

Parent Forum Minutes – Meeting held on Friday 7th October 2016

Present

Andrew Morris, Simon Barnard, Shelley Williams-Farr (R), Jo Phillips (R), Jo Copestake (Y1), Katie Bett (Y2), Verity Roberts (Y2), Henny Salinger (Y4), Tracy Harris (Y5), Tandy Titmus (Y5), Nicola Castle (Y6)

Apologies

Emma Harwood-Jones (Y1) and Katherine Higgins (Y4)

Minutes from last meeting

Approved via email following last meeting

Matters arising from last meeting

None

Agenda

1. Ashlyns Applications

Following the visit from the Headteacher of Ashlyns (Mr. Shapland) to Year 5 recently, a parent has asked if Potten End is a Feeder School for Ashlyns.

Andrew Morris (AM) stated that Potten End is not a feeder school for Ashlyns. The feeder school system doesn't exist anymore. The current admissions criteria for Ashlyns can be found at <http://www.ashlyns.herts.sch.uk/school-life/admissions/>. AM explained that Mr Shapland had requested to speak to Year 5. He speaks to all local schools with children that might apply to Ashlyns. Tracy Harris (TH) confirmed that this visit was a success.

AM emphasised that last academic year, all children from Potten End got their secondary school of choice. Henny Salinger (HS) added that there were children from as far as Adeyfield that got a place at Ashlyns last academic year. Tandy Titmus (TT) said that the current Year 5 is a 'Boom Year' with potentially more children applying for secondary school places in 2017-2018.

Simon Barnard (SB) stated that he understands the concerns of parents, considering that historically children attending Potten End have been successful in application to Ashlyns. Since the restructuring of the school system in Berkhamsted, there is uncertainty.

HS asked if AM has considered children from Potten End taking the 11+ test. AM stated that the curriculum is already very full. The 11+ is now harder to tutor for than it was previously. He would also be concerned about diverting focus from end of KS2 SATs. If there were more grammar schools locally, the situation would be different

2. Modern Foreign Language (MFL) provision

A parent has asked if there could be a French or Spanish club/class for children from Reception onwards. Another parent would like confirmation about the statutory requirement for MFL in FS/KS1.

AM confirmed that there is no statutory requirement for MFL in FS/KS1. He stated that a Spanish club was offered to Years 1, 2 and 3 this term, though unfortunately the teacher (external) is now not available. AM apologised for this. He will check on Spanish club arrangements for Year 2, which may still be taking place.

AM stated it is not possible to add MFL into the formal curriculum for the younger children. At this age, the learning would need to be all speaking and listening, with no reading and writing. There is anecdotal evidence that this approach can slightly delay the development of the new language. Therefore, MFL is more appropriate at KS2, where children are able to read and write in the new language as well.

Shelley Williams-Farr (SWF) highlighted that some nurseries provide MFL learning through singing and games. The children really enjoy this and enjoy sharing the words and phrases they have learnt. She asked if this would be possible in FS/KS1, in a similar style to the informal musical learning provided by Mr. Wallis. AM said that he would make this suggestion to the Reception team.

AM will investigate the possibility of running a 'foreign language' club for the younger children and will give an update at the next Parent Forum meeting.

3. Mother's Day and Father's Day celebrations

A suggestion has been made that parents could join their children for lunch to celebrate Mother's Day and Father's Day.

AM stated that this was a lovely idea, but unfortunately not feasible due to the size of the dining hall and the need for extra staff to cook/serve meals. He also expressed concern that working parents may feel left out if they could not attend. This was supported by HS. AM highlighted the Mother's Day service that already takes place each year and everyone was in agreement that the Father's Day cards and chocolate last year was a great success.

4. Buddy System

A parent has expressed concern about the Buddy System for some children. They have suggested that children in Reception have two buddies, a girl and a boy, to allow for personality differences and play preferences.

AM explained that this concern has now been discussed with Mrs. Hall. Unfortunately, due to the numbers of children involved, the suggestion of each child having a Year 4 boy and girl as buddies would not be possible.

All commented on the great success of the Buddy system, especially Buddy lunches. Katie Bett (KB) added that the Year 4 children take the responsibility very seriously and will often look after each other's Buddies when needed.

HS asked if it is possible to allocate a boy or a girl to each Reception child based on personality prior to children starting Reception. AM confirmed that the Foundation Stage team do try to pair children up carefully, based on personalities. He suggested this could also be discussed at the home visit for new starters. He also highlighted the success of the 'Family' lunch time with Buddies. The older children eat more slowly and wait for their buddies to finish their lunch. They are also modelling good manners for the younger children.

SWF suggested that the children who are new to the school be highlighted so that an extra close eye can be kept on them during lunchtime.

5. Communication of weekly learning objectives to parents:

A request has been made that parents be informed of the main learning objectives for the week, in order to prepare and support the children in this learning at home.

AM stated that this is not practical. Verity Roberts (VR) highlighted the half-termly leaflet that is given to parents with key learning areas for each year

group. AM explained that learning objectives can be confusing and therefore, providing this information may lead some parents to feel they are in fact less able to support their children. He outlined the best ways to support children in their learning: ensuring they complete their homework, asking their teacher for their specific next steps in various areas of learning and providing experiences centered on their topic learning e.g. taking them to a museum.

