

Parent Forum Minutes – Meeting held on Friday 15th February 2019

Present

Louisa Ingram (Headteacher), Simon Barnard (Vice-Chair of Governors), Clare Shoesmith (R), Sharon Kinder (Y1), Jo Phillips (Y2), Jo Copestake (Y3), Emma Harwood-Jones (Y3), Verity Roberts (Y4), Mary Flynn (Y5), Katherine Higgins (Y6)

Apologies

Sarah Chittenden (R), Shelley Williams-Farr (Y2), Katie Bett (Y4), Louise Cutler (Y5)

Minutes from last meeting

Approved via email following last meeting

Matters arising from last meeting

1. Update on Breakfast Club/After-School Club survey

Louisa Ingram (LI) explained that two surveys have been undertaken – a survey concerning after-school provision, in conjunction with an external provider; and a survey concerning before school provision, during Parent Consultations in the Autumn term. The statistics are available from the office on request.

The results from both surveys indicated that there was an interest, but not enough at this time. Simon Barnard (SB) commented that it would be good to be able to offer the provision, but there would need to be an uptake of 16-20 children to break even.

LI said that the school then approached Pooh Corner Pre-School and Nursery, who already provide an after-school pick up at Potten End. They have suggested that parents contact them about their Breakfast Club and they may be able to arrange a drop off to school at 8.45am.

For the school to be able to run their own Breakfast Club, more interest will need to be generated.

Actions

- Parents to inform the school office of further interest in Breakfast Club (if not already stated in the Parent Consultations survey).
- Parents may contact Pooh Corner Pre-School and Nursery to express interest in their breakfast club and a potential drop off at Potten End.

2. Update on lunchtime games/activities (See also Agenda Item 5)

LI explained that the covered walkway is now used every lunchtime for colouring, games and as a quiet space. This is part of the new 'zoning' of the main playground for different activities taking place at lunchtimes. Reception and Year 1 have now moved into the EYFS playground, in order to provide all children with a safer and larger space to play.

Katherine Higgins (KH) asked what the pupil view on 'zoning' is. LI said that the informal feedback from the children is good and a representative from the Diocese is also positive

about the zones. The school's HIP (Hertfordshire Improvement Partner) will be visiting the school in two weeks and will undertake a formal Pupil Voice survey about the new playground arrangements.

LI highlighted that Reception and Year 1 now have lunchtime access to the extensive outside resources in the EYFS playground. Staff have commented that the play of the younger children has become stronger and more imaginative; for example they are playing cafes, making mud pies and hunting for bugs.

SB added that all these changes are helping to address the behaviour issues on the playground.

LI said that the school would like to recruit an additional MSA (Midday Supervisory Assistant) to provide extra support with the new playground arrangements.

3. Update on clubs

Parents have asked if there is any update on a possible netball or dance club, as discussed on 12.10.19.

LI said that a dance club is now offered for Years 4-6 on a Friday. It was also offered to Years 1-3, but there was not enough interest from parents to make it possible.

Verity Roberts (VR) expressed concern that she, and possibly others, did not see an email offering dance to Year 1-3. LI said it could still be a possibility for the Summer term.

The idea of a netball club is limited by the availability of the hall, which would be needed in case of bad weather. Mrs Sharpling has looked into this, but unfortunately it doesn't work with the hall timetable at present.

LI highlighted the before-school Yoga club currently running for Years 2 and 3.

Agenda

1. Feedback from Miss Ingram on The Potten End Way

LI emphasised that the new behaviour policy, The Potten End Way, is a real priority for the school. Parents will have received an email this week with further details, including the slides from the meetings that took place in January. She apologised for the delay with this.

She asked parents to please work with the school and reinforce the importance of The Potten End Way at home. The policy sets the expectations for behaviour and encourages children to be proud to be part of Potten End School.

A review of the policy will take place every half-term. The first review has taken place at a recent staff meeting. As a result of feedback, slight tweaks have been made to the recognition board system in class.

