

Minutes of Parent Council Meeting, Friday 1st May 2015

Present: Anna Fairhurst, Victoria Doran, Deborah Shipway, Claire Wright, Leah Walker, Jane Hornsby

Apologies: Jackie Hampson, Kelly Hatcher

1 Several parents would like the school to offer sporting activities (such as skipping) before school.

We need the children to be coming into school at 8.40 ready to start their learning, so such activities would need to be between 8.30 and 8.40. That is not to say they could not happen. Teaching assistants have not started work at that time, and teachers are getting ready for lessons, so there is not at present a member of staff available to lead this. If any parent would like to do so, please get in touch with Mrs Fairhurst.

2 Yesterday (Thursday 30th April) children were late out, and this is not the first time.

We are very sorry about this. One class was late for assembly, which put the time back, and I just didn't look at my watch in time to shorten it. We will do our best to ensure this doesn't happen again.

3 Several Year 2 children have been upset because they haven't been able to have their first choice at lunch time, when Key Stage 2 children are allowed to choose in the morning.

This is true: Key Stage 2 children are allowed to express a preference with the morning register for what meal they would like, and Tammy cooks the correct amount. If we extend this to Class 2, there would not be the economies of scale to give Class 1 children a choice at the time, and we are worried that Class 1 children might struggle to make a choice in the morning and remember it at lunch time. We could ask parents to book all the meals for their children the Friday before. Several members of the council thought this might be extra effort, and some parents might not remember.

Mrs Webb has come up with a compromise idea which we tried for the first time yesterday, of keeping the current system but alternating whether Year 1 and Year 2 goes up first. The council agreed that we will try this for the next month or so and review at the next meeting. Class 2 parents, please let your Parent Council representatives know how this is going.

One good news story about lunches is that, now we have a contract with a new company, Tammy is able to negotiate her recipes with the children. The Caribbean chicken this week was unpopular, with lots being thrown away, so Tammy talked to the children about why they didn't like it and agreed to cook it without raisins next time.

4 There are not many clubs available for Key Stage 1 children.

Because we are such a small school with a small staff, there is a limit to the number of clubs staff can run. It is great that so many of them do choose to do clubs after school, but the only way we can increase the number is by finding more people to run them. We have a couple of paid-for clubs but we are reluctant

to ask parents for more money than we do. It would be fantastic if parents were able to run clubs for us.

As we had this discussion, two members of the Parent Council offered to run clubs for Classes 1 and 2 in Term 6. Mrs Doran will run a sewing club and Mrs Hornsby will run a colouring club. This is really kind of them both. Mrs Doran will let the school know which day she would like to run it and the maximum number of children. We will ask parents for donations of wool and embroidery thread, and use the newsletter to ask if any other parents would like to come forwards.

5 In Class 2, some parents would like more written feedback in reading records.

In Class 2 especially, the school staff sign the reading records every day but do not write a comment. The reason for this is that it is time-consuming to do so and TA time is precious – it is more important for them to be supporting children than writing in reading records. However, they do check them every day (and sign them to show they have done so) to make sure each child has read and to take note of any parental comments which should be brought to the teacher's attention. We are sorry if some parents feel we are "checking up on them" by doing this, but it is really important that children read every day, and we need to know who is not doing so, so that we can help the children and talk to the parents. Reading is something this school does really well, as the results show, and we are sure that our system of asking reading records to be filled in daily throughout the school is a key reason for this.

However, some parents would like to know when an adult (such as Mrs Hancock, a regular volunteer reader) has read with their child. We will invest in stickers to put in reading records whenever a child reads 1:1 with an adult in school, although please remember that not all children do read 1:1 with adults, especially if they are showing that they are making great progress through their reading records and class Reading lessons.

6 Some parents find homework a chore and feel that it is not particularly useful.

As it happens, this coincides perfectly with a long conversation the teachers had at the staff meeting on Monday.

We are not going to change the way homework is done in Class 1, which is generally thought of as being good, or in Class 4, where it is important that children develop the discipline of doing written homework in preparation for secondary school. We also, as discussed above, value the reading records and the work parents do reading with their children at home, which makes a huge difference to their learning. However, from next week we are going to change how other homework is set in Classes 2 and 3. We are having a drive on basic skills in Maths and on spelling, as we find children make better progress in class if they have these skills really embedded.

We are teaching spelling on most days, so children in Classes 2 and 3 will be sent a list of words related to what they are doing in class to learn with their parents each week. In Class 2 they will be praised for doing it, but in Class 3 there will be a formal spelling test with the expectation that the children have learned the words.

In Maths, the greatest difference parents can make is to help their children become fluent in the basic number facts, such as number bonds and multiplication tables. These are quite hard to teach in a class where children are all at different stages, and parents can make learning these things fun by doing them while out and about, not necessarily sitting down at a table. From next week, parents will be told what their children are learning in Maths, which will be either number bonds or a table. The child will be supported to reach his/ her target in class, but parents' support will enable him/ her to reach it more quickly. When they know what they are learning (e.g. a table) well, they will be given a sticker in assembly and a new target in their homework book. This way, parents will be able to see exactly what their children need to learn and how quickly they are making progress.

7 Parents would like to know more about what their children can do and need to work on, especially in Maths and Grammar/ Punctuation.

We can sort this out easily. Every six weeks, children do Maths assessments covering the whole of the Maths curriculum, with the next one being just before half term. After marking but before filing, we will photocopy them and send them home for parents to see. In Grammar/ Punctuation, we will sort out parent guides for each level and send them home.

8 Clubs are sometimes cancelled, often with little notice.

We are very sorry about this. We only do it if we cannot avoid it (e.g. if the person running the club is ill and there is nobody to cover for them). If ever we cancel a club and you are unable to collect your child at 3.15, please let us know and we will make sure your child is kept safe until the time the club should end.

9 Some parents would like children to be able to have snacks other than fruit or vegetables at snack time.

It has been school policy for several years only to allow fruit or vegetables, in order to encourage healthy eating. Once we relax that rule (e.g. to allow houmous), it becomes very difficult to define what is and is not allowed. For now, we are going to keep to the longstanding school policy although we are sorry if some people are unhappy about it.

10 There is concern that the doors do not always open on time in the morning.

We are very sorry about this when it happens and we will do our best. We are often very busy in the morning and it can be difficult to notice the exact time, but we do know that a late opening time can make things difficult for parents.

11 The toilets often smell.

There was a comment that there is not always a toilet roll in one of the Class 2 toilets as well. Mrs Fairhurst will speak to the cleaner and the Class 2 teachers about toilet roll. As for smell, the toilets are cleaned every day and we do believe they are clean every morning. However, because none of the children's toilets in the main building have ventilation, smells can build up. Solving the problem will not be a quick-fix, but we will investigate how much it would cost to put in extractor fans.

12 One parent had raised that staff do not always feed back when parents have raised concerns.

If this is true, the Parent Council is not the appropriate forum. Any parents concerned about this would be welcome to talk to Mrs Fairhurst about it.

Date of next meeting: 9.00, Friday 26th June.