

Minutes of the Parent Voice meeting – Monday 20th July 2015, 8pm
Held in the Hall

1. Welcome and introduction

Mr McIntosh (Deputy Head Teacher) welcomed parents.

2. Minutes of last meeting and action points

• **Homework**

As mentioned at the last meeting, Mr McIntosh was forwarding the suggestion for a structure to the weekly homework (learning journal input) for the review of the homework strategy. Mrs Vickers, in conjunction with Mrs Hollick, had been instrumental in designing the new homework format and part of her leadership role from September would include overseeing its effectiveness.

There was a lot of further discussion about homework, with the following comments/suggestions/questions:

- It would be helpful to have, in advance, a summary of what would be studied in the course of the term/half-term. The Infant school do this, published on their website, and parents find this very useful.
- It would also be helpful to have the weekly summary published in advance; this is currently provided for Learning Journal input purposes but retrospectively for the week just gone. Having it in advance would help parents to help prepare their children for the curriculum content about to be taught. It would also be useful to have more detailed information provided in this summary.
- With regard to Maths – when the weekly summary is stuck into the Learning Journals, it would be helpful for children to write out an example of the maths content, so that parents understand exactly what the notes mean. Some children were quite poor at remembering or being able to explain what they had been learning about, and some parents had found difficulty in determining the level of challenge at which their children were working in a particular concept.
- The 'VF' stamp (denoting Verbal Feedback) was not as helpful to parents as originally intended in knowing how well their child had done in their work. The feedback was not being remembered by children and it would be helpful if in all classes, not just some, children were told to write down what their teacher had said about the homework, possibly in a different colour so as to make it very clear.
- With this type of homework, there was an assumption that parents were literate and numerate enough to help their children, and this was not always the case. It was felt important, therefore, that more clarity and examples of what was expected was required.
- There was some concern that the homework - Learning Journal and In flight menu - was taking up a lot of time at home. Some parents

expressed that there was so much to pack into time at home that basics such as reading and times tables were being given too little time.

- There was too little time given for the marking and feedback of the In flight menu homework. Some children, and parents, spend hours on some pieces of homework and it does not seem evident that teachers have much time to give adequate feedback on a single day. Could each house bring their work in on a day that week, then kept for the Friday afternoon display, so that there was more time for marking?
- Times table knowledge is still an issue; the weekly learning journal homework concerning maths usually focuses on written maths, when parents agree with teacher feedback that knowledge of times tables is crucial for most areas of maths. Some parents gave ideas, from other schools, about how a times tables system could be implemented and run in the school.
- A Year 6 parent would have liked practice for SATs to have happened earlier than January – ideally, from the beginning of Year 6.

Mr McIntosh was able to discuss the school's view on many of these points and would bring them to the attention of the appropriate teachers at the start of the new school year.

- **Esafety talk feedback**

Notes from the Esafety meeting on Thursday 11th June were published on the back of the newsletter of 12th June. This can be found on the school website under **News > June 2015 > Newsletter June 12th 2015 No20**

Additionally, two videos used during the presentation are also available on the website, under **Teaching and Learning > Safeguarding**

- **Home-school communication**

Mr McIntosh confirmed that the school would be moving towards email-based distribution of information by the end of the Autumn term, if not sooner. In September, all parents would be asked to update their contact information and once this is collated, the email distribution would begin. The school office had been understaffed recently which meant that the capacity to do this sooner was diminished; however, new appointments that would take place from September would enable the office to administer this task.

- **Ofsted**

Mr McIntosh outlined some of the work taking place at school within the 'Single Plan':

- The establishment of the Primary Improvement Board, a group chaired by Steve Mellors (Standards and Excellence Commissioner) from the Local Education Authority, set up to oversee progress towards getting to 'Good' or better
- Weekly professional development for teachers through staff development meetings, e.g.

- training for the new Maths scheme of work
- training received from the school's Educational Psychologist on the SEN code of practice
- training on Esafety
- training on using data more effectively to track particular groups of children
- training on the new end of Key Stage 2 assessments from 2016
- Weekly professional development for teachers on a rota basis using 'Iris Connect'
- Professional development for teaching assistants on the SEN code of practice and 'Communicate in Print'
- The preparation of the new Maths scheme of work starting in September
- Half-termly pupil progress meetings with teachers for each class and maths set
- The set-up of a variety of interventions in the afternoons from September to meet the needs of pupils with SEN and others
- The publication of a Governors' Newsletter to parents (to be issued tomorrow)

It was also noted by Mr McIntosh that the recent SATs results, though unvalidated, showed improvement in every category from last year, with particularly strong results in Reading and for higher attainers across all examined subjects. However, it was also true that some of the results were disappointing, notably Maths at level 4+ and the combined score for Reading, Writing and Maths. The school's new direction with mixed ability maths teaching was intended as one means of addressing the outcomes for pupils in that subject.

3. General scheduling of parent-attended events

This point was raised via the Parent Voice email, with the following context:

As I have a child in infants as well, the sports days plus the house picnic have meant that I have had to come up to the school three Friday afternoons in a row. Would it be possible next year for either the days to be varied so not everything is on a Friday or for them to be more spread out?

This was supported by parents at the meeting as a justified point and some of them, and/or some parents they knew, had also encountered challenges in being able to attend two or all three events that had occurred between the Infant and Junior Schools.

Mr McIntosh confirmed that regular meetings took place between both schools to discuss matters that affected both schools and to co-ordinate on dates and events. Both schools also send representatives to every PTA meeting which also helps with co-ordination of events.

