

Junior School

Infant School

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High Down Schools

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Executive Headteacher

Mrs A Cowan

Dear Parents and Carers,

It has been a while since our last newsletter (back in December 2018) and in that time a lot has been going on within the schools and the Governors team. We had aimed to publish six updates per year but have only achieved three this year, so there is room for improvement next year. However, I can assure you that the Governors team has remained focused, motivated and closely engaged with the activities of the schools throughout this academic year.

This newsletter contains:

- Highlights from the Terms 3, 4, 5 and 6 Governors meetings
- Comments on the OFSTED inspection
- Information about general education funding challenges
- A final few words

Local Governing Body (LGB) Meetings

The term 3 meeting (31 Jan) started by welcoming Laura McMahon as the newly elected Parent Governor. This meeting was also used to re-appoint a number of current Governors whose terms were close to ending. A key focus of this meeting was the 2018/2019 budget, especially the impact of 16 unfilled spaces in Reception year. As a team we also reviewed the "Inspection Data Summary Reports (IDSRs)" published by Ofsted. This data summarises school performance data for 2018/19 against national averages and is used by Ofsted as a performance reference during inspections. It is important that the Governors are familiar with the main points of the IDSR and are active in challenging the Senior Leadership Team on areas for improvement.

At the term 4 meeting (20 Mar) we welcomed Rowena Davin (Chair of Governors from Northleaze Primary School) who was observing the meeting as part of her leadership development. At this meeting we reviewed the spring term pupil performance data across years 1 to 6 and saw strong progress in many areas with key pupil groups identified for further focus. We also checked progress against the school improvement plan (called Raising Attainment and Progress Plan - RAPP) which contains actions to improve leadership, quality of teaching, behaviour, outcomes and Early Years provisions. We explored how the schools manage attendance (noted as an improvement priority for this year) and had updates on Safeguarding, SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability) and budgets. The Health and Safety topic included a review of the Year 6 residential trip risk assessment.

Our Term 5 meeting (21 May) reviewed the feedback from the Ofsted inspections (Junior School and After School Club) and noted that the recommendations from these inspections are already being actioned. We had a written report from the Lighthouse Schools Partnership (LSP) Director for School Improvement which highlighted very strong teaching quality and gave useful advice for improving writing outcomes further. We reviewed pupil attendance data and agreed that this would become a regular topic for review. We also closely reviewed the on-

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going years' budget, especially the impact of 21 empty spaces across the Infant school. This meeting also reviewed the draft priorities for the 2019/20 improvement plan (RAPP).

During the term 6 meeting (27 Jun) we assigned governor roles and responsibilities for 2019/20, including re-electing the chairs and vice-chairs, and held a general discussion about this years' LGB performance. We had feedback from SEND, Health and Safety and pupil voice monitoring visits. We also agreed updates to the schools Health and Safety Policy, SEND Policy and Friendship and Anti-bullying Policy. We had feedback on the recent safeguarding quizzes, completed by the governors, which showed a high level of knowledge and just a few areas needing prompting. We also looked at the three-year budget forecast for both schools and the potential challenges that will bring (more on that below). A new working group, looking at increasing the schools income, provided feedback from their first meeting and a proposal to increase revenue from school lettings. Finally, we discussed the potential use of social media platforms for improving Schools communication and profile. Although we didn't reach a consensus, it was useful to express some of the pros and cons.

Comments from the recent Ofsted inspection

On 8 May 2019 High Down Junior School received an inspection from Ofsted, where we maintained our 'good' rating. It was a fantastic vote of confidence to get official validation of the teaching and care provided at High Down Schools. Particularly pleasing was the breadth of opportunities which were noted and how the values of the school were echoed in the behaviour and feedback from pupils and parents. Ofsted had a responsibility to check how the school had responded to the disappointing Maths SATs results in 2017. The school was able to demonstrate the quick and targeted improvement actions and also how these had been cascaded throughout both schools to ensure all pupils are benefitting from improvements.

I would like to thank Mrs Cowan for her strong and focused leadership throughout the year and especially during those tense inspection moments. Since the Governors are part of the schools leadership, we were part of the inspection too. I'm very proud of the way the team prepared behind the scenes and would like to thank them for the knowledge and commitment displayed on the day.

School Funding

Education funding across the country is in crisis, although I fear that this is being lost in the news behind the Brexit headlines. Mr Gary Lewis (LSP CEO) wrote to you earlier this year and I am adding my voice to echo his sentiment and concerns. I am not a politician and have no agenda other than supporting our schools to deliver first class education for all of our pupils and to support our families. However, I would encourage you all to use the mechanisms within our political system to share your concerns with our local MP and add your voice to the growing number of national campaigns if you share our concerns.

The financial pressures on all schools are huge and you should all be aware that High Down has not been sheltered from the funding crisis. As always, we are really proud of our staff who regularly go above and beyond to support your children and each other. However, since our income is calculated on pupil numbers, finances are not helped by having a large number of spaces in the current reception year. This year we have had to make some difficult choices regarding staffing and spending to balance the schools budgets. The financial benefit of having additional classes protects us a little next year but the multi-year forecast will bring further difficulties.

On a very basic level one thing all parents can do is continue to support The Friends and PSA in fundraising. This additional income is now an essential element to providing for your children. Please continue to support their events and give as generously as you are able. It is not lost on us that you, as families, face the same or similar financial pressures. I would like to thank The Friends and Infant PSA teams for another amazing year of events and fundraising, the Governors are very grateful for the hugely positive impact that your efforts have on each and every child at High Down.

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Final few words

I would like to thank Mrs Cowan and all the staff at High Down who have worked so incredibly hard this year. Thanks also go to the many parent helpers who support the school whether in-class, fundraising or keeping us environmentally respectable. I give thanks to the Governors team and their dedication to the school. We are always happy to hear from willing volunteers and are particularly looking for new Governors especially with financial management and strategic planning experience and who are not directly connected to the school. If you know someone who might fit the bill please e-mail chair.governors@highdownschools.org

So, the sun is shining and the summer holidays are fast approaching. For those within the school this means a welcome break and a chance to relax and recover before starting afresh in September. For the rest of us, this means juggling childcare, holidays, fun days and work :-)) but I hope you find a moment to relax and reflect on the amazing experiences your child has had this year.

Yours sincerely

Gail Meacock and Nolan Hibberd

Co-Chairs of Governors

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