Jo Copestake (JC) asked if staff have noticed a positive impact on the level of disruption in class. LI confirmed that levels of disruption have reduced and there has been an increase in clarity and consistency when managing behaviour problems. All children now know what the adults are looking for in terms of their behaviour.

SB added that the governors have been involved in the formation of the policy and all adults in school are aware of the need for consistency in behaviour management. Everyone wants to maintain the good reputation of the school. LI highlighted that the school has been consulting with outside agencies and therapists. Extra training is being provided for staff and behaviour management will continue to be a focus.

Sharon Kinder (SK) commented that a lack of consistency around behaviour has been difficult in the past, therefore the changes are welcomed. SB and LI concluded by adding that things are not perfect yet, but they are on the right track and getting better.

Action

- Parents are asked to help the school to reinforce the messages of The Potten End Way. More details are available in the email sent out on 14.2.19.

2. Communication of term dates

A Year 2 parent has asked if parents could find out the next academic term dates and inset days sooner than we currently do. Other schools seem to release dates further in advance. This is very helpful to know when planning holidays, especially for the return to school each September.

LI said she agrees this is important and the school will do their absolute best to get these dates out sooner.

VR asked why school finishes for the Summer holidays on a Tuesday this year. It has been the norm to finish on a Friday and this is always appreciated by parents.

LI explained that the term dates are set by County and the school can only choose where to put Inset days. Inset days are often needed for training purposes or, as is the case with Monday 25th February, for report writing.

VR and SK expressed a worry that attendance will be low on the last Monday and Tuesday of the Summer term and that it would be better for all to finish on a Friday in the future.

Action:

- School to endeavour to release terms dates sooner.

3. PGL timing

A Year 5 parent would like to raise concerns about the timing of the PGL trip. They write:

'When my son did PGL at Potten End school a few years ago the trip took place in March - it was explained to us that this was a cheaper time of year than the summer which made sense and as a body of parents we were very happy with this - PGL is an excellent event which provides the children with a wonderful opportunity to learn 'out of the classroom',

improve their confidence and experience formative time away from parents and my husband and I are very much in support of the week away. However, I understand that the current Year 6's did their PGL in November 2018 - the timing of this is of great concern to me for a number of reasons which I've outlined below and I would be grateful and relieved if the school would consider reinstating the March date for future PGL trips instead of November:

1) The time leading up to Xmas is an exceptionally busy and therefore tiring time for children with all the extra xmas 'hype' and while PGL is no doubt a superb experience for them, it is also very tiring and they come home shattered and in need of time to recuperate peacefully - it took my son a good few days to 'get back to normal' and I'm concerned that having this experience at such a busy time of year would be best avoided, particularly in the midst of the longest term of the academic year.

2) I appreciate this may not be the case for all children, but my own children tend to get very tired in the first term of the academic year as they adjust to new teachers and routines and so, again, I feel that a November trip would be too early in the academic year and best avoided.

3) I can only imagine that November is also a particularly challenging time for staff to take a week out of normal school, with all the extra Xmas events & tasks to organise and factor in both at school and at home.

4) My fourth concern relates to budgeting. Although I'm sure school would give advance warning of upcoming budgetary commitments, the lead-up to Xmas is not a good time of year for families to be finding/saving 'extra' money and March would therefore seem a more practical choice of date in comparison.

5) While this may perhaps not affect the majority of children in the class, I know that some of the current Year 6 children ended up doing private school entrance exams the week after PGL at a time when they were naturally very tired after the trip. Even if it's only one or two children who potentially find themselves in this position, it seems a great shame to deprive them of the opportunity to go into whatever tests they might be doing in the best possible 'fresh' state of mind for the test - had my son had to do an exam the week after his trip I'm sure his fatigue would have disadvantaged him. On this note, there are usually a handful of children in the class who take the 11+ transfer test in mid-September so it would be best, if possible, to avoid any long trips away in this first term of the academic year.

March worked well for my son's 'cohort' since they were working hard towards SATS at that time but it gave them a fantastic break from the pressure whilst still allowing them time to regroup and refocus after the trip in time to take the SATS in May.'

