

Minutes of the Parent Voice meeting – Friday 20th March 2015
Held in The Barn Cedar Studio

1. Welcome and introduction

Mr McIntosh (Deputy Head teacher) welcomed parents.

2. Minutes of last meeting and action points

- **Homework**

Since the last meeting, all the feedback provided had been shared with the school's senior leadership team and the staff. Mr McIntosh received confirmation from the parents present that the homework situation had improved. Mr McIntosh again outlined the strategy going forward as of next term and reminded parents that an information meeting about this was to be held on Tuesday 24th March at 7pm. A suggestion was made, based on the Infant School's experience, that school should give some thought/prepare for the type of quantity of work created as a result of the 'take away menu' that might be brought into school in the last week of a topic.

A point was raised about the difficulty of helping children with Maths homework because of the desire not to introduce conflicting methods of mathematical operations and therefore cause confusion or misunderstanding. It would be helpful if, on future maths homework, an example of how to calculate the answers was provided. The provision of the school's calculation policy on the website would also be useful. Mr McIntosh would investigate both of these suggestions. He also informed the parents that a Maths-themed week was being planned for the week commencing Monday 15th June, which would include workshops for parents on how maths is taught in school. More details about this would be provided next term.

- **Staffing**

The staffing structure until the end of the academic year was confirmed. All relevant classes had received letters confirming details applicable to them. It was noted by parents that the school would miss the expertise of Mrs Green and Mrs Heminsley-Taylor. The school still has some challenges to deal with regarding staffing for the next academic year as three full-time members of staff are still on their maternity leave and could return with three weeks' notice, or take their full year's entitlement to October, November and January, respectively. One more staff member was due to leave on maternity leave in June (approximately). Mr McIntosh assured parents that, despite obvious difficulties in managing such personnel changes, the school's first priority at all times was to secure consistent, long-term, high quality provision of teaching for our pupils.

Mr McIntosh had received an email from the Parent Voice email address (parentvoice@barnesfarm-jun.essex.sch.uk) with suggestions for discussion at the meeting, which form the next two agenda items considered.

3. Teacher training days

This suggestion for discussion was about the scheduling of teacher training days, as follows in summary:

All of the current days are tagged on to the start or end of school holidays. If 1 or 2 teacher training days were during term time as well, this would enable parents to benefit from booking a long weekend away without paying the inflated holiday prices incurred when booking during the usual holiday periods or visiting theme parks/tourist attractions without the usual crowds.

The idea was discussed and there were differing views. Mr McIntosh wanted to make it clear that the days are normal work days for staff and that consideration of staff convenience was not a factor when setting dates. They usually precede or come just after the main school holidays in order to be more convenient for parents to arrange childcare and holidays. Sometimes, dates will be chosen that suit the booking of an external training provider that the school wants/needs to deliver training.

Parents agreed that the key point was for both the Junior and Infant schools to agree on the same dates. Anything otherwise could cause added problems for parents who have children in both schools. Mr McIntosh confirmed that this was something both schools understood and would always strive to achieve.

The dates for the next academic year had just been proposed and agreed by both schools' governing bodies, so this proposal could not be considered for 2015-2016, but Mr McIntosh said that it was something that could be discussed for 2016-2017 and the school could take wider views from parents, through Parent Voice and perhaps via the newsletter, a questionnaire, the governing body, etc.

The dates agreed, to be shared by other means as well as through these minutes, are:

23/10/15

18/12/15

04/01/16

12/02/16

27/05/16

4. Costumes

This suggestion for discussion was about the establishment of a bank of costumes, as follows in summary:

We provide various costumes for our children through the course of the year which can prove quite costly. Would it be possible to have a 'costume bank/library' at school where parents could donate outgrown or unwanted costumes that could then be reused by other pupils in the school? Once used they could be returned washed and clean.

This was considered to be a very good idea and one that should be very popular with parents. There could be an appeal via the Newsletter for the costumes and these could be stored at school. The organisation and administration of this (i.e. lending out and receiving back the costumes, keeping track of what goes where, etc.) would be the only challenge to overcome. Mr McIntosh would need to consult if this is something a staff member could be assigned for these particular occasions or if it would need to be organised by a parent volunteer or FOBFS (PTA).

Related to this, some requests/suggestions were made about non-uniform days:

- for more notice to be given concerning the dates
- to have less of them or be more strategic about when they are placed in the school diary
- to co-ordinate with the Infant school and support the same charities where non-uniform was part of the fundraising
- to give examples of how to make costumes or images of what is expected (this was particularly aimed at curriculum enrichment days when pupils are requested to wear particular costumes such as a Tudor costume or a Victorian costume).

Mr McIntosh would take these requests/suggestions to the next diary setting senior leadership meeting and the joint Infant/Junior meeting for discussion.

5. Esafety

The school had bought in the services of two police officers to make a presentation to parents about Esafety on the evening of Thursday 12th March. This was considered to be an excellent and thought-provoking session by everyone who attended, given the feedback received at the end of the evening and the following days. However, it was very poorly attended – about 40 parents came, despite two notices in newsletters (16th January and 6th March) and a letter specifically concerning the session (10th February). It was noted by parents that one of the newsletter notices did not make it clear enough that it would be about safety and perhaps some parents had not attended because of that. Mr McIntosh said that the two police officers had asked for the session to be advertised specifically as ‘Stranger Danger’ as their previous experience told them that some parents believed they knew all they needed to know about online safety and this therefore attracted fewer parents.

Another issue concerning attendance was that the session was presented on the same evening as the Infant School Parents’ Evening. Mr McIntosh acknowledged that this could have been a factor preventing some parents from attending, but that the date for our presentation was set before we knew anything about the Infants’ Parents’ Evenings. The senior leadership of both schools do meet regularly to discuss dates, joint projects, etc. and this clash must have gone unnoticed.

Those who attended and were present at this Parent Voice meeting felt the school should organise to run the session again and promote it even more, especially through word of mouth from those who had attended. Mr McIntosh said that the school was hoping to do this again and include some age-appropriate sessions with certain year

groups during the day, but that it was important to be aware that this was not a free service provided by the police and while very worthwhile, it was an added (and significant) expense to run again when it had already been provided for parents. More details would be provided when possible.

6. AOB

Some parents who made leave of absence requests (e.g. to visit a secondary school) were not always receiving feedback from school that these had been agreed or not. Mr McIntosh would pass on this concern and seek to address it with the appropriate staff.

Unfortunately, the meeting needed to conclude with the end of the school day and time for further AOB was not possible. Mr McIntosh asked parents to let him know in the usual ways or by the Parent Voice email address if there was anything they wanted discussed next time.

7. Date and time of next meeting

This could not be decided at the meeting but has been set as Thursday 30th April at 9.00am (refreshments from 8.45am) in the Barn.