There was difficulty with certain school events needing to take place as late as possible in the Summer term so as to improve the chance of taking place in good weather – sports days and summer fetes were certainly such events. However, they could indeed

take place on different days, and there may be some room for them to be slightly more spread out, and Mr McIntosh would bring these suggestions to the next joint meeting of the two schools and to the next PTA meeting (with regard to any proposed repeat of this year's summer fete).

4. Summer fete scheduling

This point was raised via the Parent Voice email, with the following context (abridged from the original):

I was unable to get time off work to attend...I understand the PTA reasoning for having the fete in school time which was they have little help from parents to man stalls if the events are at the weekend or after school...Go Bonkers was always after school, and all the inflatables were always manned by staff members; surely if the new Summer Fete idea was after school and manned by teachers/LSAs there would be enough people to make an after school Summer Fete a feasible idea, thus making the event accessible for those parents who work during school hours...I realise the Year 6 children had stalls and this was part of their schooling, enterprise ideas, etc. but what did the other children get out of this Summer Fete educationally? If the event cannot be moved to after school, can it at least be moved away a few weeks apart from sports day, allowing working parents who can take time off or swap shifts a chance to do so.

Mr McIntosh confirmed that the PTA had indeed stated that they would not be able to enlist enough parents to help run a fete on their own – this was a frequent problem for their events. School leadership could not usually direct staff (both teachers and LSAs) to attend school events on Saturdays, or much outside of school hours – this was very much dependent on individuals' availability. In order to ensure the Summer Fete could go ahead, it had been decided to run the event on a school day.

With regard to the timing, it was originally intended for all year groups to participate in an 'Enterprise Week' in order to contribute towards the fete as part of their curriculum time, but for a variety of reasons, only Year 6 had ended up doing this. Additionally, the success of the Commonwealth picnic in 2014 had been a factor in starting off the fete with a similar event at 1pm.

It was certainly appreciated that the day and the timing had not been suitable for some families. As with all events, the school would not be able to get this right for all parents, but a lot of thought was always given to this. Mr McIntosh also pointed out that the decisions for joint events like this were not taken only by the Junior school. Going forward, the problems encountered by some parents and the suggestions to resolve these would be proposed to the PTA and also discussed by both schools' leadership teams.

5. School reports – online proposal

This point was raised via the Parent Voice email, with the following context (abridged from the original):

My idea is to save paper and to have the reports online...(at a local secondary school), parents have a link on the school's site to access their child's information via a password, on the page is the child's email, attendance, newsletters and school reports, we can also book parents evening slots online...The school even sends out a reminder text to tell parents when the reports are available to read. I'm not sure if this is something Barnes could do, but it really makes a parent's life a lot easier if all the information is available in one place.

Mr McIntosh commented that the school would be very pleased to be able to do this as it would indeed be a very efficient way of organising and storing pupil information that could be shared with parents. However, the resources and technology infrastructure required to set up, operate and manage a web-based information system such as this meant that this was not currently possible for the school. Secondary schools, being larger and therefore better centrally resourced, were able to do this more easily than primary/junior/infant schools. It was not a suggestion that could never be taken up, but at the moment it could not be a priority for the school.

6. Contact with teachers via email

This point was raised via the Parent Voice email, with the following context:

Could all staff have an email address set up within school so you can contact the teacher concerned directly and get a response. Most schools do this now, so why is Barnes Farm so locking behind every other school?

Parents at the meeting were not in agreement that every other school did this – in fact, they knew of no other primary/junior/infant school that did. Mr McIntosh had also contacted other STEP schools to see what their email processes were, and from the responses received at that point, none of the other primary/junior/infant schools operated in this way.

Mr McIntosh commented that the school's website provider, Eschools, currently enabled parents who were signed up to contact teachers through their messaging system. All parents would have been given information on how to sign up to this on their child's entry to the school, as well as information about the pupil account. Though not a true email system, this technically already enabled parents to contact teachers. However, it was acknowledged that the majority of staff do not currently access this on a regular basis, nor is this currently expected by the school. This would be changing from September, when teacher Eschools accounts would be accessed every day in order to complete registration online. New messages would be brought to teachers' attention on their homepage.

It was noted and supported by parents present that clear guidelines regarding what was appropriate to contact teachers about in this way would need to be outlined; for example, requesting information about clubs should be directed to the school office. Matters that would take a long time for the teacher to respond to in an email - for

example, seeking detailed information about a pupil's progress - should still be done face to face.

All parents would receive information about this, including reminders about how to sign up to Eschools, in September.

7. AOB

- With the advent of the Houses, will children need coloured t-shirts for PE in the future rather than white t-shirts?

Mr McIntosh would find out about this and send out a response.

- The Reading record part of the Learning Habit booklet was not always being checked or commented on in certain classes and it was also unclear when children were being listened to read. There was also a lack of understanding about how and when children were moved on to the next colour band of reading books and how teachers gave advice to children/parents about next steps or making progress in reading.

Mr McIntosh confirmed that all classes ran a Guided Reading programme on an almost daily basis, ensuring that all children were usually listened to at least once a week. This also included some days where children completed follow-on activities related to their reading, rather than always spending every other day reading silently for up to 30 minutes. He would make some enquiries about the issues raised and report back at the next meeting.

8. Date and time of next term's meetings

Friday 18th September at 9am (tea/coffee from 8.45am)

Thursday 15th October at 8pm (tea/coffee from 7.45pm)

Monday 9th November at 2pm (tea/coffee from 1.45pm)

Wednesday 16th December at 8pm (tea/coffee from 7.45pm)

Any suggestions for agenda items for the next meeting can be emailed to Mr McIntosh via parentvoice@barnesfarm-jun.essex.sch.uk, sent to him via the office, put into the Parent Voice box in reception or brought personally to the next meeting.