

## Governor Newsletter Spring Term 2016

Welcome back. We hope you all had a good Easter break.

Spring term was a short and busy term for the school and governing body. The final meeting took place just before the end of term so apologies for the slight delay in circulating this summary to you.

As well as having oversight of the management of the school the governing body is also engaged with the strategic challenges the school is facing. There are two key issues with which we are currently dominating, both of which you are likely to have heard about in the news.

The first is the changes to school funding. The government currently has a consultation out which proposes a new formula for calculating how schools are funded. As there are no values currently attached to the formula we will not know what this means for us financially until the consultation has closed and the government publishes its final findings. We expect this to be sometime in the summer. We are anticipating a significant cut in our income in real terms from after the next financial year, so from April 2017. One of the main reasons for this is the proposed introduction of 'fairer funding' which will distribute money more evenly to schools across the country. While it is hard to argue with the principle, it will have a significant impact on London schools who have historically been better funded than some other parts of the country. As you may know London schools also perform well compared to those other parts. In order to maintain standards, Camden Council and others are arguing that funding in those parts of the country should be raised to match those of the better funded areas rather than depress levels of spending where schools are doing well.

We anticipate the extent of the cuts to our future funding will have a real impact. The school will be responding to the consultation and governors encourage all parents to engage with the issue of funding and to make your voice heard. The school will continue to inform you of public meetings. The consultation closes on April 17 and can be found at

<https://consult.education.gov.uk/funding-policy-unit/schools-national-funding-formula>

The other issue we are confronting is the government's proposal, published in its White Paper in March, to make all schools academies, or be in the process of becoming one, by 2020. Given the government's championship of academies, this has not come as a total surprise and the issue of academisation has been much discussed between Camden schools and the Local Authority. In some ways it had been anticipated by the establishment of a partnership between Camden schools and Camden Council called the Camden Schools Led Partnership (CSLP) which provides certain services to Camden schools and is a vehicle for collaboration between schools. It had already been proposed that the CSLP become a separate legal entity from the Council and take over the Council's school improvement service and this will be decided upon by the council next month. There is also discussion around creating another body that could become an academy sponsor.

There is currently a very strong bond between Camden's family of schools. Headteachers and governors meet regularly and share thoughts and good practice. The annual Camden Governor conference this month will focus on bringing schools up to date on what the White Paper will mean if it becomes legislation and provide an opportunity for schools to share their current thinking. The governing body will be leading the school through the decisions it takes in the face of changes ahead. A small group of us has been tasked with responsibility for taking this forward and we will continue to keep you informed. If you have any questions in the meantime please feel free to contact us or find one of us in the playground.

In our two formal meetings in Spring term we heard from Michelle Nelis, Early Years phase leader, on the developments in the Nursery and Reception, we had a brief introductory presentation from our new Assistant Head and Inclusion Manager, Katherine Walsh and heard from Gospel Oak governors about their journey to their recent Outstanding Ofsted inspection. We approved the Grievance policy and a policy for Supporting Children with Medical Conditions both of which we are required to have by law.

The committees covered the following areas:

### **Learning and Achievement Committee (LAC)**

The Learning and Achievement Committee met twice and continues to hold the school to account in its implementation of the School improvement plan relating specifically to teaching and learning. This has included continued scrutiny of the Building Learning Power initiative, the ways in which lower attainers in Maths can best be supported, the progress of Pupil Premium pupils in all subjects and the effectiveness of the current Senior Leadership team with regard to their impact on phase groups – both in terms of outcomes for pupils and bringing the best out of all teaching staff.

The term's learning walk, which took in KS1, KS2 and Early Years settings, focused on the use of support staff in Maths lessons. What this confirmed, apart from the fast paced lessons and amazing concentration shown across the year groups, was that support staff play a key role in the classroom. Georgie, the school's maths lead, is collating best practice that has developed so that this can be shared throughout the school. LAC has also reviewed observations of Maths and Literacy teaching and the Healthy Schools and Rights Respecting Schools initiatives and practice. Discussion focused on school meals, particularly concerns about overly sugary desserts.

