

Home Farm Primary School – Parent Forum meeting – Friday 21st October 2016 - 14:15

Minutes

Present: Mr Potter; Mrs Rivett; Mrs Velcherean; Mrs Wilkins; Mrs Khan; Mrs Rudkin; Mrs Turvil; Mrs King; Mr Macfarlane; Mrs Heard; Ms Jarman; Mrs Nesbitt; Mrs Mansfield; Mrs Hayton; Mrs Newson; Mrs Carlin

1. Mr Potter welcomed parents to the meeting. He reviewed some of the points discussed at the previous meeting and the action that had been taken:
 - Changing for PE – Mr Potter confirmed that Year 5 and 6 children change separately in the classroom and the study room. Some Year 4 children had asked for separate changing facilities and did not change in the toilet area. This was the only option close enough for the teacher to provide supervision. Changing did not take place in the cubicles. Once children were changed, all clothes were put in PE bags and returned to the classroom.
 - Possibility of an after school club – Mr Potter noted that Breakfast Club was proving very popular and that numbers were increasing. The school would consult parents this term on Breakfast Club usage and start time, and would invite views again on the possibility of an after school club. It would be important that any extended school activities were financially viable.
 - Closure of the gates to the car park – Mr Potter confirmed that the gates were closed as often as possible, although they were sometimes left open by delivery drivers. The school could look at self-closing gates on heavy duty springs, but the school was also aware that there may be some work to this side of the site in the future.
 - Timing of Parent Forum meetings – the best turn out had been achieved by holding the meetings on Friday afternoons, so this would continue for the time being.
 - Future of the pool – the school continued to explore its options in relation to covering the pool over the longer-term.

Parking

2. Mr Potter raised the issue of parking at drop-off and pick-up times. The school continued to encourage parents to park responsibly. He was looking at the possibility of creating two entrances that could be used at drop-off and pick-up times, in order to ease pressure on the gate next to the council play park.
3. The Parent Forum discussed this issue and a number of points were made:
 - Parents asked whether it would be possible for the school to staff two entrances, and Mr Potter noted that it would as there were normally three adults on the gate.
 - Creating an additional entrance point might help ease crowding on the pavements.
 - Parents asked whether it would be worth allowing parents in to the playground in the mornings, but it was noted that some parents did not stand behind the yellow line at pick-up time, and that the children needed room to run around.
 - Parents asked whether cutting back the shrubbery across the front of the school might help as parents would be able to see their children in the playground, but it was noted that this shrubbery belonged to the Borough Council, and that it was useful in providing a screen for the playground at other times.
 - Parents asked whether the school had considered operating an informal 'drop-off' zone, and the Parent Forum discussed the way this worked at Queen Boudica school. It was noted that at Queen Boudica, the street was one-way and that this helped to make the drop-off arrangement work.

Academies

4. Mr Potter noted the discussion that the Parent Forum had at its previous meeting, and confirmed that the Governing Body continued to look at the possibility of becoming an academy and part of a multi-academy trust.

5. If the school became an academy, this would not change the identity of the school, and would not mean that teachers would immediately move elsewhere. It would have the effect of turning the school into a company limited by guarantee, and the school would be directly accountable to the Department for Education and not to the local authority. Being an academy would bring certain freedoms, for example in relation to the curriculum, and the freedom to access other sources of funding. Working more formally with other schools would also generate the opportunity for economies of scale, and would mean that schools could access each other's good practice and good ideas.
6. Parents asked a number of questions:
 - Would admissions still operate for the school individually? Mr Potter confirmed that they would.
 - If there was an issue with the finances of one school in a multi-academy trust, would other schools have to share the burden of this? Mr Potter explained that each school forming part of a multi-academy trust would be a company, and the multi-academy trust would be the umbrella body. Schools would not need to 'bail out' other schools.
 - What would this mean for the HFSA? The HFSA was a charity with an entirely separate identity to the school. It would continue as such, and the HFSA's money would remain the property of the HFSA.
 - Parents asked what other academy trusts were in existence locally, and Mr Potter provided an overview of this, including details of the three large academy chains in operation in Colchester. Marilyn Rivett noted that there may be a tipping point at which it may not be viable for the County Council to maintain its input to the schools which had not converted. By looking at these issues early, the school had the opportunity to define its own pathway.
 - Would being an academy be attractive in terms of recruiting teachers? Mr Potter explained that it could be better for retention, and that being part of a multi-academy trust would help to ensure that good teachers could be retained locally.
7. Mr Potter concluded by confirming that consultation with parents would take place as the considerations continued.

Governing Body

8. Mr Potter noted that the Governing Body had a vacancy for a Parent Governor. Mrs Rivett and Mr Macfarlane provided an overview of what was involved. Governors acted as critical friends to the school and its leadership team, and were responsible helping to drive school improvement through the provision of challenge and support. Mrs Rivett was happy to provide further information if anyone was interested.

Issues raised by parents

9. Mrs Wilkins thanked Mr Potter for providing first aid and lifesaving training to Key Stage 2 classes. Parents noted that the children had found the training to be positive and engaging.
10. Parents asked who the flu vaccination would be available to, and it was confirmed that it would be available to children in all classes from R to 6. The NHS would provide the school with letters providing further details which would be sent home as soon as they were available.
11. Parents asked some questions about the nature of homework provided in Year 4, and what the expectations were about children's knowledge of the times tables. Mr Potter explained that the aim was that children should know up to their 12 x 12 times tables by the end of Year 4, but it was important to continue to reinforce these during years 5 and 6. The focus on mastery in the new curriculum meant that it was important to teach skills that enabled children to use maths in context. This meant that expectations of Year 4 were higher than they had been under the old curriculum. Some parents commented that they felt homework expectations were too high for some children, and Mr Potter would review this.
12. Parents asked whether homework completed in homework club should be marked by teachers. Mr Potter would look at this issue.

13. Parents commented on the arrangements for letting children leave from the football clubs on Mondays and Thursdays after school, and Mr Potter would look at this.

Next meeting

14. The next meeting would take place on Friday 25th November at 2:15pm – all parents were welcome to attend.