

Parent Forum Minutes – 22 January 2016

Present

Miranda Seldon, Tracy Harris, Katie Bett, Jane Joshi, Shelley Williams-Farr, Jo Copestake, Nicola Castle, Henny Salinger, Katherine Higgins, Simon Barnard, Andrew Morris, Samantha Packer

Apologies

Verity Roberts, Tandy Titmus

Minutes from last meeting

Approved via e-mail following last meeting.

Update on last meeting

Andrew Morris (AM) reported that the use of stickers in reading records had now been implemented across the school.

Hand-dryers have now been fitted. There is a small matter which will hopefully be resolved soon.

Scooters – a place for scooters to park has been concreted this week. It is an area that the Pre-School used for their bins and there is a gate with a latch. AM felt that it could start being used shortly.

Simon Barnard (SB) reported that there has been a fault with the heating in the new block with temperatures varying 7-8 degrees Celcius between classrooms and corridor. It has been located and is being dealt with.

AM stressed that he is dedicated to solving problems that parents have and if there are any concerns, parents are free to make an appointment to see him.

Agenda Items

Year 6 children not getting enough lunch

Jane Joshi (JJ) raised this issue but it has been brought up by several parents. The children in Year 6 are being served but are complaining that they are not having enough to eat. Also, food not served is being thrown away and JJ expressed concern that food that the children would eat is being wasted. Several children are coming home hungry and ask why there is waste when there needn't be.

AM will speak to Alison the cook. He stated that children are served very quickly on the whole but agreed that there are days when there is a problem. The main problem appears to be that the kitchen staff have specific contracted hours and they do not work beyond those. The kitchen is being shut at the time when these hours finish whether all extra food has been served or not. Several suggestions were made: to serve the leftover food to children once everyone has their first serving but before they might have finished it in order that the kitchen can still shut at the correct time; also to find out if kitchen hours could be extended; or for parents to pay for extra food. AM

agreed to look into these options but felt extra food might not be possible as portion sizes are regulated.

School Trips Payments

Sam Packer (SP) suggested that having a payment schedule might help some parents keep track of paying for school trips. There are currently instalments on Wisepay available for parents to pay when they choose but SP said that Ashlyns offer specific deadlines and several people have reported that they can keep better track of these payments this way.

Parent access to To Paint a Picture

Katherine Higgins (KH) raised this point requesting whether it is possible to access this programme from home. AM stated that Purple Mash is the software which has a range of programmes available. He will look at whether it can be budgeted for in April for access in school and home.

From Reception:

AM thanked the Reception Reps for the issues raised and their offered solutions.

Mud-pit: some children are coming home covered in mud after playing in the tyre in the Foundation Stage playground

AM stated that it seems to be the area around the bus that is causing the problem and that it is currently cordoned off as it's so muddy at present. He agreed that he did not wish to send children home covered in mud and will talk to Miss Harvey and Mrs Hall if the problem re-occurs.

Shelly Williams-Farr (SWF) suggested that coveralls could be worn if there was digging or playing near mud. SB did question who would then wash the coveralls.

Reception children lunch too early (11.30am) with no snacks in afternoon

AM stated that lunch for Class R is not 11.30am but that they go into the hall 11.45am and eat around 11.50-11.55am. AM suggested that fruit could be made available in the afternoon either where there was extra in what is supplied, or that extra could be ordered from the wholesaler. HS suggested a parent rota for buying fruit so you don't rely on leftovers and SWF suggested that she or another representative could be responsible for buying the fruit.

Is there a way of reducing Christmas Cards that children write/doing a card 'Secret Santa'

A Reception parent : "I did have an idea for one thing to raise following Christmas and that was to do with Christmas cards. I don't know about the other Reception parents but I found it a bit of a strain getting my son to write his cards, and when my daughter joins the school we will have nearly 60 cards to write out, just for their class mates. I was talking to a friend of mine about it and her sons school (Fleetville in St Albans) are an 'Eco School' and don't do Christmas cards. I know the children would want to do something though and we thought of the idea of them doing a Christmas card secret Santa, where they make a card for the class mate they pick out? It would certainly save a few trees."

