

Parent Forum Minutes – Meeting held on Friday 22nd June 2018

Present

Louisa Ingram, Simon Barnard (Vice-Chair of Governors), Jo Copestake (N/Y2), Emma Harwood-Jones (N/Y2), Jo Phillips (N/Y1), Sharon Kinder (R), Shelley Williams-Farr (Y1), Katie Bett (Y3), Mary Flynn (Y4), Katherine Higgins (Y5), Tandy Titmus (Y6)

Apologies

Verity Roberts (Y3), Henny Salinger (Y5),

Minutes from last meeting

Approved via email following last meeting

Matters arising from last meeting

1. Attendance

Following the announcement at the last Parent Forum meeting that a letter will be sent to parents when a child reaches a certain level of absence, a parent has asked for clarification on what this level of absence will be. They ask if children with medical conditions will be exempt from these letters, since these children require more days out of school than the average child. They also ask if this issue will be taken into consideration when giving out attendance certificates, as these would not be attainable for such children.

Louisa Ingram (LI) acknowledged all these concerns and said they are very much on the school's radar. She stressed that it is absences taken for holidays that they are targeting, not those relating to illness. This year, 50% of all children in school have had unauthorised absences for holidays. The school is continuing to receive more requests for holidays during term time, despite the warnings about attendance given earlier in the Summer term. The Ofsted target is 96% attendance. High levels of absence have serious implications in an Ofsted inspection and have a negative impact on learning. The school is raising awareness of the issue now and will be launching new certificates for good attendance in the Autumn.

The Attendance Officer visits regularly to review levels of attendance. A letter will be sent to parents when a child's attendance falls to around 90%. Absences due to medical reasons will indeed be taken into account in this process and these children will not receive letters.

Although the attendance certificates will be a whole school initiative, the system will be adapted to the situations of individual children (e.g. those with medical conditions and those who do not want to attend school and need encouragement to do so). Therefore, individual targets will be set so that these children may achieve a certificate. Also, children will not need to aim for 100% attendance – the exact levels are yet to be decided.

Jo Copestake (JC) asked if the problem relates to single days off or longer periods of time. LI explained that all absences, no matter what the length, are contributing to the situation. For a holiday absence to be authorised, the circumstances have to be 'exceptional'. The lower cost of a holiday in term time does not count as 'exceptional'.

Katherine Higgins (KH) asked what the implications are for the high level of unauthorised absences. Simon Barnard (SB) explained that it could trigger an Ofsted inspection and it can be a contributing factor to a limiting judgement during an inspection (a limiting judgement would prevent the school from achieving a 'good' grade).

Mary Flynn (MF) asked if the age of the child is taken into account. LI confirmed that as soon as a child reaches five, holiday absences are unauthorised. Absences relating to the 11-plus are authorised.

Sharon Kinder (SK) explained that a school in Hemel Hempstead allows children to take up to two weeks off school for holidays in term time, on the condition that the time is made up during the school's 'Summer Holiday Club'. This helps parents who cannot afford holidays out of term-time. LI and SB expressed concern that funding for this situation would be very difficult. They also explained that the continuity of learning would be disrupted and all children would have different gaps in their learning following absences. They said they will ask the Attendance Officer what the policy on this would be, but stressed it would be very difficult from a cost and logistical perspective.

MF asked if children are able to make up work that they miss after unauthorised absences. LI said this is not feasible due to the already very high workload of teachers. SB added that even if this was possible, the statistics would remain unaffected.

2. Adults in classrooms

A parent has asked if the information regarding students and volunteers in classrooms could be sent out again, as parents have not received it.

Mrs Sudbury gives her apologies that this has not been resent yet. Parents will receive this soon and there will be an updated version for the Autumn term.

Action:

- Mrs Sudbury to resend email.

Agenda

1. Contact with teachers (Year 2 and above)

A Year 1 parent has asked if there could be more contact with teachers at drop-off in Year 2 and above. They note that there are usually TAs on the door and it would be good for the parents to be able to get to know the teachers as well. They suggest this wouldn't have to be everyday, but perhaps there could be a mix of TAs and teachers throughout the week.

