

Minutes of the Parent Forum Meeting – Nov 16th 2016

Present: Kirstie De-Machen (Chair), Georgia Richards, Teri Morley-Ocsko, Clare Wisdom, Melissa Hickmott, Amanda Shed, Victoria Hobson, Tina Holditch

Apologies: None

Welcome

K D-M welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked for a review of the actions of the previous meeting:

- 1) Website launch in September 2016 – TH explained that it is unlikely that there will be a specific launch of the school website. Parents are signposted to it via the bulletin, weekly class letters, and through other school correspondence so they are aware of the changes and are using it in its current format.
- 2) New Intake Welcome evening – TH stated that this has been set for 7.00 pm on Wednesday 12th July and that a representative of the Parent Forum would be invited to attend.
- 3) Parent Questionnaire – GR explained that this will be discussed at the next Full Governor's Meeting on the 23rd November 2016. It had been decided to postpone issuing a parent questionnaire until the school's conversion to academy status had been completed, as there was already considerable communication with parents around this and with school information in general prior to Christmas.
- 4) Invitation for the Chair of the PTFA to attend the Parent Forum – Melissa Hickmott introduced herself as the new Chair of the PTFA following its AGM on the 15th November. Other positions held within the PTFA are as follows:
 - Vice Chair – Kirstie De-Machen
 - Treasurer – Emma Moger
 - Secretary – Sarah Williams (with assistance from Teri Morley-Ocsko and Sara Henderson-Smith)

MH explained how the funds raised by the PTFA last year had been spent. CW stated that it was very useful for parents to have access to this information and was grateful that the PTFA had communicated this clearly to parents. CW asked if any Reception parents had attended the AGM or the Meet and Greet. MH confirmed that a few had, but that anyone was welcome to attend PTFA meetings and to help out. VH felt that it might encourage more people to attend and help with PTFA events if it was made clear that they did not have to have a specific role in order to do so. VH offered to bring items from the Parent Forum to PTFA meetings and vice versa

Members agreed that items from the previous meeting had either been resolved or taken forward satisfactorily.

Report Format

TH asked for feedback on the new reporting format. T M-O expressed the view that it had been well received by parents. The level of detail included was very helpful. The format of the Early Years reports from Reception were fantastic and parents valued the detail in them and also the inclusion of so many photographs.

AS stated that she had provided half-termly summarised reports for each child in the past but appreciated that this level of detail might be an additional burden on the teachers' workloads. After some discussion the members agreed that the current reporting format gave all the information required.

VH mentioned how useful the weekly class letters were in informing parents about what children had done in school.

T M-O questioned if new parents were aware that the contact books were a way of communicating directly with teachers about any issues, and were not just for recording reading at home. K D-M suggested that next year's new intake could have a description of what the contact books can be used for attached to the inside front cover. TH also stated that this would be clarified via The Bulletin.

Book Look

TH asked how the Book Look sessions had been received. All members felt very positive about them. CW found it helpful to see how the teacher's feedback to the children via their books. It was stated that it was good to have the teacher's present to talk to if needed. GR had enjoyed the chance to see inside the classrooms and see all the displays.

The Bulletin

T M-O fed back that some parents found The Bulletin too long and that as a result some information can be lost within in. Members discussed ways around this but concluded that it was useful to have all the information in one place. VH stated that it was easy to see what dates have changed but important to keep all dates included as well in order not to miss things. TH explained that it was important to have a "one-stop-shop" for school news which reflected the whole range of activities that take place at the school. Members agreed that communication from the school to parents had improved recently and having everything in one place was preferable to receiving lots of separate e-mails.

Star of the Week

T M-O asked why Star and Citizen of the Week information was not included in The Bulletin each week. TH explained that these awards are only given out at Celebration Assemblies and these do not occur every week. Whenever there is a Celebration Assembly the Star and Citizen of the Week awards are given out and are then recorded in The Bulletin.

Wednesday Worship

TH was asked to clarify the difference between Wednesday Worship (to which parents have recently been invited) and Class Acts of Worship. TH explained that Wednesday Worship takes place each week and is not led by a particular year group. It had been decided to invite parents along to take part in this worship on a year by year basis in blocks of three weeks per year. The reason that these worship sessions only take place in the morning is because they are a good way to set the children up for the day, and this is also the time that Father Matthew is available to lead them. The Class Acts of Worship are led by specific year groups. Parents from that year are invited to attend and stay for tea and coffee afterwards. Dates for all the above have been published in The Bulletin.

