

PARENT FORUM MINUTES – Wednesday 6th February 2019

Attendees:

Cate Gregory – Head of Infant School
 Ryan O’Hearn – Director of Teaching and Learning
 Susan Kinch – FOSIS Co-Chair
 Jo James – FOSIS Co-Chair
 Jo Blondin – FOSIS Secretary
 Jo Craig – Class rep for Moles
 Claire Jerrim – Class rep for Owls
 Kelly Winter – Class rep for Badgers

Apologies from class reps for Foxes, Woodpeckers, Rabbits, Hedgehogs, Otters and Squirrels.

Thank you’s/Positive Feedback

- A big thank you to Mrs Clark and all the staff involved in organising the fantastic nativity. Parents thoroughly enjoyed it and appreciated all the hard work that went into it.
- Thank you for the fantastic hospital day organised by year R staff.

Discussion points

Taking children out of school

It is understood that year 2 children may have been taken to the church (separate to visits for the nativity) on at least 1 occasion last term. Please could the school confirm if this is correct and if so, what the purpose was of any such trip(s)? Parents were concerned that they were not made aware of the trip and that therefore they did not know the whereabouts of their children at that time. They were unable to recall having given their specific agreement.

Please could the school confirm the procedure for taking children to the church/on any other local trips (for example to USH)?

Would it, in future, be possible to please give parents advance notice of when any such trips will be taking place, together with an explanation as to their purpose?

- *When parents/carers sign their children’s registration forms, they are also signing to say the school can take their children out to local areas, including to the church or USH for sporting events without having to seek separate consent each time. The school do need parental consent each time they propose taking the children on a coach due to the additional risks involved.*
- *The school follows the DFE’s Health & Safety on Educational Visits policy, which is available to parents upon request.*
- *In relation to parents not being made aware of the trip, there was some confusion over which trip was being referred to. It was ascertained through discussion that one of the trips that took place was actually a year 1 trip, when the children were taken to the church in support of their learning about the importance of water. CG said that when local trips are planned to support the curriculum, this is detailed on the curriculum letter so she presumes it was mentioned on there.*

- *Mrs Gregory (CG) and Mr O'Hearn (RO'H) said they would try and ensure that, in future, as well as being mentioned in the curriculum letters, parents and carers were specifically notified of dates when any local trips would occur.*

Movement within Year 2 classes

It is understood that a child has been moved from Woodpecker class to Badgers, increasing the number of children in Badgers to 31. Concern was expressed about the increase bringing the total number of children above the recommended numbers and that parents were not advised of this change (only being made aware of it through their children).

It is fully appreciated that issues of confidentiality are likely to arise but is the school able to provide any further information?

A parent was concerned to be told by their child that since the changes, one of the children in Badgers now needs to sit at a separate desk (presumably due to a lack of space at the group tables).

Is the school able to provide reassurances in relation to how resources will be managed with the increase in the number of children?

- *A move between classes in the middle of term is not ordinarily the first port of call but it was felt that this particular move was necessary for the benefit of the whole year group. Class moves in the middle of the year have happened before. Sometimes, after mixing up classes at the start of the year, a new chemistry happens which requires changes to be made.*
- *The school are confident that the children are getting the same feedback and level of teaching. CG and RO'H are very pleased with how the class has continued to function and the teacher is very comfortable with the change. The school feel it has been seen as a very positive move.*
- *An increase in numbers to 31 is not uncommon and can happen for other reasons. Under certain circumstances, the school would be legally obliged to offer children places which could increase class sizes. For example, applications by twins or a child with an Educational Health Care Plan (EHCP).*
- *Within the year group, the ratios of teachers to children have remained the same.*
- *It was also explained that Shirley Infants is very lucky to still have a teacher and TA in each class every morning – including in year 2. With funding cuts in education, this is not the same in other schools across the city. The school feel that this is really significant.*
- *In relation to a child being sat a separate desk, neither CG nor RO'H have witnessed this when they have visited the class. There is adequate desk space for up to 35 children. It was noted that on occasions, some children are moved away from others if they are struggling to concentrate and/require a bit of quiet so perhaps this is what was being referred to. If an individual parent has specific concerns, they are asked to contact the school personally.*
- *Prior to the move happening, discussions were had with the classes, the teachers and the parents of the child involved. The school were keen to make the transition as positive as possible and did not feel it was appropriate to highlight or publicise it further by any formal communication to parents*
- *The school consulted with their Standards Improvements Officer who was in full support and agreement. The academy supported the changes in this specific case and they were also approved by the Governors at the Leadership and Personnel level.*