LI asked for clarification on exactly what the parent would like from the extra teacher contact. She explained that generally, teachers are very busy setting up for the day during this time. We are fortunate that we have enough TAs available to welcome children on the door.

Jo Phillips (JP) and Shelley Williams-Farr (SWF) explained they would need to seek further information, but they thought this idea has probably been suggested due to the change from daily contact with teachers at the Year 1 door, to a very different set up in Year 2 and above. JP commented that in many schools the situation for Year 2 is the same as for Year 1.

Katie Bett (KB) explained that parents are able to speak to the teacher at drop-off if the situation is urgent and arrangements are different at pick-up, when children in Years 2-4 are let out through the external doors by their class teacher.

Actions:

- JP/SWF will seek clarification on this item from the parent.

2. School dinner portions

A number of parents from Reception, Year 3 and Year 5 have expressed concern about their children being hungry in the afternoon and at the end of school due to school dinner portions being too small, with no chance of seconds. Their joint concerns are summarised below:

- **There is concern that the quantity of food provided from a school dinner is inadequate for their children's needs.**
- **Older children have complained that they are given tiny portions that are the same size as those given to younger children. Some younger children also feel that the meals are too small.**
- **Some children say the portion sizes are not equal for children from the same class. They have asked for extra food or seconds, but have been told no.**
- **The children are left hungry for the afternoon, which impacts on their learning and concentration during lessons.**

One parent suggests that, while this matter is investigated with Herts County Council, perhaps parents can provide supplementary food e.g. an energy bar or banana for the afternoon. However, they object to doing this given they are paying for the meals already. They are reluctant to move to packed lunches as they believe a hot meal at lunchtime is better and more nutritious.

LI acknowledged the concerns of parents and has discussed this issue with our cook, Alison Brazer. Mrs Brazer has taken pictures of a variety of the meals and sides on offer and these will be available soon for parents to view.

Mrs Brazer explained that there is not an unlimited amount of food on offer. The portion size is fixed and the quantity cooked is determined by how many children need a dinner each day. LI explained that the whole range of food available to children each day is large, however some children choose not to eat certain foods. She added that most children will be hungry at 3.15pm, no matter how much they have eaten at lunchtime.

KH asked if the portion size varies between Reception and Year 6 and if there is a possibility of seconds. LI confirmed that KS2 portions are bigger than KS1 portions. She added that large portions of food can be overwhelming for some children. Regarding seconds, this is not possible as dinners are cooked according to the number of children requiring them. There is not enough food left at the end of serving to offer seconds.

Tandy Titmus (TT) stressed that it is still important to give children a cooked meal at tea time, as they may not have eaten everything that is on offer at lunchtime.

KH asked if all the items shown in the Herts Catering menu leaflet are available each day. LI confirmed that the sides are all available on the salad trolley. KH also asked if children are encouraged to eat all their food before leaving the

table. LI explained that they must put their hand up when they are finished. They need to have eaten a decent amount before they are allowed to leave.

LI suggested the following steps going forward:

- Mrs Brazer has offered to attend a Parent Forum meeting to discuss the matter further.
- Mrs Brazer would be happy to chat to parents about individual concerns in person. Please pop in after drop-off in the morning.
- If parents still have concerns, they are welcome to contact Herts Catering. Neither the school, nor the kitchen staff have any control over portion size and available food.

KB asked if there are any county guidelines available on appropriate portion sizes. LI will look into this.

JP asked if parents are able to send children in with an afternoon snack, as suggested above. LI said this is not possible. She suggested bringing a snack at pick up time, but added that most classes still have left over fruit/salad from the morning snack in the afternoon and children are very welcome to have this.

Actions:

- Photos of meals to be available for parents to view shortly.
- LI to investigate portion size guidance.
- Mrs Brazer to attend Parent Forum meeting for further discussion, if necessary.
- Parents welcome to speak to Mrs Brazer about individual concerns after drop-off.
- Parents welcome to contact Herts Catering if they still have concerns.

3. Transport for school trips

A Year 1 parent would like to raise the matter of safety on school trips when a coach is not provided for both the outward and return journey. For the recent Year 1 trip to Berkhamsted School, children were taken by coach, but needed to be picked up by parents. This caused problems for working parents and also those rushing back to school to collect siblings. Parents who were able, kindly collected several children at once.

