

News from the Little Hadham governors: January 2018

Belated, but really important thanks

Those of you who were able to make it will have experienced another very successful Christmas Fair. As well as raising an impressive amount of money, it was a really positive community event and a real credit to the pupils, parents and staff who undertook all the hard work before and on the day. Many thanks to the Friends and their many helpers.

Equally enjoyable and successful - despite attempts by the snow to sabotage them - were the several Christmas productions. The children rose brilliantly to the challenge of lost rehearsal time and all their hard work and that of the staff shone through.

As is the custom, governors and staff served the children with their Christmas lunches. We then sat down together for our own meal. It's one of the real pleasures of being a governor to spend time with the children. We are very lucky to have such sociable and positive pupils. We are also extremely fortunate to have such committed and enthusiastic people in the kitchen.

Among very many people who make a major contribution to the successful running of the school are our Teaching Assistants, our caretaker Mr Trundle, and Mrs Chamberlain and Mrs Erswell in the office. The governors would like to acknowledge their hard work and commitment and thank each of them for all they do to support our children

Car park surveys

We continue to explore possible ways of improving our car park. As part of this we have been actively engaged with several departments at Herts County Council. Herts Highways appears unwilling to spend any money on the A120 as they consider the problem to be short-term, since the new by-pass is planned - but that is still some time away. Regrettably they also seem extremely reluctant to work with us to find ways to improve the situation. Hopefully the addition of the new land next summer (see below) may help to provide a solution – meanwhile we will keep trying!

Governors, with help from parents, carried out several surveys before Christmas. The results are helping to provide evidence to the County Council and Highways to support our case for changes on the school site and on the A120.

- On the days we surveyed there were 126 pupils and 24 members of staff in school. The maximum number of cars on site was 45. As is all too apparent, at the busiest times there are fewer spaces than cars on site.
- The problems are greater in the afternoon with congestion at its worst from 3.00pm through to about 3.20pm.
- Congestion in the morning is at its worst around 9.00am. There are considerably less difficulties before 8.50am. For example, there were twenty-nine cars on site at 8.49am, but forty-three at 8.58am.
- Some of the tail back in the car park is caused by the poor sight lines on the A120 when exiting towards Stortford.
- The car park layout often results in cars stopped in the middle, resulting in blocked, but empty parking spaces.
- The driving skills, patience and good humour of by far the majority of parents is impressive.
- Many stay parked on site for quite a long time, particularly in the afternoon, to talk to staff, chat with other parents and walk their dogs. We wouldn't want to discourage this.

What we saw highlights considerable ongoing concerns

Although understandable that sometimes people get frustrated, not least when in a hurry to be somewhere else, it is frightening that the actions of a few parents are putting children's safety at risk. Among the activities we saw were:

- parents getting openly angry and aggressive towards other parents in front of children.
- children being allowed to walk through the car park without close adult supervision.
- parents parking in the disabled bay, causing real difficulties for those with legitimate reasons to park there.
- parents parking on the chevrons by the double gates making it difficult for drivers to see children coming into the car park from the playground – and hindering children's ability to see cars on the move in that area.
- a parent driving out via the entrance, despite this obviously being extremely dangerous.
- parents letting children get into their car whilst queuing on the A120.
- An individual who left her car parked on the entrance slipway whilst she went into the playground to collect a child, resulting in a significant tailback on the A120 in both directions.
- parents driving dangerously fast and aggressively through the car park, although there were children about.
- Cars queuing on the A120 because parents are not waiting to move further into the car park before going to collect their children.

We know that vehicle access is a real problem, but so it is in most schools - but if you are one of the minority who does any of the above, please don't become the person having to face the consequences of an injured child.

What do Governors do?

Governors have three key responsibilities:

1. To ensure there is a clear vision and ethos which sets the framework for how the school will develop in the future. This is particularly important at the moment as we move to recruiting our new headteacher. Undoubtedly the most important part of the governors' role is finding the right person to lead the school. We are seeking someone who will maintain our current values and ethos whilst ensuring the school continues to move forward. Thank you to all the parents who gave their views on the day of the panto – these have been reflected in our headteacher recruitment pack.
2. The Governors are required to 'hold the headteacher to account' for the performance of the school. This is about ensuring that every pupil gets the best possible for them. Of course, this is partly about their academic achievements, but it's much more than that. We want our children to flourish as individuals, to have a wide range of experiences and opportunities and to enjoy coming to school. It's also about having high quality leadership, teachers and support staff.

To monitor how staff and children are performing governors receive regular written reports from Mrs Stockley and curriculum leaders. Most recently we have looked at Maths, English, RE and PE. This included anonymised, detailed information about the progress and achievements of our children. We also look at school policies and make regular visits into school to observe how these are being implemented. We ask lots of searching questions about a wide range of issues, to which Mrs Stockley and her staff provide detailed answers.

3. The third responsibility is to ensure that the finances are efficiently and effectively allocated.

Newly acquired land

You may be aware that just before Christmas planning consent was given for the construction of 5 houses in the field that runs alongside our field and playground. As one of the planning conditions the school has been gifted some land – highlighted by the hatched area on the attached plan.

This will enable a number of improvements, all of which we are hoping will be undertaken in the summer holidays. We will be extending our field, which will now be large enough for a full size junior football pitch. The field will also have newly installed drainage, which should make it accessible for a longer period each year.

The mound at the far end of the field will be removed and the field extended both to make it larger and to create a newly planted forest area.

New fencing, designed to keep out rabbits will replace the current fencing. Our playground will also be remodeled and extended.

All of this will be undertaken by the developers, so at no cost to the school. We are grateful to Bill Bampton from Pelham Structures, who has been extremely supportive in helping to ensure the school benefits from the housing development. When more details are available, we will share them with you. Meanwhile we are considering other possible improvements to our outside space. More on this at a later stage.



Homework

At our last consultation with parents, homework was raised by a number of people. This is a marmite topic with some are against it whilst others are strongly in favour. In response, the governors' Curriculum and Standards committee have considered whether and why homework is given. They concluded that homework is important for the following reasons:

- it helps to consolidate what children have learnt during the day
- it is an important way to engage parents in their child's learning
- it helps teachers to see whether children have really absorbed what they have been taught
- it prepares children for the pressures of secondary schooling
- it helps to develop children's organisational skills

As part of the governors' follow-up on this topic we will be discussing with staff how the school supports parents in helping their children with homework and whether there are any aspects of this that might be improved.

If you would like to share your thoughts with governors please let the school office know and we will get in touch.