Attendance letters

A question was raised in relation to the sending of letters following absence from school. However, this issue has now been covered in the updated section of the website (under the 'Attendance' section).

- *Lots of background work has been done and additional information added to the website. CG pointed out that the issue of attendance is also covered at the Year R welcome meetings (although it is appreciated that there is lots of other information to absorb too!)*

After school clubs

In relation to after school clubs, parents have noticed that these start after other schools and finish before other schools. Is the school able to explain the reason for this?

With specific reference to karate, the sessions at Shirley infants finished 2 weeks earlier (23 November) than in other schools and re-commenced a week later in January. There is concern that this provides Shirley infant children less opportunity to grade than their peers in other schools.

If, as is understood, the organisers of karate would be willing to extend the club to match the dates they teach at other schools, would the school be able to facilitate this?

- *CG explained that one of the reasons after school clubs are in 10 week consecutive blocks is to make the office administration easier. In addition, at the end of term, the children are so tired and club sessions less successful.*
- *In the last few weeks of term, teaching staff have key deadlines, target cards to complete etc. so having a quieter after school environment supports them too.*
- *Karate - when the contract was agreed between the organisers and the school, it was on the understanding that classes would be in a 10 week block, the same as for all the other clubs. The school were reassured that this would not affect the children's grading.*

Date-planning

In relation to date planning, year 1 parents found it hard that they had home learning (fairy tale houses) and their royal ball on the same day. It would be appreciated if this could be altered in future, if possible.

- *Yes this can be looked at again. CG thought that by having both on the same day, it would be making things easier. The school had previously received feedback that parents had felt there were too many dates to remember which is why it was changed.*

Milk

It has been noticed that the school milk is now being provided in cardboard cartons instead of plastic bottles. At the last parent forum, parents were pleased to learn about the various different recycling uses the school made of the plastic bottles and are concerned that the cartons cannot be recycled. Please could the school explain any reason for the change?

- *CG said this is unfortunately out of the school's control – it just depends on what the supplier provides. The school also prefers bottles because in addition to the fact they are recyclable, the school uses them for many other things.*

Marvellous Me/Website

A number of year 2 parents said they love the updates and that they are helping to initiate conversations about the children's days. There appear to be less updates/award notifications from Year R teachers but these have started to increase in recent weeks and parents hope that this will continue.

- *CG said that when comparing usage, there was a slight inconsistency between the Year R classes but that in overall comparison to Years 1 and 2, there was not much difference.*
- *CG said she would make sure that the Phonics and Maths curriculum updates are being sent out regularly. She said that the leadership team can sometimes feel removed from the children and their families and that Marvellous Me is lovely because they get to see the children and their work when badges are awarded. The actual badges are now stuck into the children's books.*
- *The weekly email is also now sent out by Marvellous Me. The previous 'Call parents' system was great but there was a fee for each message sent, whereas this is not the case with Marvellous Me. 'Call Parents' also changed hands without advising the school, which led to parents being asked to sign up for accounts without the school's agreement. The school ended their contract with 'Call parents' and changed to Marvellous Me.*
- *Work is being done to streamline communication between Infants and Junior's. This will hopefully make it easier for parents but it will take some time to get it completely right.*
- *CG also said that, due to the amazing fundraising done by FOSIS, work will be done to make the websites slicker so parents can easily access information and all the communications. Both schools are changing providers as part of the improvements. The changes will again take some time so please bear with the school.*
- *Jo James (JJ) commented that there has been a delay between letters being available on Marvellous Me and on the website. CG said this is being addressed and changes are being made. Any communications now need to be sent to the office by Wednesday to ensure they go out on Friday. From this week, when the weekly communication is published on Marvellous Me, the same letter and any attachments will also be immediately available on the website. CG thanked parents/carers for their patience.*

Friendship Bench

Please could the school confirm whether there is a friendship bench in the year R playground? If there is, please could children be reminded about it, how to use it and how lunchtime staff can help them?