GR asked if next year it would be possible to stagger the invitations to Wednesday Worship in order to make attendance slightly easier for working parents. They could then possibly attend all three for their year group rather than make arrangements with work to cover three consecutive Wednesday mornings.

TH agreed to publish the clarification above in The Bulletin.

Going Paperless

T M-O raised the question of whether the school accepted forms returned via e-mail. TH stated that they were happy to do so, and can accept electronic signatures on consent forms. It was important to send forms out in hard copy also as some parents do not have access to e-mail. The contact book can also be used to reply to requests for information from the school.

VH asked if The Primary Times could just come home with the eldest child in future to save duplicate copies at home.

Tenax Update

TH confirmed that aside from losing "VA (Voluntary Aided)" in the school title there will be no visible significant changes to the look and ethos of the school after conversion to academy status. The plan is to convert on the 1st February 2017. The consultation process with the unions is taking place during the following week. The main changes are "behind the scenes" in terms of financial processes and systems, and changing staff contracts from one employer to another (although all their terms remain unaltered).

VH expressed the opinion that when the news was given to parents that the change was being considered it seemed very daunting but that in practice there has been no impact as far as parents are concerned.

Attendance

TH explained that the attendance information the school has to collect must comply with guidelines set by the Department of Education and Ofsted. The school can only report a child as in attendance if they are actually in school when the register is taken.

Some members felt that losing out on 100% attendance awards due to medical appointments or secondary school visits could be hard to explain to the children. There was significant discussion around this.

GR raised that the attendance figures have to be discussed at Full Governing Body meetings. It is important to get a true figure for attendance as it highlights potential issues within the school, for example if particular children are struggling to attend for whatever reason, which can then be brought to Governors' attention. TH is always asked to explain attendance figures in detail at these meetings.

A discussion around unauthorised absence due to parents taking children on holiday during term-time followed. TH confirmed that this has increased since the new ruling. Members agreed that they can understand the pressure on parents when the price differences between holidaying in term-time and outside term-time are so great.

Languages

TH was asked to give more information around why only Italian was taught as the second language. She explained that legally the school only had to provide a foreign language in Key Stage 2 and she was delighted the school was in a position to offer it to all pupils. As Mrs Ward is a native Italian speaker it was thought that this, along with her skill in teaching, and boundless enthusiasm would be of great benefit to the children. If parents expressed an interest in their children learning a different language alongside Italian this could be something that the school could look into via an outside provider and an out-of-school club. Unfortunately it was not something that the school could finance.

CW asked if Year 5 learn some French prior to their trip to France. TH confirmed that they do.

Swimming

Parents had expressed a concern to some members that swimming lessons were now only offered to Year 6 pupils.

TH made clear that the school had to ensure pupils could swim 25 metres and that they had received some self-survival skills in the water by the time they left primary school. Taking pupils from the younger years swimming was resulting in pupils being out of the school for two hours a week in order to have a thirty minute swimming lesson. It was hoped that by offering swimming to Y6 pupils they would be able to organise themselves quicker and better so that they would have less time out of the classroom. At the pool the children will be divided into two groups in order the non-swimmers can have the specific instruction they require while the more able swimmers focus on survival skills.

AS stated that some parents had been relying on the school providing free swimming lessons from Y3 and when this opportunity had been removed the parents found it hard to secure private swimming lessons, and some could not afford to do so.

MH stated that there might be more of a fear factor in older children making it harder for them to learn to swim in Y6.

GR stated that there was also the significant impact of the cost of the coaches in taking the children to the pool safely which had to be considered, as well as the pressures on the school to ensure the children met the demands of the new curriculum.

VH considered that it might be a matter of the school managing expectations and preparing parents for swimming instruction rather than telling them that children will be taught to swim while at school.

Grandparents' Day

T M-O suggested that this might be something the school could consider in future. All members felt this was a great idea and TH agreed to look into it.

Communication/ Contact with Forum Members

GR will set up an e-mail address for AS

K D-M will utilise the repaired noticeboards outside school to inform parents about the Parent Forum

TH will circulate items raised by the school for feedback from parents prior to next meeting

GR will bring any issues from the governing body

Date of next meeting

7.00 pm Wednesday 15th March

Any Other Business

Due to the volume of items on the agenda for this meeting it was asked that any other items for discussion be brought to the next meeting or circulated to members via e-mail in the interim.