AM stated that although there is an Eco perspective, writing Christmas cards is an opportunity for children to practice writing, it is a positive experience for them to receive and open cards and there could be problems if you had to send a card to a child you didn't like or wasn't your friend. Katie

Bett (KB) suggested that it is a personal choice about how many cards you let your child send. It was also agreed that as they moved up the school, they are more likely to have smaller groups of closer friends and the number of cards written does decrease. JJ stated that Dacroum Recycling will recycle cards (without glitter) and that a postbox could be kept in school for children to bring cards for recycling. Tracy Harris (TH) suggested that it would be great for the school Eco Council to get involved with that.

Is Lunchtime Break supervised enough for Reception children and should more activities be organised for them to help them settle in?

There are concerns about this that have been expressed. Parents have asked for more supervision from teachers (whilst acknowledging the staffing issue), reducing the number of days Reception children go to the big playground, giving prefects responsibilities for children who look 'lost', specific club activity for days of the week (ie Monday could be colouring club, Tuesday beat the goalie & other ball games (involve the older boys), Wednesday playground games ('it', 'grandma's footsteps', 'catch'...etc), Thursday they could arrange an assault course & Friday hide & seek as there was concern that Year 6 are not wanting to be involved in running the skipping club.

AM stated that it is worrying for parents of very small children especially as the top age bracket in school has increased. He did stress that the supervisors and staff ratio at Potten End is higher than other schools with eight staff on duty at lunchtime and he is satisfied with this. AM said that the foundation stage playground is treated as a learning space. Apparatus is set out for learning and there is an opportunity and need for bonding with peers that is important for the smaller children. The reason that this space is not used at lunch time is that the toys/activities in there would require adult supervision and this takes away staff from the main playground. AM also stated that he has not seen older children being anything other than kind to younger children. Year 6 are entitled to their break as well but the problem might be that there is an initial overenthusiasm of them to sign up to organise everything and then find they have no time to themselves. It was suggested that they be encouraged to sign up to help but not every day. AM will speak to Year 5 and 6 teachers about organising outside activities but that indoor activities are not possible as this will remove supervisory staff from outside. AM will also talk to Mrs Norman about setting up a separate Reception area for certain days. The details will be sent to Parent Forum members to pass onto parents. AM did state that when a separate area was set up previously, it was used but children tended to wander in and out, comfortable knowing it was there but not feeling they had to remain in there all the time

One suggestion by Reception parents was that Buddy relationships are important and HS suggested that the profile of the Buddy Bench be raised and a rota of Year 5 and 6 children be put in place to monitor it for any smaller children feeling left out. AM confirmed that Year 4 act as buddies.

AM advised that there is a new Information Pack being drafted and SWF suggested that details about playtimes and the issues being resolved could be added in there so that those who don't have siblings or easy buddy relationships can be made aware of how it all works.

Any Other Business

HS asked about a replacement for Mrs Brown in Year 6. AM stated that in the short term, Mrs Stroud will be doing one more day working up to the SATS and he would be covering her Deputy Head duties until the SATs. Then it will allow for a more creative and project-based curriculum.

AM reported that a flute teacher came into the school for a workshop to encourage Years 5 and 6 to take up the instrument. The aim is for the pupils who take these lessons to be competent by the time they leave the school.

Nicola Castle (NC) requested clarification on the relationship between Potten End and Ashlyns School and whether the former acts as a feeder school. AM stated that Potten End is not a feeder school and that applications are made on the basis of distance. AM advised that he has spoken to Ashlyns School recently to clarify their Admission Policy regarding Potten End as part of Berkhamsted with an HP4 postcode.

Next Meeting: Friday 11 March 2016 at 2pm.

To be reported back on:

Lunches: if extra helpings can be given before kitchen closes, whether kitchen hours can be extended or parents pay for bigger portions for older children.

Access to Purple Mash

Fruit for Reception Children – via parent contribution or through the wholesaler

Eco Council to discuss Christmas Card recycling in school

Lunchtime Break for younger children – increase profile of Buddy Bench with dedicated children to monitor; Reception area for children to escape to; activities to be organised by older children.

Ashlyns admission policy – to recognise Potten End as part of Berkhamsted.