- *Yes there is a friendship bench – it is the bench that goes around the tree but it is in need of some TLC and one of them broke. CG will work on sorting this out. Jo Craig (JC) suggested that maybe parents could help with this and JJ said it could be part of the jobs for the next 'tidy up' day. CG was very grateful for this.*

Action Point: CG to arrange tidying up the bench and JJ to liaise about this being added to the jobs for the next tidy up day.

Gates

It has been noted that the gates in the secret garden and the yellow gate at the bottom of the steps between infants and juniors have started to be locked much earlier, causing congestion. Please can the school confirm any reason for this?

- CG explained that the school have had to take steps to further tighten up security following the new 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' document. This was especially in relation to after school clubs, where there can be between 60 and 90 children still on site. That is why the gate has been open for a short time after school but then closed again, preventing access back through.
- It is due to safeguarding and to try and minimise the chance of someone unknown accessing the school. There are 5 gates and the school have been trying to secure the entrances further to increase site safety.
- CG apologised and said that there should have been a poster on the yellow gate on Monday warning of the proposal to close it for a week's trial and then discuss at parent forum.
- It is about balancing the risk of children walking by the road, compared to the risk of someone accessing the site. Both are risks that need to be addressed and minimised as much as possible.
- CG explained that this is the only gate that is not either in direct view of staff or has a member of staff allocated to it.
- There was further discussion about possible solutions. Claire Jerrim (CJ) suggested that perhaps it would be possible for parents with children in both schools to drop them in one place – maybe they could go in through the door by the junior toilets. CG confirmed that there is a member of staff on that door so perhaps this could be trialled. It is a good idea and might relieve the congestion.
- CG also said that there had been previous discussions about the possibility of the juniors entering through the year 2 entrance, going up the stairs and walking past the junior leadership office. Perhaps both options could be possible and parents choose? It was generally agreed that the option of one drop off would be welcome and would hopefully help with less parents/children having to get between the two schools.
- CG envisages the gates being closed about 3.20 p.m. which should allow for most children to have left school.

Action Point: CG to discuss this issue with the leadership team members from both schools and to communicate the decision in the infant and junior newsletters.

Hot Dinners

An issue has been raised about puddings not always being as per the set menu and on some occasions, biscuits being offered instead. Please could the school explain any reasons for this change?

- CG said that there were some problems caused by the caterer's mixer breaking, meaning they were unable to make certain puddings (mainly flapjack). They sent biscuits instead without telling the school. This issue has now been resolved and meals should be as per the menu. CG apologised and accepts this should not have happened, especially to junior parents/carers who pay for their children's meals.
- It was felt by those present that standards in hot dinners had not been as good recently. CG shared this view and has provided feedback to Chartwells. There is a new menu from February and CG has asked for some of the options to be changed as she does not think the children will like them. The contract with the caterers is due for renewal shortly and the school have given them clear guidance if they are to continue using them.

Dog Fouling

Is there anything that the school can do to support parents in relation to the issue of dog fouling in the roads surrounding the school? This has got particularly bad recently (especially on Wilton Crescent).

- *Parents/carers should contact governor, Sarah Horsfall, who has canvassed for signs to be put on lampposts.*
- *Jo James (JJ) will forward emails on to the council. Parents/carers are asked to send photos, describing the exact location of the mess and the council's sanitation unit will be requested to come and clean the area. Information to be emailed to: shirleydogfouling@gmail.com.*

Points from previous parent forum

Parenting Course

Following the last parent forum, FOSIS conducted a poll to establish interest in a proposed parenting class. Due to the level of interest expressed, Karen Allen has confirmed that she is happy to run an information session for interested parents to learn more. Further details will follow.

