



Dear Parents,

A belated welcome back to the new school year and a very big welcome to the new families (and staff!) that joined us over the summer holiday. We hope that you have all settled well into school life for the year and all our pupils are enjoying themselves (and learning too!).

The school has launched into the New Year full of energy, which has been lovely to see. Some of you will already know from our previous letters what governors do, so I apologise for any repetition but some of the below might be new to all of you and all of it might be new to some!

### **Setting the Vision and Strategy**

Whilst we have no operational responsibility within the school, we have to make sure that pupils are doing well (in every aspect of their school life – not just academically) and the school continues to improve. In April each year, the school staff and governors take advantage of an INSET day to review the academic year so far and to look ahead to plan the future. To help the planning, staff and governors often visit other schools to learn what they're doing well and to get ideas for improvement. We are also visited by other schools and our 'school improvement advisor' who helps us look for schools who have inspirational approaches that we might learn from. Many of our teachers also spend a lot of time researching best practice and bring back ideas that they want to implement.

At the INSET day, we look through the results from the parental and pupil surveys that are sent out each spring and try and build suggestions from those into the improvement plan too (the lodge in the playground came from a suggestion from pupils about five years ago). We all work through those areas together – analysing what has gone well, what has not gone so well and what we want to try next, always aiming towards our vision: 'Through creative and challenging experiences, we inspire our school community to develop resilience, a passion for learning and the courage to pursue our dreams. Within our nurturing environment and beyond, we live out Christian values, enabling all to flourish in the love of God.'

Mr. Stapley takes all of the suggestions and spends hours distilling it all into a school improvement plan that now extends several years down the line and gets more exciting every year. The Full Governing Board will check and agree this at the start of the academic year – and the targets from it cascade down into individual targets for staff so that every part of it is 'owned' by somebody.

### **Holding the school to account**

After governors have seen and approved the plan for the year ahead, our next job is to monitor that it is being achieved. We plan a schedule of visits through the year to talk to staff and pupils so that we can see for ourselves how it is working. We also have committee meetings where we will talk to Mr. Stapley and see data – we never look at individual pupil data but we will check that teachers are monitoring academic improvement and will see the overall picture in each subject. We also look at data like attendance because that is an indicator of well-being. The government also provides benchmarking data at a higher level – so we can check how our school compares to other similar schools (how much do we spend on different areas of the budget? how do our academic results compare? etc.). We will raise any concerns we have and check the school is addressing areas that need addressing.

**Finance** – Our final area of responsibility is the school finance.

Much of the school's income is based on the number of pupils we have registered in the school – that number is taken on 'census' day which is a snapshot on one day in October each year. The number of pupils on that day dictates how much money the school receives in their budget for the next financial year. For the last two years, we have had 104 pupils (out of a possible 105) registered on census day which means we're receiving close to the maximum budget we can. We also receive some additional funding in specific areas. The government sometimes has certain target areas – at the moment, schools all receive specialist sports funding, in the past it has been in other areas. This helps pay for sports equipment, specialist coaches and training for teachers in sports coaching. The school also receives money to support specific pupils – some with significant additional educational needs and those from low-income families.

On the other side of the finances, most of what the school spends is on salaries and other employment costs – nearly 80% of income is used to pay staff (their salaries and the additional employment costs, pensions, insurance, apprenticeship levy etc.). Staff pay levels are decided by the government so if they award pay rises to the teachers, they should also provide the additional funding to pay for those pay awards. Unfortunately, this often falls a bit short so belts are tightened elsewhere. This is why all the money raised by the PTA is so vital – we can afford to pay for things that the school budget would not stretch to. It also makes a massive difference that we have so much support from parents and the local community with donations of time, equipment for the outside areas and even a minibus....

Whilst we are never able to 'splash the cash' as a school – every spend, even down to pencils, is checked to make sure it's good value – the budget has a little more space in it this year than it has in previous years because the school is so close to being full. So we have approved additional spending in areas that will make a difference to workload for school staff - we can now afford to get specialist IT support in for a couple of hours a week and are able to release staff for subject leadership time and the Senior Leadership Team for strategic planning time.

Hopefully, this all gives you an idea of what governors do. And, if you've made it this far, maybe you're interested enough to want to join us? Becks Massie has stepped down as a parent governor after five dedicated years in the role (thank you Becks, much appreciated!) so we now have a vacancy for a new governor. Mr. Stapley will send a separate letter out shortly, but if you might be interested and want to know more before applying, do give me a shout or talk to one of the other governors, most of whom are around school regularly. The current parent governors are: Yolande Roberts, Selina Eyles and Adam Lott, Lena Valentine is our professional clerk and was a governor previously and Lucie Edmed is vice-chair of governors and a current grandparent helping with the school run (and the garden, the chickens, anything really) – all of them would be happy to give you the low down on the role.

Thanks for reading, fingers crossed for applying and Happy Christmas (!?)

Cheers,

Hester (07874 855340)

Chair of Governors