LI said she understands the concerns expressed by this parent. However, Mrs Sharpling has said that having PGL in the Autumn term has made a huge difference to the bonding and maturity of the class.

LI explained that when the trip takes place in the Spring term, it always has an impact on SATs. It is also not ideal for it to take place after SATs, as there are so many other important activities going on in school at this time. On the whole, the school believes the Autumn term

is preferable for PGL. However, LI agreed that it is important that the time of the 11+ test is avoided.

KH asked if it could be moved to the week before half-term this year, both to move it further from the 11+ and to allow children more time to recover afterwards. LI agreed this was a good idea. Mary Flynn (MF) noted that the light in the evening will be better for outside activities before half-term.

SB highlighted the budgeting concern. LI suggested that parents could begin to pay for the trip on Wisepay in the Summer term of Year 5 if this is helpful with budgeting. School will endeavour to get the costs out to parents sooner than previously to enable this.

Actions

- School will try to ensure PGL takes place before Autumn half-term.
- Costs to be available to parents sooner than previously to enable budgeting and earlier payments.

4. Allocating roles for school productions

Year 3 parents have asked if less outgoing children or those in the younger year group could be considered more when allocating roles and words for school productions. One parent has commented that each year their children don't have words to say as they are in the younger year group.

LI explained that it will always be the older year group that is allocated the speaking roles. All acknowledged it was unfortunate that Year 3 have been the younger year group for two years in a row, due to the changes in production arrangements. However, the teachers feel that the new arrangements worked well and therefore the school plans to continue with the new model. Teachers will always try to ensure that those would like to speak (in the older year group) are given a speaking role.

JC added that the new system of ticket allocation worked well with the smaller number of children in each production. LI and other class reps agreed.

MF noted that children are also given the opportunity to speak in class assemblies. LI confirmed this and added that outside agencies and church children's workers taking collective worship will often ask for volunteers to contribute.

SK said that at other schools, parents are invited to watch the class assembly. She asked if this would be possible at Potten End. LI agreed this would be a good idea and she will suggest this to the teachers. SK added that parents wouldn't expect a big production, but that it would just be another good opportunity to watch their children speak and perform.

Action:

- LI to suggest to teachers the idea of parents being invited to watch class collective worship.

5. Arrangements for playtimes (See also Matters Arising Item 2)

A parent with children in Year R and Year 3, would like Reception children to be allowed in the big playground once a week, at least. They write:

'I think it's good for them to mix with the older children and for this not to be an issue for them i.e. being scared of the older year groups. It's always been a really big plus point about the school, with the year groups mixing effortlessly, encouraging real trust and understanding between children no matter what age they are. I feel that banning KS1 from the big playground may cause integration issues... from a personal point of view, but this does apply to many children as well, my two now never see each other at school which I and they are sad about.'

JC explained that she thinks the mixing of year groups in the playground has always been a good thing. It has promoted a culture of 'no fear' between the younger and older children. She asked if there could be an opportunity for them all to play together at lunchtime once a week.

LI explained that this was not possible due to safety considerations, which are paramount. At breaktime, Years 1-6 are still together on the main playground. Breaktime is a much shorter time frame and less complicated to manage without children coming and going for lunch. Having all the children together in a small space is difficult when the play of the older children can be much more physical. She outlined other opportunities for the younger and older children to mix e.g. during World Book Day activities.

Clare Shoesmith (CS) commented that this change has happened at other local schools too. She said it can be intimidating for some Reception children to be in the main playground with the older year groups.

JC asked if there could be an opportunity for the younger children to play in the main playground as part of transition arrangements in the Summer term. LI said this could be considered.

SK commented that she really embraces the varied outside play in the EYFS. Year 1 still need this free play. LI added they did try having Year 2 in the EYFS playground as well, but this proved to be too many children in a small space. In the main playground, Year 2 look up to the older children and they interact well.

SB explained that this is all part of the continuing learning curve for the school since the expansion to become a Primary. He highlighted the huge variety in the levels of maturity in Year 5 and 6 children. LI confirmed that the school is still very much in a transition phase.

