. These children were Sophie and Melissa.

The two friends hardly had time to talk before the ambulance appeared, eee-aaw, eee-aaw. The siren was turned off just before the school, and the ambulance stopped right next to Sophie who told the driver to go down the side of the school and then around to the right, onto the grassed playground. Then Sophie and Melissa went back to their class where all the children were supposed to be reading but they weren’t. Everyone was too excited.

Frederick was loaded into the ambulance, with his mother, who had by this time arrived at the school. The ambulance drove slowly out of the playground and straight to the hospital where—as the children were told later—Frederick had some x-rays and special tests. He had to stay in hospital for at least a few days. Melissa, whose mother was a nurse and who worked at the hospital, knew a lot more than this, but she wouldn’t tell Melissa, saying something about ‘patient privacy’, which Melissa didn’t understand. She did understand though that she had to stop asking.

Sophie suggested that the class make a huge get-well card for Frederick, and that it be taken to him that very night, during visiting hours. The teacher said it would be a wonderful idea, but she would first check with Frederick’s mother. Yes, Frederick and his nurses all agreed so the children in Year Five had a very long art lesson, making and signing the card.

That night Sophie and Melissa went to the hospital to give Frederick the card. He had finished his dinner and was looking much better. The nurse allowed him to go on a short walk down the hospital corridor with the two children. Sophie wasn’t sure

what to say to him so she made a joke about him missing out on homework. Hospitals are strange places for children, and strange even for adults. Parents must feel like this when they visit a school, thought Sophie, who was a very thoughtful girl indeed, sometimes.

Frederick said that in Kindergarten he could do a roly-polly, and that he would like to again. But he knew McDonald’s wasn’t part of the get-back-in-shape plan. Melissa told Frederick that if things were to change, he would have to change first. Both girls thought that Frederick was a brave boy who needed another chance.

Next Monday morning was school assembly, as usual. But there would be a special guest. Sure enough, the principal, Mr Bean, began his introduction: “Boys and girls, congratulations on your recent NAPLAN results. But we all want to be even better, especially in writing. And this means thinking of good ideas, lots and lots of them. So we have invited someone who will be working for the rest of the week with the teachers here, and you children of course, with a special invention to really improve the writing. Girls and boys, please welcome the principal of Storey Street Public School, Mr Peabody.”