This parent's main concern was the safety issues around these parents walking back to their cars and crossing busy roads with up to five children. Thankfully everyone was safe, but they ask what the safety policy on this

situation is and as it was still within school hours, who is responsible for the insurance if something went wrong?

They believe that every school trip should provide the return journey, even if parents have to pay more towards coach costs. They have spoken to other parents and most would have preferred to pay more to have their child returned to school for pick up, rather than have the inconvenience of pick up from a different location. They add that they did not feel comfortable being responsible for the safety of other children during school hours.

LI explained that all local Head Teachers are part of a Dacorum Sports Partnership group. Most of these Heads have requested parental help with transport due to the high costs. If a coach were to be provided for both outward and return journeys, there would be a cost of £4-5 per journey (therefore around £10 per sports trip). Unfortunately, sports funding cannot support this and parents would be asked to pay.

LI appreciates the challenges faced by working parents and the inconvenience caused when drop-off/pick-up arrangements change. The school are trying to increase their involvement in sporting activities and they would not want any extra cost to prevent any children from attending.

LI acknowledged all the safety concerns raised by the parent and takes these on board. She explained they need to find the right balance of providing coaches and asking for parental help - this is still under review.

There was general discussion about the question of responsibility and insurance when parents volunteer to drop-off/pick-up additional children. LI confirmed that parents would not be covered by the school's insurance in these circumstances, even in school hours. SB highlighted the potential safeguarding issues when parents transport children other than their own. LI explained that parents must be completely happy with the arrangements that they make for their children.

4. Uniform on school trips

A Year 1 parent is concerned that the class were not asked to wear uniform on their trip to Mountfitchet Castle this week. They highlight this issue as a parent of a child who is vulnerable to running away, getting lost and talking to strangers. They say that in previous years their children have been asked to wear uniform on trips to public places for reasons of safety. Even in wet and muddy conditions, children have previously been asked to wear school jumpers with jeans and wellies. They appreciate that it is not as fun for the

children to wear uniform. They hope that this isn't a change of school policy, as it is much easier to recognise children when they are wearing uniform.

LI explained that prior to every school trip, the school undertakes extensive risk assessments using the national system Evolve. Any vulnerable child has an individual risk assessment tailored to their needs, in addition to the class risk assessments. These children will usually be in a group with a member of staff, rather than a parent helper. All teaching staff are extremely aware of the needs of any vulnerable children when out of school. Usually a ratio of 1 adult:4 children is used.

Due to the warm weather on the Mountfitchet trip, children wouldn't have been wearing school jumpers anyway. In case of emergency, the children wear a blue wristband with the school's mobile number on. The teacher will have this phone with them at all times.

KH asked about the possibility of children wearing tabards or hats so they can be identified more easily. LI explained that when there are other schools in the same area, all schools can end up looking the same. This happened on the trip to the O2 Arena last year, when hats were worn.

JP explained that Verity Roberts (VR) feels it is easier for children to wear non-uniform as they can be dressed more appropriately for the weather and the activities. This is particularly helpful for the girls, who can then wear leggings/shorts rather than dresses/skirts.

SB and LI explained that the situation varies depending on the age of the children and the location and nature of the trip. Mountfitchet Castle is very enclosed, with few members of the public present. However, a trip to the Natural History Museum would be very different. Therefore, the decision about uniform needs to be made on a trip-by-trip basis, following the outcomes of the risk assessments.

5. Making contact with new children and parents

A Year 4 parent, who is new to the school, would like to discuss ideas around making contact with new children and parents.

MF says that she and her daughter have been made to feel very welcome at the school. Miss Ingram, teaching staff and office staff have all been very helpful. She explained it is tricky to get know the names of all the children and parents and said it would be helpful to have contact details, though she understands there could be confidentiality issues.

LI explained that unfortunately, due to GDPR restrictions, the school cannot give out contact details of parents or names of children. They can only pass on the name of the class Parent Forum rep. Most classes have a WhatsApp group for communication between parents.