Action:

- School to consider the possibility of Year 1 playing in the main playground as part of Summer transition arrangements.

6. Communication with parents

A Year 5 parent has asked if there is scope for one or two parents in each class to act as a focal point to support the teacher in sending out class communications and liaising with

parents on class matters. They suggest that it need not be an onerous role and would be slightly different in emphasis from FOS and parent forum.

They have also asked if parents can please made aware of children leaving or joining the school during the year, just as emails are sent out with staff changes. Notwithstanding the tightening of data protection rules, a simple email to inform the class parents that a child is leaving or alternatively joining the school, would enhance cohesion and make new arrivals feel welcome.

LI said that in theory, having a 'class contact' to assist in communications between the teacher and parents is a good idea. She asked for more information about the particular areas of need. MF explained this would plug a gap not covered by Parent Forum or FOS and promote cohesion in communication at a class level.

Several class reps explained that this already takes place on an informal basis for some classes within the WhatsApp groups. There was agreement that reminders given in this way are very useful and that teachers sometimes use this method of communication when they need to give a message at short notice.

LI highlighted that it cannot be assumed that all parents will use WhatsApp. She added that having a 'class contact' is fine on an informal basis. Any parent willing to take on this role will need to make themselves known to the class teacher.

Regarding children leaving or joining the school, LI explained that due to GDPR regulations, the school is unable to send out any information on this.

Action:

- If a parent is willing to be an informal point of contact between the class teacher and the rest of the parents for that class, they may make themselves known to the teacher.

7. Handwriting

A Year 5 parent has asked if there is a policy to facilitate handwriting being taught actively throughout all primary years and, in particular, older children being encouraged to use a fountain pen. They explain that fountain pens are very cost effective, produce legible and well-formed writing and inaccessible ink reservoir (albeit disposable) pens are available so there is not an issue around spillages of ink.

LI explained that there is a handwriting policy, which is formally taught in the younger year groups. However, there is an assumption that older year groups are familiar with this and therefore discrete handwriting lessons do not take place. Teachers will always model correct cursive handwriting on the board. Legible handwriting is a formal requirement of meeting age-related expectations in writing. Therefore, handwriting is still an important consideration and individual children will receive support with it, if necessary. However, other areas, such as grammar, must take priority in KS2.

SB said that a handwriting competition used to take place, in memory of his daughter. Children were given a theme to write about and the entries were judged by the governors.

He would be happy to sponsor prizes for this, if it were to take place again. LI said this could be considered by English Subject Leaders, Mrs Brown and Mrs Hall.

MF expressed concern that left-handed children will find handwriting trickier. KH agreed and said it is important to model how to overcome the difficulties that arise when writing with the left hand.

Regarding the use of fountain pens, LI said that the school won't be changing the pens at the moment as they are pleased with the ones they are using. Their current pens are in line with guidance from County. She encouraged parents to speak to their child's teacher about individual handwriting concerns.

CS added that there is a useful app called *Crazy Cursive Letters Lite* which supports children in learning how to form and join cursive letters.

Action:

- LI/SB to liaise with Mrs Brown and Mrs Hall about restarting the handwriting competition.

AOB

1. Date for Year 6 Bikeability

LI confirmed that Year 6 Bikeability will take place on 8.7.19.

2. Scooter Park

KH explained that an anonymous donor would like to give financial support for the expansion of the scooter park. Mr Illingworth has had a quote for around £400. The plan is to double the size of the current scooter park and fit it with gates. A tree stump will need to be removed.

SB asked KH to liaise with the office and confirm the funding.

Action:

- KH to confirm the funding and make arrangements with the office for the work to take place soon.

3. Lunchtime arrangements

- **A Year 1 parent is concerned that the children in this class, particularly packed lunches are not finishing their lunch as they are being told to rush. They write:**

'In order to hurry the children they have allegedly been told they are not allowed to talk to each other anymore? Which seems rather draconian and surely not the atmosphere we want the children to be experiencing whilst they eat their lunch. At many schools staff take it in Rota to eat their lunch with different groups of children to encourage eating, whilst also reinforcing social skills, could Potten End not trial this technique?'