SB commented that the methods of teaching used in school may be different from those used at home. AM emphasised that there is a need to trust in the judgement of the teachers and that giving additional information around learning objectives may cause stress for some parents. VR added that each child will be at a different stage in their learning. AM agreed that the pace of learning will vary depending on the learning objectives already met.

TT explained that difficulties can arise if private tutors have requested current learning objectives. AM stated that a tutor needs to have a very specific focus in order to have impact. All tutors should be aware of the current curriculum requirements.

SWF highlighted that this particular concern is an ongoing problem. AM outlined the steps that should be taken if a parent is concerned:

- Ask class teacher for the child's specific next steps and key priorities in their learning.
- Ask class teacher for recommended resources – books, websites etc.
- Speak to AM if still concerned.
- Attend Parent Teacher Consultation with their child.

6. PE Curriculum

A parent is concerned about the PE curriculum, following an account of a lesson by their child in which they pretended to be animals moving around the hall. They ask for clarification about the sporting curriculum and how the children can be provided with a higher physical challenge.

AM explained that the lesson in question would have been a dance lesson. The PE curriculum must provide a broad spectrum of experiences, though he acknowledged that some children will prefer more mature approach. The PE curriculum covers games, dance and gymnastics throughout the year. Dance is important for building creativity.

AM explained that he is confident that his staff are providing age-appropriate learning opportunities across all areas of the PE curriculum. He added that Mrs. Loria is now on the staff and she brings expertise in PE teaching.

HS asked if there is a plan for a new PE Teacher. AM stated that there is not. He explained that staff are very good at teaching PE and they are continuing to raise standards with external coaches (for staff training, rather than teaching PE lessons).

In reference to discussion at a previous Parent Forum meeting, more competitive sports are taking place. Last year, the school entered two rugby competitions, the Y5/6 football tournaments/league and the Y3/4 football league.

JC asked for confirmation about which year groups can use the cricket pitch. AM explained this is for Year 3 and above only, with two adults supervising. The younger children have access to the whole outside area and multi-surface pitch. From a health and safety point of view, AM is not happy with Year R-2 using the cricket pitch. These classes would need one adult for every six children, which is not possible.

7. School Council selection

TT asked if children are allowed to be elected to the School Council if they have been on the School Council or Eco Council before.

AM explained that previous School Council members cannot be re-elected, but previous Eco Council members are currently eligible. This has been allowed in the most recent election.

AM also stated that they are working to raise the profile of the Eco Council and plan a relaunch for January 2017.

AOB

Residential School Trips

HS asked if the Year 4 Hudnall trip is going ahead. AM confirmed it will. He has asked for parent views on this matter and the majority have requested it continue. This is a two-night trip, about twenty minutes away from Potten End.

TT asked what a child would do if they chose not to attend the PGL trip. AM explained they would come into school and complete independent project work. Nicola Castle (NC) asked about the cost of PGL. AM said that Jean and Jeanette are working on the costs and they will be put on the website. They plan to do this for all trips.

AM confirmed that PGL takes place in March, which is colder, but cheaper. Their health and safety standards, organisation and professionalism are second to none. It takes place at their flagship centre at Liddington, near Swindon. This is close enough should an emergency occur. All rooms are ensuite, with four children sharing.

SB asked if a child could attend for just a day. AM was unsure of the cost of this, but could enquire.

Press Gang

HS asked why there were no biscuits at Press Gang. AM confirmed he has requested there are no biscuits. Potten End is a Healthy School and there is no need to provide biscuits. He also added that children should be sitting down when eating and not dropping crumbs.

Parking

JC observed that parents are still parking on double yellow lines around the school, on the single yellow line on Church Road and on corners. She asked if AM could be outside some mornings to discourage dangerous parking. AM agreed that he will try to do this when his timetable allows.

SB added that by law, cars are allowed to stop on double yellows to drop off and pick up, as long as the driver does not leave the immediate area around the car. The driver may leave the car and help passengers but not 'quit' the vehicle

completely. The engine may be running or not. AM explained that the police do not issue tickets for parking offences. This is the responsibility of traffic wardens from Vinchy.

All agreed that they have witnessed dangerous parking. SWF commented on the particular dangers of cars parking on the pavement, forcing parents and children to walk into the road and obstructing the way for pushchairs. VR added that vans often park inappropriately at the village shop. SB added that consideration must also be shown when using the Village Hall car park. The Village Hall Committee could stop allowing parents to use it if parking is inappropriate.

Suggestions were made for ways in which we can encourage parents to park safely. AM agreed that parents wearing yellow bibs to promote safe parking is a good idea. SB will make a proposal to the Governors regarding this.

Bus to Ashlyns

SB explained that the council is trying to stop the free bus between Potten End and Ashlyns, which will result in children walking to Berkhamsted along The Common, towards Gravel Path. The council suggest that if the junction at Gravel Path is improved, this will be a safe route.

TH urged all parents to write to Mike Penning MP to ask that this does not go ahead. All stressed the dangers of children walking along this very busy road.

J. Phillips
12.10.16