

MINUTES

PARENT FORUM MEETING

HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 7TH DECEMBER 2016

Present: Lisa Parkes Sarah Evans (Minutes Taker)

Catherine McDougall Karen Hodgkinson Ciara McEwen

Anna Gregory

The meeting commenced at 6.35pm.

LP started by welcoming everybody and handing round a Powerpoint handout, the main points being:-

Reading and writing

Building resilient children and character building

School Development Plan

Homework

Reading and writing – there is now a big focus on these areas. We now have sequences of learning in the classes. The children do a lot of reading around texts then gradually build up to a piece of writing. The piece of text is open to all the children but differentiation takes place for the various abilities. The teaching approach is that a sequence of learning is planned with the children being given enough experience of the piece of text before getting into the writing part of the exercise. They are encouraged to “magpie” and pick out key words and phrases. CMc: Could you give us an example of the type of text Year 3 and 4 might look at? LP explained that the Wizard of Oz is one of the books being looked at. There is a move towards using more classical texts and Mrs Eggleton has also used The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe in the past. The PTA are also being approached with a Wish List of books which will compliment our topics! It is important to open the children up to all sorts of authors and to appeal to the boys as well. **ACTION: School to provide parents with a book list.**

Comprehension skills – LP pointed out that there are now much higher expectations starting from Year 1 and 2. The children in Year 3 and 4 are now doing what Year 6’s used to do! LP pointed out that children now have to be able to pick texts apart and, unfortunately, some parents think that, because their children are good readers (they can decode and break down words) that this automatically means they will be good at comprehending texts. Unfortunately, this is not always the case and children need to be able to understand and explain what they are reading. We are trying very hard to help the children with this skill.

SPAG (spelling, punctuation and grammar) – We now have weekly SPAG lessons. We are getting the children to thread it through and apply these skills to their writing across the curriculum.

Bug Club and reading rewards – Bug Club is great as long as the children do the comprehension element of it as well. LP explained that Charlotte Underhill had chosen a core group of boys and asked them about reading - they were very positive about Bug Club, the library and getting reward stickers. They also enjoy filling up their bookmarks and having the opportunity to choose a book. KH: It is great to have the books in different formats – sometimes having a paper book falls a bit flat. CMc: Both my children are avid readers and actually prefer a paper book. One of the parents said that they don't always write in their reading diary when they have read additional texts at home. Staff check on Bug Club every few weeks and Charlotte Underhill has a record of how often children go on to the website. CMc: One child loves it, the other prefers a paper copy book. LP pointed out that boys often prefer the computer element of Bug Club. It is another tool to encourage children to read and enjoy exploring books.

Parental engagement and support – We still have a number of parents who do not read with their children at home and this runs throughout the school. LP explained that children do need somebody to share a book with and it is actually a lovely experience sitting and reading with your child. A new Reading section has been put on the website with links to reading documents. CMc: Challenges in the back of reading diaries – are there copies of these and could we have them all in one go so we know what they are aiming for? **ACTION: School to provide information relating to the next challenge ahead for each child.** CMc: Some of the challenges may need expanding on as it is not always clear what is being asked for. Could this possibly be drip-fed through by the teachers? LP explained that this is where guided reading is so important and we have extended English lessons to accommodate this. A lot of children are very literal but it is not just about reading the text, it is about picking out finer detail as well so the children have to get to grips with a number of skills. This time round the test was really challenging and they have to remember to go back to pick out all the detail and look for answers. CMc: Have the current Year 2 children done this paper? LP explained that she was referring to the current Year 3's. CMc: At what point do you decide what paper they do? LP: They now have to do both papers, even the SEN children. LP reassured everybody that we do not treat it as a test and it is done under very relaxed conditions. CMcE: Had really noticed the difference in child's confidence since going through a few past papers. LP: some of the questions asked for an opinion from the child which is a hard concept. Inference is the hardest concept of all for the children to grasp. We do lots of practice and work based around texts and this starts from January. CMc: Are the tests timed? LP: there are guidelines but these do not have to be rigidly adhered to. It is important for us to engage the children – we have made improvements to the library and are encouraging them to read lots. Those children who do not get to read at home with an adult, have the opportunity to do so at school.

Building Resilience / Preparation for life in Modern Britain

There are 9 protective characteristics which are linked to the Equality Act 2010.

We have looked at each of the characteristics and how we deliver them. We have now produced a document to show how we teach the different elements. Our Philosophy For Children lessons are great for raising questions in children's minds. All the parents felt that certain difficult questions could arise during the lessons – however it was agreed that the important thing is how the questions are handled. LP explained that P4C is all about discussion and that no one opinion is right or wrong – everybody has a voice and it will help with the children's listening skills. Even the Reception children are getting involved by discussing things such as their favourite animal. SAPERE are the authority on P4C for anybody wishing to find out more information.

