

Parent Voice
Thursday 15th October 2015
The Barn Cedar Studio

1. Welcome and introductions

Mr McIntosh (Deputy Head Teacher) welcomed parents and, for those who had not attended a Parent Voice meeting before, outlined the purpose and procedure of the meeting.

2. Minutes of the last meeting and action points

- **Online homework** (homework in general discussed in main agenda)
 - As indicated in the last meeting, it had been decided that the school's subscription to Mathletics would not be renewed.
 - Following feedback from the last meeting about SAM learning, and feedback from Year 6 teachers, it had also been decided not to continue with this programme.

- **School performance data**

As indicated in the last meeting, it had not been possible to access the most current end of Key Stage 2 data for Chancellor Park and other local schools, unless they had published this on their website. At the time following the September meeting when Mr McIntosh looked into this, this had not been the case. The government will eventually publish results for all schools on their performance tables website, accessible at: <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/performance/index.html>

- **INSET days**

Mr McIntosh had presented this proposal at the joint Infant/Junior senior leadership team meeting. While acknowledging the benefits of the proposal for some parents, it was felt that this would leave the schools vulnerable to not being able to respond in a more timely fashion to professional training needs as they arise. A parent raised the point that council-run activities (e.g. at leisure centres) did not extend to INSET days, making childcare arrangements difficult for parents, and that grouping the INSET days into one week could mean that the activities provided by the council could be viable for extending to another week. However, this would probably only be the case if many schools in the local area adopted the same INSET policy and at the same time in the year.

- **Peripatetic music lessons schedule**

The music teachers had been requested to make sure their schedules were on a rotating basis from next half term. This would not be the case with lessons provided by Stave House as these had to take place on Tuesday lunchtimes in order to fit in with their other commitments in providing PPA music lessons for Years 3 & 4 all day on a Tuesday.

3. Parent voice email agenda item: Book fair

A request for discussion regarding the Book Fair came from the Parent Voice email. The parent had proposed keeping the book fair for sales after school but not taking the children there during the day in classes. This was due to the disappointment caused to children who expect/want to buy a book after school after having browsed earlier and the pressure felt by some parents to spend money, regardless of whether they can afford it or not.

Some other parents at the meeting agreed that it could be a basis for friction with their children, that having the fair was a potential opportunity for highlighting a rich/poor divide in the school community and that the cost of books provided by Scholastic was greater than could be bought elsewhere. Other parents commented that they had discussed with the children in advance of the book fair if they would be buying anything or not and it had not been a problem for them. Some also liked the fact that their children had been able to have time to select a choice that they could then quickly buy. Mr McIntosh outlined the advantages of holding a book fair and the general opinion was that having one was a good idea. Most parents present did not object to classes making visits during the day, with suggestions for further improvement including:

- Teachers reminding children on their visit that parents may not buy anything
- Children could take their Learning Passports to the fair in order to write down some of their favourite choices so that they could find them at the library or add them to their Christmas/birthday list
- Other booksellers could be tried, if they do book fairs e.g. The Works or The Book People
- The school could better publicise the library service book bus that comes to school every fortnight

4. Parent voice email agenda item: Year 6 leavers photo in the Chronicle

A request for discussion regarding Year 6 leavers photograph in the Essex Chronicle came from the Parent Voice email. The parent enquired why there was no photograph of Barnes Farm Year 6 leavers in the Chronicle while it seemed that every other school was represented, questioning if this was an omission by the paper or a positive choice by the school. Mr McIntosh confirmed that it was certainly not a choice made by the school; he had asked Mr McTaggart about this in advance of the meeting, who had explained that it is the newspaper that makes contact with the school to request to take the photo of the Year 6 leavers and they had not done so this year. Mr McIntosh would set up a reminder for a proactive discussion with the Chronicle to take place in June next year.

5. Parent voice email agenda item: ICT suite keyboards

A request for discussion regarding the state of the ICT suite keyboards came from the Parent Voice email. The parent had been told by her daughter that they are difficult to use, with keys needing to be thumped and some keys producing a different letter/number/symbol on the screen. Of the parents present, no issues of this nature had been reported by their children. Mr McIntosh outlined that the ICT equipment was regularly audited and reviewed in order to keep the resources in the best working order, Sometimes, hardware and software developed problems, but our ICT technician, Mrs Mordaunt, was extremely effective at her job and would always respond to any issues

brought up by children or adults. Mr McIntosh would pass on this query to Mrs Mordaunt to be investigated.

6. Parent voice email agenda item: Playground games

A request for discussion regarding playground games came from the Parent Voice email. The parent, who was present at the meeting, outlined that there appeared to be significant negative issues concerning playtimes. Other parents also contributed the following points, as reported by their children:

- All games involving a 'home' or a 'base' have been banned, meaning that popular games such as 'it' and 'manhunt' cannot be played
- Skipping is not allowed on the field
- The running area does not always seem to be available for running
- New Year 3 pupils have found the transition difficult as they had more freedom of choice and movement in the Infant school
- There are few games resources available to play with
- The split of playgrounds between Years 3&4 and Years 5&6 was a divisive separation
- Children reported being bored at playtime, having little to do

Suggestions for improvement included having a mix of the two playgrounds, perhaps on different days, or mixing children by their House Groups. There could also be one whole playground reserved for running and active games, while the other could be for calmer activities.

Mr McIntosh took note of all the issues and would spend some time speaking with Mrs Hogan, the Midday Supervisor, to seek her viewpoint and see if there was scope for making changes.

