

School Responses
Governor Drop in
Friday July 9th 2016:

Topics from this meeting (topics in bold):

The newsletter: while not a formally raised topic a number of parents had comments on it. People said they did not always read it, ‘yes I receive it but I don’t click through to the document itself’, ‘I do think it would be better if there was a hard copy given out’. Two parents mentioned that this [the giving out of hard copies] had been an ongoing discussion with the school and they felt Mark was very certain that he was not going to start printing the newsletter. We then discussed other ways to help ensure the newsletter was read by as many people as possible. Everyone present felt it would be better if there was no attachment, if the newsletter was simply in the body of the original email. Someone pointed out that with everything in the first email then ‘key dates’ would appear as soon as people opened the email (not one click away) and this would draw them in.

Action: governors to ask Mark if a more straightforward newsletter was possible.

Response: The newsletter needs to be able to be printed out by those who don’t have access to the internet or would like a hard copy. It also needs to be able to be viewed on the school’s web-site. Not sure a newsletter embedded into an email would allow this. If yes, then I would be interested in pursuing this further as it might encourage more people to read it. When we did send out newsletters via hard copies, lots of parents didn’t read them either. It is also expensive printing these out every week and we need to use our money wisely.

Homework: Some parents present felt that the marking of homework was still very sporadic and others raised the issue that the homework given (for different years) still needed a lot of parental input and that the homework ‘took far too long’. ‘It’s a full scale battle in my house some weekends and that’s just not how I want us to spend family time together’. One governor explained how Gospel Oak approach homework (the ‘menu’ given at the beginning of term and how the parents and children can then choose what to work on) and this idea was liked a lot. Another parent talked about how homework had only really become manageable when her child was in year 4 as up until then it was a struggle (other parents present found this reassuring!).

Governors explained that there was recently revised homework policy and that the school was meant to set homework which built on what children had already learned. Parents were advised to raise it with teachers if this was not happening.

PTA fundraising: Some parents who had been at the PTA meeting the night before said they felt the school was not joined up enough between the PTA and the governors and the SLT and that this meant that there was no strategic vision for fundraising. One parent noted that if there had been broad communication re: the SEND room that could have been a focus for fundraising and yet it hadn’t happened. People asked how hard would it be for Mark and SLT to decide 3 priorities for fundraising which the PTA and parent body could then focus on?

Action: governors to ask Mark and SLT to consider this and ensure we approach it with more connectivity next year.

Response: Definitely – this is going to become more important as time goes on.

School drop-off time: One parent who has children in both infants and juniors raised the issue of having to drop her children off at the same time in two different playgrounds and talked about how stressful it is and how one child is always upset at having to be left alone and one child is always late. She asked if there could be a properly staggered start as even a 5 minute difference between infant and junior drop off time would improve the situation drastically. This idea was greeted enthusiastically by other parents present who had children in both infants and juniors. It was noted that a properly staggered drop off would give parents the chance to see/chat to other parents rather than rushing from one playground to another and it would also give all parents the chance to give a brief message to a teacher at drop off if necessary. Both these things felt very important to the group at the drop in and very positive contributors to the well-running of the school and the community and no-one could see any reason why the school could not introduce this for next year.

Action: governors to ask Mark and SLT to consider introducing a staggered start between infants and juniors.

Response: On the face of it a reasonable suggestion. However having checked this out with EWS (Educational Welfare Service), they were not keen. Other schools who have tried it out have reverted back to the same start time as it hasn't improved punctuality issues and has caused other problems.

Possible issues are as follows:

1. We don't necessarily want people chatting in the playground. The gates need to be closed and locked to keep the school secure and we also need to make the playground available for staff and children.
2. We are trying to discourage parents from approaching teachers in the morning as it holds everything up, even for brief messages - ref recent letter to KS1 parents. Messages can always be left at the office, sent via email, passed on as a letter or passed on to a phase leader.
3. We wouldn't want to start school any earlier than 8.55am so a staggered start would mean that some children wouldn't finish until 3.35pm with a knock on effect for staff. Teachers have staff meetings and support staff have other commitments
4. Those working parents who have to wait around for a 9.00am start and a 3.35pm finish may have other commitments which this would impact on
5. It might cause confusion about the start time
6. The period when the office would have to be on call would be extended by at least 10 minutes each day. It would also impact on Derek's time at the start and end of the day when he is often very busy
7. The playgrounds are relatively close and it takes less than a couple of minutes to get from one to another. We'd suggest children being dropped off in the KS2 playground first and then as soon as the bell goes, children in the infants being taken around. Often classes are still lining up in the infants at this point so the children wouldn't be late.
8. If there was a staggered time, we could have a situation where there would be a lot more infants in the KS2 playground at the start of the day which would increase congestion.

An alternative suggestion might be to introduce a soft start for the juniors between 8.50am – 8.55am. This would reduce time lost in the mornings and maximize learning

time. This would mean parents could drop their KS2 children in the playground anytime from 8.45am (as is currently the case) but then encourage them to go up from 8.50am. It's up and running in other schools with positive feedback. Just an initial idea at present which will need more thought and discussion.

Staff who are leaving: A parent asked how many of the teaching staff were leaving this year. People were reassured to hear it was just two of the class teachers but there was dismay at the departure of Dan who parents said had been 'quit simply amazing' and 'transformative' to their children.

New music teacher: a number of parents present said how impressed they had been with the new music teacher. They felt his music and his ways of teaching music were inspiring and exciting and they noted how their children had started coming home talking about music and the impression it had made on them. Someone else said the song choices appeared to be more grown up and this was brilliant as it kept older children interested in singing.

Highgate school intervention: One parent brought up the involvement of Highgate school at Brookfield and questioned it. There was some consternation that Highgate had come in and 'picked off the top five year 4 children for extra Maths and also taken the clever Pupil Premium kids' (although people were unsure if that had happened this year or just last year). Two parents felt very uncomfortable about this as they felt this was introducing an element of selection which was exactly what they didn't want and another parent mentioned how children who had been to Highgate for a day then came back wishing to go to school there which had led to some tough conversations. The governor response was to explain that the school does have links with Highgate (but not exclusively) and that Highgate had delivered other more general benefits to Brookfield with science club and choir. There was a discussion about the more general activity being more acceptable as it was not 'selection'.
Action: school must be very careful and transparent about the role Highgate (or any other private school) plays in helping educate Brookfield pupils

Parent-teacher meetings: One parent asked why the parent/teacher meetings in the autumn term happen so late on in the term – namely in the last week or two of what is a very long term. People discussed how beneficial it would be to have an introductory meeting for each parent and teacher much nearer the start of the first term. This would not be a 'progress' meeting as such as obviously the teacher would not have yet got to know the pupils but rather this meeting would be an introduction and a chance for the teacher to connect with parents and establish a strong rapport for the year. It was noted that this happens very successfully in reception and everyone present felt this could be continued further up the school and that both parents and teachers would benefit greatly.

Action: governors to ask SLT to consider putting in introductory parent-teacher meetings in the autumn term across the school.

Response: We have done this.

Peggy's Ship: One parent raised a concern about the safety of the climbing frame in the junior playground. She was worried about the number of injuries caused and whether or not the play equipment was well-supervised at playtimes. The governors

reassured her that any incidents are recorded and that they school has a number of staff in the playground at all playtimes.

Meeting ended at 9.55am.