



Dear Parents,

As another academic year draws to a close, we wanted to wish our leavers the best of luck in their new schools, the staff an amazing break and all our families some fun and relaxing times together!

As I've written before, governors have three key roles – helping to set the vision and strategic direction of the school, supporting and challenging the headteacher and school and monitoring the budget and finances of the school.

The vision for Brabourne has always been based around ensuring every pupil finds areas which they enjoy, which they are good at and that can build their confidence, so they are more resilient in areas they find more difficult, are unafraid to take on challenges and maybe fail because then they will improve in those areas too. This is illustrated in the parable of the mustard seed – how even the tiniest seed can grow into a great tree that can help support and shelter others. This vision will not change but there will always be ways we can improve on delivering it so we have a school improvement plan which helps prioritise what the school will be working on and where the money is best spent. This year the school improvement plan was extremely challenging, but we have seen so many improvements delivered and we know, as we meet with confident, happy children in school, that those mustard seeds are growing fast!

Most significantly, it's been great to see the results of all the curriculum planning coming to fruition. In a school the size of Brabourne, all of our teachers wear many hats – each of them has to lead at least one subject as well as teaching. So they were all involved in developing the new curriculum plans which you can see on the website and it was a massive exercise – months of work went into planning themes which run throughout the school at the same time, linking to literacy texts, projects, visits, design and technology, art and even science.

This year has been the first full year of putting all those plans into action – and what an exciting but exhausting year it's been! As governors, we visit to see the curriculum in action and talk to staff and pupils about how it's going and we've thoroughly enjoyed it all. From the continuous provision in Venus and Mars classes, where children are dressing up, painting pictures, creating science projects and challenging each other in maths (quite often all at the same time), all carefully designed to build their understanding of a theme, to the sophisticated debates in Jupiter class where pupils demonstrated their understanding of the British parliamentary system or linked the work of Sir Isaac Newton to later scientific developments (and wondered on links to Shakespeare). Pupils are overwhelming positive when asked about their school experience and, in our latest mini-questionnaire, over 80% *always* enjoy learning, *always* feel happy at school and *always* find their lessons interesting – up from about 60% last year.

The school has also been working hard on extending beyond the core curriculum (the part required by the Department for Education) and have massive thanks to give to so many parents, grandparents and others. Last year Mr Stapley focussed on improving play time (which can be a stressful time for some pupils because it is not as regulated as class time) and the new lodge has enhanced this too – now there is something for every pupil to do, whether it be creating their own obstacle courses with construction materials, reading quietly or playing board games in the lodge or using the gym equipment or playing football in the lower playground, 84% *always* enjoy playtime. Now the changes are happening throughout the school - the garden area is generating produce with support from Lucie Edmed and others and we have chickens, a farm shop and plans for bees. Even the PE curriculum has been extended to take advantage of our location with army style training run by external instructors and outdoor learning proving to be big hits with pupils (94% *always* enjoy outdoor learning). And with the large playing field area, we can start to plan for more areas down there too.

Governors have just approved spending on an extended canopy outside Venus and Mars class – with the current canopy to be moved to offer cover outside Neptune class. This will ensure a greater variety of outdoor activities no matter the weather and increase the area for learning for all three classrooms and should all be in place by September.

More and more pupils are taking on leadership roles – by the time they reach the top end of the school, virtually every pupil will have some sort of responsibility whether it be eco team, the worship team, house captain or sports captain. We hope that this means they will go into secondary schools as confident young people, ready to take on challenges in a bigger environment.

All of these activities have been recognised with a variety of external awards – the Gold Sports Mark, Full Accreditation of the International Schools Award from the British Council, the Gold Wilder Kent Award and the RHS School Gardening Award with plans to work towards Arts Council recognition in future.

Governors not only have a responsibility towards pupils, we also have a responsibility for all staff – we don't just challenge, we support too. So we try and make Brabourne a healthy working environment, something which is always very high on Mr Stapley's agenda. Our staff turnover is very low which is an indicator that something is going right but everybody needs fresh challenges in their lives so it was incredibly bitter sweet to hear that two outstanding teachers – Mrs Winchester and Mrs Miller – would be moving on to start their own business and we hope they make as great a success of it as they have in their contribution to life in Brabourne. However, what could have been a daunting prospect of recruitment has turned out to be further evidence that Brabourne is a sought-after place to work with two highly experienced teachers coming in to fill the gaps (along with a slight internal juggle with Mrs Barnes) both of whom are really excited to be joining the team. So we look forward to welcoming Ms Brown and Mrs Green in September although both have already been in and around the school getting acquainted.

With the departure of Mrs Mac in 2022, our biggest challenge for the governing board this year has been the move from managing the school finances internally to using a KCC run service. That has not been an easy transition and we are yet to find a solution which provides us with the information Mr Stapley needs, in a timely and detailed fashion, so that will continue to be a priority for next year.

So that has been the Governing Board perspective on the year. I'd also like to thank all of the governors for their time (is this beginning to sound more like an Oscar speech?) and energy. Quite often when a committee is manned by volunteers, the workload falls to just a few but all of our governors give up enormous amounts of time – the committee chairs organise their meetings and visits, those with individual responsibilities organise their visits into school, several are also active on the PTA, coaching sport or running other school projects. This does also have the benefit that they are all very familiar with the school but their dedication to multiple roles is appreciated and make the role of Chair so much easier.

In particular, we need to thank Ruthie Gilbert who is leaving the board after five years. She is a foundation governor – ensuring the voice of the church is not lost – and joined us from Kingsnorth after the local parishes couldn't find somebody able to help. She has been an incredible support to the school – and has brought an international perspective that will be hard to beat – and has even brought new pupils in the form of her grandchildren (so she will still be at the school gate from time to time). Thank you Ruthie!

This also means we now have a vacancy for a foundation governor so if you know anybody who might be willing to join us in that capacity, please do encourage them to get in contact. They must be a regular church attendee but it can be in any Christian denomination.

To see who the other governors are, have a look on the school website and please do ask questions (my contact details are below and most of the governors are in or around the school gate regularly) if you would like to know more about school governance.

Thanks for making it this far! More news in the autumn...

Cheers, Hester (Chairofgovernors@brabourne.kent.sch.uk or 07874 855340)