

Home Farm Primary School

Parent Forum – Friday 10th February 2017, 14:15

Present – Mr Potter; Mrs Rudkin; Mrs Wright; Mrs Mansfield; Mrs Berry; Mrs Ciobotaru; Mrs Jackson; Mrs King; Mrs Hayton; Mrs Khan; Mr Travi; Mrs Carlin

Apologies – Mrs Newson

Minutes of the previous meeting and matters arising

1. Mr Potter welcomed parents to the meeting. He provided an update on actions taken since the previous meeting. He had reviewed the timetable for homework. Some teachers had changed the days on which homework was issued – this reflected changes to the school's timetable for teacher preparation, planning and assessment time. However regardless of the day homework was set, children were always given a week including a weekend to complete it.
2. Mr Potter confirmed in response to a question that the school had not renewed its subscription to Reading Eggs due to the financial pressures the school was facing.
3. Mr Potter provided an update on issues raised at the previous meeting relating to Earwig, the online learning journey used by Class R. Although there was an Earwig app, this was for use by schools and teachers. The company was planning a parents' app but it was not yet available. In the meantime Earwig displayed best on tablets and laptop-sized screens. Parents were able to comment on pictures, and were doing so. The school could see who logged on and how often and so could get a feel for how parents were engaging with the system. The system does not automatically send notifications to parents when content was uploaded, but staff could generate an email notification to parents to tell them there is new content. The school was considering whether roll Earwig out through other year groups in the school, and any further feedback from parents was welcome.
4. Parents had asked at the previous meeting whether the Tucasi Scopay system allowed parents to save cards or pre-pay for items, and whether alerts could be sent by the system when balances were getting low. The school had discussed these issues with the system provider. Alerts could be set by parents within their account settings, and the school had posted instructions on how to do this on the school website. Scopay could also be configured using a Worldpay function called 'futurepay' which would allow parents to save card details. The school would take this forward.

Parking

5. Mr Potter raised ongoing issues with inconsiderate parking outside of the school. The school continued to issue reminders to parents and had sought input from the Borough Council and the parking attendants. Parking did improve on the occasions when the parking attendants were present but there were still issues with parents blocking driveways or even on occasion parking on residents' driveways. The school would continue to monitor the situation and to issue reminders to parents to park responsibly.

Financial context for schools

6. Mr Potter provided the Parent Forum with an overview of the financial context in which the school was operating. He had included an article on these issues in the newsletter the same day. The Government was consulting on the introduction of a new national funding formula which was likely to mean reductions in Home Farm's budget. Funding had also been removed from local authorities, and schools were being asked to buy back services previously provided by the local authority for free. The school continued to manage its finances as prudently as possible, but its ability to fund new or additional activities was limited. It was important that parents were aware of these pressures on the school. He had written to Will Quince MP to make the school's concerns known.

Investigations into the creation of a Multi-Academy Trust

7. Mr Potter noted that work was continuing to look at the feasibility of establishing a Multi-Academy Trust in partnership with five other local schools – Montgomery Juniors; Montgomery Infants; Kings Ford Infants; Gosbecks; and Lexden. The Parent Forum discussed this work. A parent commented that it was good for schools to share resources, but that there was no evidence that the creation of a MAT improved school outcomes, and there were grey areas that needed to be understood such as the autonomy of individual schools, and access to the curriculum. It was noted that it was important for parents, as the school's main stakeholder to have information about the options and involvement in the work.
8. Mr Potter explained some of the reasons why there might be advantages in joining a MAT. These included the financial context and the opportunities that might be created to achieve efficiencies in 'back office' functions; the opportunity for the school to choose its future path rather than being forced into a secondary led Academy Trust; and the advantages in terms of recruiting, retaining and developing teachers.
9. Mr Potter agreed that it was important that parents and staff had a voice in the process. At this point, Governing Bodies of the six schools were still exploring the options and no decisions had been taken to proceed. The first decision point would be reached in March, when Governors would decide whether or not to formally consult staff and parents. If the Governing Body of Home Farm did decided to go ahead with a consultation, there would be staff and parent workshops so that information can be shared and views heard.
10. A parent noted that they would be concerned if the school's ethos changed, and Mr Potter confirmed that he could categorically state that if a MAT was created, the individual schools would retain their uniqueness and individual nature. This principle would be written into the articles of association for a MAT. Schools would also retain their own local governing bodies.

Issues raised by parents

11. Parents asked how the school was planning to mark World Book Day. Mr Potter explained that the children would not be dressing up this year, and that a different challenge was planned to mark the day. More information would be provided after half-term.
12. Parents asked whether the school monitored the use of the tuck shop. Mr Potter explained that Year 5 ran the tuck shop and carried out a full range of stock-taking and profit and loss analysis. Parents asked why snacks such as yoghurt raisins were available when children could not bring these in from home as a snack, and Mr Potter explained that the tuck shop provided something special once or twice a week in order to support Year 5's enterprise education. Parents commented that some Class R children did not know how to buy from the tuck shop, and Mr Potter would ask their Year 6 buddies to help them. Parents suggested that the Year 5 could write something for the school newsletter about the tuck shop and the school would take this forward.
13. Parents asked about the e-safety evening taking place on 9th March and whether handouts could be provided to parents who were not able to attend. Mr Potter confirmed that information would be posted on the school website. Cheese, wine and biscuits would be available on the night!
14. The Parent Forum discussed e-safety more generally, and noted that it could be challenging when children were discussing things in the playground, particularly if some children had been playing games or watching films inappropriate for their age. Mr Potter noted that one of the school's aims in teaching e-safety issues was to build children's resilience and help them to deal with such situations.
15. Mr Potter thanked all parents for attending the meeting. The next meeting would take place on Friday 31st March at 2:15pm.