

Minutes of the Parents' Open Forum held 07.10.2013

"Always striving to improve!"

Attendees: Miss Cartwright (BC), Mrs Taylor (CT), Mrs Thomson (RT), Mr Kirk (BK), Ms C Taylor (CT), Mr Alder (DA), Mrs Gannon, Mr Nicholls, Mrs Adams, Mrs Brunige, Mrs Primus, Mrs Payne, Mrs Tomlin.

Mrs Thomson (RT) welcomed the attendees and opened the forum by asking everyone to introduce themselves.

The School Development Plan

Our School has 10 targets on the development plan, and RT asked if there were any comments, were there any points to add or clarify?

Q - Road Safety and Travel Plan could you expand this? Namely the section "development of the Buryfield drop-off area, and re-orientation of the school main entrance".

A – BK stated that in line with the aim of reducing traffic down Church St, amongst many things to look at one aspect may be to investigate creating a designated walk path from Buryfield car park onto school site.

Challenge for all

Under this title is the school looking to improve links with professional bodies, such as the digital arts, and the British Film Institute. This has happened in Yr 2 BC has done a project with an animator and made a film. RT stated what the parent had been talking about was in fact what our teachers are doing every day. The teachers look, investigate and connect all different aspects of learning creatively, through all manner of imagery.

IT

RT asked what about IT? How do we bridge the gap between what the children may have outside of school and what we can realistically do in school? Should Parents be asked to provide iPads / tablets?

A discussion took place involving lots of aspects of IT. Devices, iPad / tablet/ laptop, how other schools deal with it, problems with broadband connectivity, mobility of devices, keeping them charged, updated, clean! Here at GMS we have a set of 6 iPads which are used for various classes (French in particular), or in small groups. Examples of useage were the children were shown how to navigate effectively & safely and recognise and use websites, linking with the curriculum.

Q – How would the children use them in class?

MT – they would use them to research and support topic work very effectively, on all areas of the curriculum, countries, history etc.

Parent would like to see connections with the National Computer Museum, and some emphasis placed on programming, technology, & robotics, using current technology, but having an understanding of its' history. RT interjected and stated that MT & BC are having training 11.10.2013 in line with new Government Directives about the National Curriculum and how IT can/should be taught in school.

RT – What about children with Special Educational Needs? Should they have an Ipad / tablet / laptop for use in school? If so how should they be funded, by school/parent/sponsored? What value would the device add to that child's education & learning? Parent commented that the BBC for Schools programme offer advice, resources, information that innovates and inspires and that this would support & encourage the use of IT in school (for all).

Q – Is the school teaching children to become programmers? Or are they learning to use the internet safely, safely navigate websites, write e-mails etc.

BK – the ICT curriculum addresses all of these aspects, and more, and this was reiterated throughout the Yr groups of teachers present. BK emphasised that the use of the computer / tablet / Ipad device could be used as a dictionary, a thesaurus, a book, and drawing pad, use the technology for something other than a “gaming device” which a lot of children see it as.

RT – what about writing in school? Is it still relevant to learn how to use the hand? An overall Yes! It was agreed that good pencil control and letter formation from an early age was still a vital skill that needed to be in place, and by Yr 4 / 5 & 6 whilst handwriting is not taught specifically, it was taught amongst guided reading etc. There are various systems in place at school which take place discreetly to address and improve writing throughout school, from shaped pencils, grips and specific lessons.

Q – Would a keyboard assist some children? If so, how could this need be addressed?

It was agreed by those present that should the teaching staff/Inclusion department feel this resource would be of benefit to a particular child, then this could be looked at in more detail.

Homework – Q received by e-mail

This half term whilst we are concentrating on Reading, Yr 6 children are also given one piece of maths. In preparation for KS3 the volume of homework will gradually increase to 4 pieces a week by the end of Yr 6. All children should be reading and noting in the reading record book every day.

Sport – Q by e-mail

To encourage more sport in school a suggestion that we should drop an assembly and have an additional PE lesson was suggested. The assembly time each day is a valuable part of the school day. It is our act of collective worship, and having a good sing acts as a strong bond for the children and staff and allows all age groups to connect. Also with 27 activity clubs (lunchtime & afterschool) on offer this term, if a child wants more sport, there should be something available for everyone!

School Development Plan – Q by e-mail

In the plan it welcomes Literacy development but doesn't mention maths, why? Put simply our school results last year couldn't actually get any better! It is already a strength and continues to remain challenging for every child, perhaps this should be communicated to parents to realise we're not ignoring it! DA also confirmed with MT that Numeracy would continue to be focussed on and they were looking into part-taking in more challenge quizzes, to really give the children something to get their teeth into!

Sharp step edge in Pre-school

This has been raised with the Health and Safety Committee who have agreed with Mr Brown to "round off" the edges of the step. Whilst there have not been any reported incidents of injury, where improvement could be made, it will be.

ICT – what is the solution? (Mindful of school budget)

Ideally a set of iPad / tablet / laptops for each class (6 would be an ideal number per class). In the school development plan the aim is to make 2 distinct LRCs (Learning Resource Centres). The Library (whilst still a home for our lovely books!) would become KS1 LRC with a whole class set of tablets for research / teaching ICT skills and the current ICT suite would become KS2 LRC also equipped with tablets.

Any ideas for PTA spending? - please forward any suggestions via the school office.

Uniform – is everyone happy with our decision to only slightly change the uniform? We are working towards all children to be in grey skirts / trousers / shorts / pinafores and tights by Sept 2014.

RT Thanked everyone for their attendance.