- *CG said she thought that a date had been confirmed for the information session but Jo Blondin (JB) said she was waiting to hear back from Karen Allen.*

Action Point: JB to email Karen and find out what date has been booked so this can be progressed.

Congestion outside Hedgehogs

At the last parent forum, Mrs Gregory said the school would be testing out various suggestions in an attempt to ease the congestion outside Hedgehogs class. Please could the school provide an update in relation to this issue?

A parent has asked whether it would be possible to install an extra step (or ramp) at the side of the scooter shed, so parents wishing to access Squirrels and Otters classes can go around the back of the shed instead. Perhaps a parent/group of parents would be able and willing to do this? Is this something the school would consider?

- *CG apologised for not taking any further steps since the last forum - she had hoped that the reminders which went out in the newsletter would have eased the problem. She will now look at again at trialling Hedgehog class using other doors, as per the Minutes from October's parent forum.*
- *CG said it is not possible to add steps as suggested. £10,000 was spent through lottery funding improving the area behind the scooter shed so this cannot be changed. There would also be a health and safety issue.*

Action Point: CG to trial ways to ease the congestion.

AOB

Coffee Meet ups

Class reps used to be able to book the Infant community room for year group coffee meet-ups. Please could the school clarify whether the new community room in the juniors can now be used for this purpose and if so, how any such meetings should be arranged?

- *CG confirmed that the junior community room can be booked for coffee meetings via the office. CG will liaise with Karen Allen to ensure there are enough cups, etc.*
- *CG is aware the room could do with some re-decoration. JJ said to let FOSIS know if parents can help.*

Action Point: CG and JJ to liaise to arrange for the community room to be tidied up and to ensure there are appropriate supplies available to parents/carers.

Football

Please would the school confirm whether children are allowed to play football at lunchtimes?

- *CG said unfortunately not. At an earlier parent forum, there was discussion about superhero/rough play and CG said that football sometimes caused this aggressive behaviour too. Initially, the school tried to put control mechanisms in place instead of banning football – including games being supervised by staff etc. Unfortunately, this was not successful and there were too many children getting hurt through rough behaviour.*
- *CG said they know how much the children love football and the school do want to re-introduce it. The plan is that, once it is warmer, Team Spirit will be asked to run some sessions teaching the children how to play safe and fun football and that it can then slowly be re-integrated back in to playtimes.*

Parking Update

This remains an ongoing issue. Some of the school governors are part of a steering group and are constantly working to improve the situation. The group is headed up by parent governor Matt Corkhill. There is a Facebook group as well. The governors would welcome parental support on this matter and anyone wishing to join the steering group/know more is asked to contact Matt.

- Please could parents be reminded again not to park on the zig-zags and yellow lines (which is especially dangerous to those children walking to the juniors on their own?)
- Please could parents also be reminded not to park on the fire exit/field gates on Wilton Road as doing so prevents access by Emergency service vehicles?

Action Point: CG will ask that a further reminder is included in the newsletter.

Year R playground

Kelly Winter (KW) sought clarification as to whether older children were allowed in the year R playground as apparently some year 2 children have been.

- *CG confirmed that no older children are permitted to use the year R playground.*

Action Point: CG will speak to lunchtime staff to monitor this and remind the children in assembly.

Differing Consequences

KW said some children had reported it seeming as though some of their peers did not have the same consequences for their negative behaviour, for example, they would not miss playtime etc.

- *CG said that every child is given a consequence if they break the rules etc. but that this consequence is based on the individual child's needs and that, therefore, it may look different.*
- *CG that most of the time the children are very understanding but she can see why different consequences could appear unfair. However, there is always a consequence – it may just be something else for example missing golden time or not being able to go into a different classroom for MOOT etc.*
- *CG said that if there is an issue between children, the school use the restorative practice method to try and resolve it. They encourage the children involved to say how the incident made them feel and (supported by an adult) what they think the consequence should be etc.*