SWF mentioned that volunteering for Friends of School is a great way to meet other parents. LI added that attending the pre-church coffee morning is also a good way of making contact. KH also suggested that many parents will be around to chat at drop-off and pick-up.

Action:

- Name of Parent Forum class rep to be passed to new parents.

6. Secondary school advice

A Year 6 parent would like to discuss the Secondary School application process and request that more information and advice is given to parents. They explain that this year many children in Year 6, including their own, didn't get their first choice of school. Looking back, they feel that they went into the whole process naively, without really considering which school they were likely to get. They feel their choices would have been better if they had been given some advice at the start of the process. They explain that there is more to it than just putting down your first choice and crossing your fingers. The County website is difficult to use and everyone thinks they can 'beat the system'. They say that they learnt much more about the system after they didn't get any of their choices and went through the appeals process. They would like parents about to start the application process to be warned how difficult it can be and given more guidance.

LI said that she understands the frustrations regarding this issue, but the school is not allowed to give any advice around which schools should be chosen.

TT said that Year 5/6 parents need to look closely at all schools in the area and they should not assume that they will be given their first choice. Sometimes children can miss out on a school on the distance rule by a matter of metres. She said that parents should always appeal a decision. She added that they should put down reasons why a child should attend a particular school from the outset and not save these for the appeal process. SB explained these should always be educational reasons, not relating to proximity to the school. For example, the child has anxiety and needs to be in a school with excellent pastoral care, or the child excels at sport and needs to be in a school which will encourage and support this.

SB highlighted that 95% of children in the county were allocated one of their choices. He added that schools can change greatly over time and the situation will be different every year.

KH asked if there could be advice sessions run by the parents, not the school. LI said this was not possible within school and that parents would need to arrange this. She encourages the current Year 4 and 5 parents to chat to the Year 6 parents regarding this before the end of term.

Action:

- Year 4 and 5 parents are encouraged to speak to Year 6 parents about their experiences with the Secondary School application process.

7. Year 5 and 6 show

A parent has asked if there can be more than one performance of the Year 5 and 6 show.

They also ask if we can have or borrow more radio microphones for the performances so the songs can be performed by the groups (i.e. pirates/lost boys/mermaids) without others having to join in to bolster the sound.

LI explained that there cannot be another performance as the cost of the license fee for the production is around £700 per performance. This is without taking into account the financial and logistical costs of using Ashlyns for a second day.

KH said this is a shame when so much effort has gone into the production.

The school are looking into purchasing more radio mics. LI explained that teachers follow the script very closely and sometimes others are required to join in with group singing. They are working hard to ensure all children on stage have a chance to shine.

8. PGL feedback from parents

A Year 6 parent would like to give some feedback following the recent PGL residential trip and asks if some things could be addressed differently next year.

They highlight the short notice given about costs and required payments. They also express concern about room sharing – children were asked to choose a friend they wanted to be with in their rooms, but the girls (they are

not sure about the boys) were not put with the people they chose. Teacher allocation to groups was also an issue as some groups did not know their teachers at all.

LI said that Year 5 parents have been given six months' notice of payments required for the next PGL trip. This will allow parents to plan payment instalments, if required.

Due to time limitations, TT continued this discussion with LI after the meeting.

9. Spelling

A Year 6 parent is concerned about the standards of spelling in school. They say that spelling, and a lack of support with it, has been an issue since Year 2 for their child's class. They say that the children who need extra support sessions in class have not always been able to access this.

Due to time limitations, TT and LI discussed this item after the meeting.

10. Scooter/bike storage

A Year 5 parent has asked if the scooter park can be enlarged.

A Year 3 parent has also highlighted that there isn't anywhere to store bikes. Since we are encouraging children to use greener ways of getting to school, it would be good if there was somewhere like the scooter park, to store bikes as well.

LI explained that she is very sorry, but they are unable to extend the scooter park or create parking for bikes. KH said the scooter park would only need to be extended by a small amount on either side. LI said this is not a priority at the moment due to limited playground space, lack of budget and no caretaker to carry out the work. KH suggested parent volunteers could do the work. LI explained this was not possible.

11. Learning to cycle

A Year 3 parent has asked if the children can do cycling training or the cycling proficiency test at school.

