

# Brabourne Church of England Primary School

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Headteacher: Mr Andrew Stapley

Dear Parents,

Another term, another letter and happy new year! Last term I expanded on our governance responsibilities for setting school strategy. This term it's time for finance – a hot topic currently. As governors, we have responsibility to 'oversee the financial performance of the school'. Clearly we're not involved on a daily basis but we do have to check that the school funds are being used appropriately – and appropriate means as much as possible is used directly for the benefit of the pupils. The school is only financially audited every few years so, in the interim, we have to check that the public money allocated to the school is spent in the best way for the pupils and that any risks are managed.

Some of the tasks involved are:

- Reviewing the three year financial forecast to make sure we understand and manage the budget going forwards. This is set every year and cascades out of the school strategy. It contains the best estimate of changes that will happen over the years to come but is most accurate for the year ahead.
- Monitoring spending against the forecast. The finance committee meets six times a year to review the figures Mrs Mac manages. We question why there have been variations against the forecast and understand what other variations are going to happen looking forward. One key figure is the balance of money that is left at the end of each financial year. Schools are now limited on how much money they can keep in their account at the end of the year, but it's good to have a cushion in there to be able to cope with anything unforeseen so it's a challenge to make sure we have the right level of reserves.
- Benchmarking against other schools. Every year we check our school's spending against similar schools which is a sanity check to ensure our spending is focussed on the right areas.
- Managing risks – for example, we check the school can handle an emergency if one occurs, that the school assets (valuable ones such as the computers) are monitored, that decisions about big spending are controlled properly with several quotes obtained and suppliers checked and that insurance is in place to cover the buildings, staff etc. We also check every invoice the school has paid against the bank statements so we know that there are no dodgy dealings!

Set into a bigger picture, we also have a responsibility of looking even further ahead to try and understand how changes in education policy will impact on the school and how we can best manage this. Recently this has helped drive our proposal to join the CARE foundation trust. Government policy is removing financing from local authorities (i.e. Kent County Council) which in turn means they are now starting to charge schools for services that have been provided free in the past. This is already costing the school a few thousand pounds a year but is likely to increase. Being part of the foundation trust means we can negotiate products and services for ten schools (and more when we use the services of the Co-operative Schools Network) which makes them cheaper than if we were trying to negotiate them for just Brabourne. It also helps that there are more people available to find these deals than just Mrs Mac, adding it to her already heavy workload. So far we have obtained a better rate on personnel services and payroll than we had through the local authority and the Co-operative Schools Network (of which the Foundation Trust is a member) also found us a better price on the new laptops the school has recently bought.

Funding for schools is getting tougher. Over the last five years our budget has increased by about 1% a year whilst the cost of employing staff (which currently accounts for over 75% of our total budget) has increased

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by about 2% a year. In addition, we now have to pay a contribution to the new apprenticeship levy, the increased payments to KCC as mentioned above, along with price increases on many of the other items the school buys. Once salaries are paid, we have an average of about £500 per pupil per year to spend on their education. Our biggest concern, at the moment, is our initial calculations based on the government's New Funding Formula indicates we may lose a further £10k per year – about £100 per pupil. One of the reasons we invited our local MP into school was to escalate these concerns and we have also had discussions with our Kent County Councillor since some of the decision is down to how they implement the funding formula. The story will continue!

We do get specific funding for some pupils – a few with Special Educational Needs (but not all) get a personal allowance which covers the cost of supporting them and those who are entitled to pupil premium (from low income families) receive over £1000 to be spent on ensuring they have an equal start in life to their peers. We also receive specific sports funding that we can spend on anything related to promoting sport and activity for all pupils – but which will stop in 2020. More details about how we use all of this funding is shown on the school website and governors have a responsibility for ensuring the school is using it well.

If you have any further questions about any aspect of governance, please don't hesitate to ask me or one of the other members of the governing board. There have been no changes in the governing board since my last letter, we are:

Hester Fenwick – Chair of Governors, temporary Chair of Teaching and Learning and member of Finance Committee (Parent governor)

Roger Shaw – Vice-chair of Governors and Chair of Finance Committee (Co-opted governor)

Emma Keating – Chair of Ethics & Culture Committee (Parent governor)

Sarah Hopker – Safeguarding Governor, SEND Governor and member of Teaching & Learning Committee (Parent governor)

Sarah Vant – Health & Safety Governor and member of Ethics & Culture Committee (Parent governor)

Maggie Smith – member of Ethics & Culture Committee (Foundation governor)

Jasmine Stewart – Member of Teaching & Learning and Finance Committees (Co-opted governor)

Mr. Taylor – (Staff governor)

Mr. Stapley – Member of Teaching & Learning and Ethics & Culture Committees (Headteacher)

We are continuing to try and recruit for our two vacancies but hope to have good news on at least one of them shortly.

More details of all our governors and their attendance at meetings can also be found on the school website.

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