SMSC – making sure the children have breadth and balance – Parents were informed that SMSC across the school is reviewed annually.,

Pupil Voice – A very important part of school life. Getting the children to be more independent by means such as involving them in writing pieces for the school newsletter is one area we would like to work on. They already take part in groups such as Green Team, School Council, Pupil Forum and Sports Crew. We want the children to take ownership. The playleaders project is working really well with the older children leading the others in more organised play.

Mental Health – We have been looking at mindfulness and yoga – ways to improve ‘state of mind’. We are already using mindfulness colouring as a means of calming children down and will also be investigating yoga and breathing techniques. LP went through the key points of the mindfulness curriculum: intention, attention, attitude. LP has been on growth mindset training. This ethos will be introduced in January and teaches the children to be open and not have fixed ideas about who they are. The CBeebies website has some useful information for parents and we plan to hold a workshop for parents in the new year. LP explained that a lot of our children are not risk takers and we aim to build up their belief in themselves. Some of the poor behaviour for learning in school is down to children not facing up to a challenge. CMcE: there is a place in the world for shy children as well, they need to be who they are. Another parent agreed that due to feeling the pressure to change, some children lose themselves. Everybody agreed that certain aspects of a child’s character are entrenched and cannot be changed. Lisa explained that growth mindset has been discussed at great length by the staff. We want to make sure that children are working to their maximum potential – it is about getting better at things and not giving up, not changing a child’s identity. KH: the children are very aware if they are not good at something and some of this is about getting the message across to parents in the right way as sometimes the message received by parents is that their child needs to become more confident and stop being shy. Another parent talked about wanting her children to have the learning behaviours needed to thrive as they move on to middle school. The environment here is very different to a middle school where the teachers will not know the children in the same way. Lisa agreed and said that whilst we are very nurturing here, we need to build the children up so they become more resilient. CMc: One of the school’s strengths is its attitude to values and celebrating them. All these values need to continue to be developed. The enrichment opportunities offered within the school are invaluable. Lisa went on to talk about Mantle of the Expert – a teaching method which uses dramatisation to bring subjects to life. All the children in the class play a part. We are also making a concerted effort to get the Year 3 and 4 children out to as many sports events as possible and are using our Sports Grant to facilitate this. The parents felt we should use this as a marketing tool as we have such an inclusive ethos within the school.

School Development Plan Priorities – reading and writing standards, maths opportunities across the curriculum, reviewing assessment and record keeping procedures. There will be a focus on making the children more resilient and tracking progress across the foundation subjects. We will also be working towards the Artsmark award which will take about 2 years to achieve and Charlotte Underhill has started to look at this.

Homework – Reception homework consists of phonics, reading and maths
Year 1 and 2 consists of reading, spellings, maths or English
Year 3 and 4 consists of reading, spellings, maths or English and other projects

Lisa hoped that the parents were now more aware of the days on which homework goes out and comes back in. Longer tasks are now better explained with the main aim of the task being clearer. Parents have been asked to write a short comment about the homework – we need to know if we are pitching it right.

One of the parents commented that she likes the “extension” at the end of the homework as it is great for those children who like to explore something a bit further. Another parent felt her child had been enthused. The routine of maths one week and English the next also works well although the English homework tends to take longer! Lisa felt this was one area in which we would never please everybody but felt we had the right balance at present.

Any other business – CMc raised the idea of school purchasing enough musical instruments (perhaps with the PTA’s help) for a whole year group (Year 4 due to the issue of size with the younger children) and then providing tuition during the school day. Another idea was to put one child who might not be in a position to afford tuition, forward for lessons to be paid for by the school. Lisa’s main concern was being able to find a teacher of the right calibre to deliver the lessons. Another of the parents also felt that teaching in groups was not generally successful – individual tuition is much more effective but also expensive. Lisa felt that the majority of our families would be able to afford to pay for music lessons outside of school anyway. Another issue would be when to fit the tuition in during an already very busy school day. The children have access to Charanga music website during school time and thoroughly enjoy using it. CMc: how do you make sure that children get musical opportunities? Lisa felt the children were lucky to have a teacher in the school who is a talented piano player. **ACTION: investigate the possibility of re-starting recorder group. Also look at possibility of getting more music related visitors in (perhaps CBSO).**

Lisa thanked everybody who attended and the meeting concluded at 8.15pm.