- A Year 6 parent also comments on the time allowed for the children in this class to eat their lunch. They write:

'It seems the Year 6 children are being asked to go in for lunch at 12.45 and being warned at 12.50 that they need to hurry up, with a further rather grumpy moan at 12.55! This seems a ridiculously short time in which to allow year 6 to eat. Apparently at one point children were going to take it in turns to go into lunch first, this however doesn't seem to be happening and unfortunately year 6 are taking the brunt of the meal time supervisors eagerness to get the hall cleaned for the afternoon.'

SK confirmed that this seems to be of particular concern to Year 6 children.

LI said the school are very aware of the problem. Lunchtime arrangements are difficult due to the high number of children that must eat in a small hall. Mrs Sharpling has conducted a 'time and motion' study in order to identify the cause of the problem. It seems that getting Year 2 and 3 into the hall in a timely manner was an issue. However, the situation is now improving.

LI added that children are allowed to talk. Only if they have been there for a long time e.g. 25 minutes, will they be asked to stop talking and eat more quickly.

4. Website update

Emma Harwood-Jones (EHJ) said her husband has offered his support with updating the school website. He runs a digital marketing agency and could oversee any updates.

LI said that in principal, this would be very welcome. She explained that an external company is currently responsible for the website. The governors are currently looking into updating it, but extra support would be appreciated.

Action:

- EHJ to liaise with the school office and governors, Marianne Barker and Emma Harris, regarding updating the website.

5. Young Voices

VR said this sounded like it was a really positive experience for the children. She said several parents have asked if it could take place every year for Year 5 and Year 6, rather than alternate years. This would allow children two chances to go, in case of snow day cancellation or illness.

LI explained that this previously was the case, but it was changed due to the high cost of the event. KH added that the event, and the preparation for it, is a lot of extra work for teachers. MF suggested perhaps there is more that can be done at home to support children in their preparation, for example by learning words as homework. KH added that Year 6 were set homework for Young Voices this year.

LI said they could look into changing the arrangements. She asked VR to gather general feedback from parents and she will do the same for the teachers involved.

CS suggested another similar event at the Royal Albert Hall that could be considered on alternate years.

Action:

- VR to seek feedback on Young Voices from parents and see if there would be interest in Year 5 and Year 6 children attending every year.

6. Extra physical activities in school

KH asked if Skip2bFit is continuing this term.

LI said that Skip2bFit took place in the Autumn term and Energise is taking place this term. There is a possibility that The Daily Mile may take place in the Summer term.

VR suggested the Joe Wicks School Fitness program as possibility for the future. It was highlighted that it is good to cater for the preferences of all children by including a range of activities. KH suggested that The Daily Mile could be used throughout the year, with other activities provided in addition to this.

7. Communication with parents following Parent Forum meetings

LI explained that it is important that all parents simultaneously receive consistent feedback from Parent Forum meetings. She asked that class reps wait to discuss outcomes from the meetings until the minutes are available on the website.

Jo Phillips (JP) said she will try to ensure this happens within a week of the meeting. Class reps could then post a link to the minutes on their class WhatsApp group and/or discuss items with individual parents where necessary.

Actions

- Minutes of Parent Forum meeting to be up on the website within a week if possible.
- Class reps to notify parents that the minutes are available and then discuss further details where necessary.

8. Parent Forum Admin

LI said that JP will be stepping down from the Parent Forum at the end of July, both as Year 2 rep and as admin. She thanked JP for her contributions to the Forum and asked reps to consider if any of them would like to take over the admin role from September.

Action

- Volunteer required to take over Parent Forum admin from September. This involves compiling the agenda, liaising with class reps and being responsible for the minutes of the meeting.
- New Year 3 class rep required from September.

9. Learning information for parents – item carried over to next meeting.

J. Phillips
26.2.19