7. Parent voice email agenda item: Requests for money for activities at school

A request for discussion regarding requests for money for activities at school came from the Parent Voice email. The parent noted that some children had been singled out in classes and told to ask their parents to pay for the recent visit of the skipping workshop. The parent expressed that they did not believe the child should be made to feel bad about this as it was not their fault if their parents did not pay and the fact it is a 'contribution' means that there is a choice for the parents to pay or not. Other parents present at the meeting confirmed that this had happened in various classes and they felt similarly about it. Mr McIntosh regretted if anything had been said to children in this way that had upset them and their parents and would bring up the matter with Mr McTaggart.

Further discussion took place about trips and visitors to school that involved requests for financial contributions. Suggestions for the future included asking pupils and/or parents about their opinions on the type of trips or visitors to school they could have during the year in order to secure a better 'buy in' of parents. Some parents present did feel a general sense of activities being imposed on them/their finances without any sort of consultation. Mr McIntosh would discuss this further with Mrs Vickers, who was now responsible, in a co-ordinating and strategic position, for school trips and visitors to school.

8. Parent voice email agenda item: Homework

Several requests for discussion regarding homework came from the Parent Voice email, with the following opinions/issues raised in messages:

- There is too much homework, taking too long to complete and proving difficult for parents to make balance with other after-school commitments
- Parents find it difficult to motivate children to complete homework and there is constant anxiety in trying to make sure it gets done and is up to date
- The weekly journal is difficult to complete as the information provided in the weekly summary is too vague and children do not always know how to set their own work; this lack of guidance leads to the need of a high level of support from parents
- Parents, who might struggle academically themselves, find the task of supporting their children in completing further work in their Learning Journal very difficult
- Children are apparently being told off, kept behind in class and/or sent to homework club if work has not been completed
- Basics such as reading, spelling and times tables are not being allowed enough time at home because of the time required for the weekly journal as well as the in flight tasks
- Consideration should be made for bringing back old style literacy and maths homework worksheets to be stuck into their learning journals as that week's homework as parents find it difficult to pitch home learning at the right level
- There could be a parents resources area created on e-schools where all the worksheets could be accessed with relevant links provided each week or hard copies available for parents who request them

Lengthy discussion took place, with the following additional opinions/issues raised:

- Parents felt that children were being penalised in school if homework was either not done or it was felt to be of a limited quantity and homework club was being seen as a punishment
- More guidance is needed if the learning journal approach is to be continued, such as showing examples of work from each level, particularly for maths
- Parents feel that children are spending a lot of time doing tasks or activities that aren't benefitting them or their academic needs
- House points are only given if substantial work is completed – there should be more rewards for work done
- There is too much peer pressure put on children to contribute towards their House points total through their homework
- There should be more flexibility to take account for families' different weekly pressures
- The whole system is too complicated with Abacus, spellings (in some classes), times tables, reading, weekly learning journal work, half termly in flight menu, headteacher's holiday homework – it is baffling and difficult to keep up with
- The maths provision from Abacus is good and interesting but parents do not want their children sitting in front of a computer all the time to complete homework

- Some parents feel that it would be a shame to lose the creative element of the current homework approach i.e. the in flight menu – this has proven popular with many children and allows them to flourish in many different ways
- Having the half term break to work on the in flight menu tasks this time round has really helped in terms of time and reducing pressure on completing work before the end of a busy half term of school

Some questions were raised:

- Is it necessary to have as many as five tasks to complete from the in flight menu?
- Could there be a project set over half term holiday or even over the whole half term?
- Could children have a scrapbook to record their weekend activities?

Mr McIntosh was grateful that parents had taken the time and opportunity to express their concerns through Parent Voice as this was an ideal vehicle through which to communicate them. He would be taking all of these points back to the senior leadership of the school as a matter of priority. He could not promise that all the changes suggested would or should take place and it must be remembered that Parent Voice is not a decision making body, but clearly this was a huge matter of concern to many parents and the school was committed to working with them to ensure home learning was as effective and productive as possible.

9. New lunch menu

Both the Infant and Junior school had recently met with the school dinners provider, Ashlyns, to discuss a revised menu. This would be available prior to half term to enable parents to make choices before returning in the first week of the new half term.

10. AOB

- **Lost property box**

A parent had noticed the poor state of the lost property box and asked if it could be possible to do something about it. An offer was made by the parent to help sort it out, with the possibility of giving any unmatched items to the PTA to sell as second hand uniform at the Winter Bazaar in November. Mr McIntosh would make contact with the parent to arrange this.

- **Harvest festival**

A parent asked if there was a reason that parents were not invited to the Harvest service and if not, could this happen? Mr McIntosh explained that the Harvest service is held at the local Church as part of our RE provision in celebrating a Christian festival at a place of worship and that it is not considered a performance. Additionally, as the whole school attend and participate, the entire space at the church is used up, with no room left for other attendees. However, it could be possible to consider next year's service to be attended by parents, though to enable this to occur it would need to be separated into a Years 3&4 service and a Years 5&6 service which would impact on the content of the service.

- **Years 5&6 Christmas production**

A parent commented that the length of the Years 5&6 Christmas production last year seemed very long and that as a result of limited participation, many of the children were sitting idle for a long time in each of the two performances. Other parents assumed that this must also have been the case for rehearsals. Would it be possible for the production to be shorter or for more pupils to participate in a more active way? Mr McIntosh would make enquiries about what the arrangements were for this year.

11. Date and time of next meeting

Monday 9th November at 2.15pm (tea/coffee from 2pm) in the Barn.