LI said that the school has applied for cycling training in the past two years, but has not been successful. Unfortunately, no explanation has been given as to why. They have applied again for Year 6 for the next academic year.

MF said that Scouts may be able to provide cycle training. LI asked MF if she would be able to investigate this. She added that there are many cycle schemes running in the school holidays that can be accessed by parents.

Action:

- MF to investigate if the Scouts are able to provide cycling training.

12. Breakfast club (Previously discussed on 8.5.15 and 19.6.15 – please see these minutes for further details)

A Year 3 parent has asked if there could be a Breakfast Club at school.

SB highlighted that this issue has been discussed at least twice in the last five years. Mr Morris looked into it in detail and conducted a survey of parents, but not enough parents responded positively. TT explained that there really needs to be a high number of children for a club to be viable.

There was a general discussion about the difficulties in setting up a Breakfast Club. These include: the availability of space in school, the logistics of clearing up the hall quickly before collective worship, the cost to parents and the staffing of the club.

Regarding staffing, unless school staff were able to run the Club, an external company would have to be used. SWF said the cost of this was previously worked out to be too high.

KH explained that before-school clubs were introduced as an alternative to a Breakfast Club. e.g. judo and basketball.

13. Year 6 sponsored events

A Year 6 parent has asked if the sponsored events for Year 6 could be spread out across the year, rather than many in the Summer term. There are many expenses at this time of year with the PGL trip, Ashlyns trip, new school uniform etc.

TT explained that with the Water Walk and World Cup Challenge sponsored events, in addition to trips and secondary school uniform, the costs for Year 6 in the Summer term are overwhelming for many parents.

LI acknowledged these concerns and asked if there was one particular event that was causing difficulty and could be moved. TT suggested the Water Walk.

LI explained this is closely linked to the post-SATs Rainforest project. She added that World Cup only occurs once every four years, so this won't be a problem every year.

KH added that PGL has been moved to November for the next academic year, which will help matters.

LI encouraged parents struggling with trip costs to speak to the school about it, as she does not want any children to miss out.

14. Classroom Temperature

A parent has highlighted that the Year 5 (and potentially Year 6) classroom is getting too hot. They ask if we can put some measures in place to reduce the heat on hot days and/or improve ventilation.

LI and SB explained that the school are aware of this issue. It has been discussed by the Governor's Premises Committee. There is a hedge that is partially blocking the windows and this will be cut back soon to allow the windows to open fully.

SK asked if there are recommended limits of temperature in classrooms. LI said there is a legal lower limit, but no legal upper limit.

KH and SK asked about the possibility of other measures being used to lower the temperature e.g. heat reduction film on the windows and fans. LI said that film would be very expensive. SK added this is not always very effective. SB explained that they are not allowed to use fans with moving blades in school for health and safety reasons.

LI added that on hot days, the doors are kept for ventilation and the blinds are kept shut to reduce the sunlight entering the rooms. If the classrooms become too hot, teachers will take the children outside to the covered area to cool down.

Action:

- Hedges to be cut back shortly.

15. Father's Day (Previously discussed on 7.10.16)

A Reception parent and a Year 3 parent have asked if we can celebrate Father's Day in school in the same way that we celebrate Mother's Day.

LI and SB explained that unfortunately, the school will not be celebrating Father's Day in the same way as Mother's Day. It is not an event on the church calendar, whereas Mother's Day is.

16. Year 5 school trips (Previously discussed on 19.1.18) – Carried over to next meeting

A Year 5 parent has asked if school trips for this year group could be more interesting, for example a trip to the Houses of Parliament.

17. Updating parents on outcomes following Parent Forum meetings – Carried over to next meeting

A few of the Parent Forum class reps have asked to discuss the ways in which we currently update parents following a meeting.

Questions for discussion:

- **How and when should we update individual parents who have given agenda items on the discussion/outcomes from the meeting?**
- **How and when should we update the whole parent community on the discussion/outcomes from the meeting?**
- **Would it be helpful to have the minutes up on the website more quickly i.e. within a week?**
- **Could we ask for the minutes to be attached to the weekly bulletin the on the Friday following the meeting so that all parents can access them easily?**

J. Phillips

2.7.18