The new assessment provisions have been central to the committee's work this term. Committee members have observed the moderation of pupils' writing samples and seen for themselves the extent to which the new expected levels are considerably raised from the previous system. Governors are helping oversee the ways in which tracking and reporting levels can be most effective under the new, and as yet untried, system. Particular challenges face the Early Years team who have base line assessments that they are required to provide by the Government in addition to the more informative ongoing assessment that the school uses. We are monitoring the use of Tapestry, an online learning journal, which can be used for communication with parents but also serve as an observation and assessment tool. The other very significant strategic consideration for LAC this term has been to plan for the impacts of the more difficult financial position that will face the school in the

coming terms. As ever we are grateful to Mark and all the staff for their commitment and hard work to find ways to challenge and inspire the children.

### **Personnel, Salaries and Wellbeing Committee (PSWB)**

The short term was a busy one for PSWB. We reviewed and approved two important policies: the Intimate Care policy for the Early Years (nursery and reception), and the Safeguarding policy. Both of these impact life at Brookfield in a different way and so governors have spent a long time discussing the options, reviewing what are 'example' policies from Camden and deciding what is best for our school.

As a committee we are now being asked to agree an increasing number of policies and statutory documents so it is vital that we continue to focus on 'what does it actually mean for Brookfield – for our teachers, our pupils, our parents'. For those who are interested, the final policies are posted on the school's website.

Publishing governor attendance is now a government requirement and so the topic of attendance was discussed at the full governors' meeting in mid-December. It was agreed that governor attendance will be a PSWB standing item and PSWB will review it once a term and governor attendance will be published on the school website.

As well as discussing policy, PSWB also reviews pupil behaviour, exclusions, incidents of bullying and safeguarding at each meeting and then termly we review staff attendance and training. It is good to see that the decline in red slips as noted in the last PSWB update, continues and reported incidents of bullying remain low. Finally the committee would like to thank Cee who delivered an exceptionally comprehensive analysis of staff absence across the school which both highlighted areas of concern and the costs of absence and we are now seeking ways to address both.

This term PSWB will review the pay policy which is a significant agenda item.

### **Finance Committee**

As Spring term is the last of the school financial year (which runs to 31.3.16) we have looked at the final out turn for the year. As in previous years we ended the year with a slightly better reserves position than forecast, due to conservative forecasting and careful cost management. At around 6.6% of the delegated budget our reserves remain consistent with good practice. The team are also finalising the budget for the financial year that runs from 1.04.16 which will be ratified by the full Governing Body in the next few weeks.

Alongside this, we have been trying to assess what the potentially quite difficult financial news may mean for Brookfield, and other schools' budgets. We know the revenue position for the financial year that starts on 1.04.16 which show a marginal increase in our revenue from Camden, but beyond that we have been told to prepare for much more uncertain times. We have discussed and agreed that the school, with support from the governors, should look at what the potential scenarios might be and what impact they would have on pupil attainment: which has to

remain our over whelming priority.

On a more positive note, we have also been thinking about what we can do to raise further income for the school and are grateful to the newly formed fundraising committee; in particular Karine (mother of Maya in Reception), who have been driving our efforts to raise more money through grants, donations etc.

### **Premises Committee**

The workload of the premises committee is driven in large part by the ongoing works and building projects. In Spring term our list of works included:

- The completion of the stabilisation work to one of our boundary walls. We are pleased to report the cost of this was carried by Camden and the work caused minimal disruption to the school
- Works to the heating/boiler house works which will be completed over Easter.
- Ongoing works to the nursery garden - this is almost complete
- Introducing more outdoor storage and a purpose built sandpit and mud kitchen to the YR outdoor area.
- Finalising plans for a new SEND / Sensory room on the top floor

The committee discussed dangerous parking near the school gates. Notes to parents in the newsletter have not stopped some parents and carers parking dangerously at pick up and drop off time. A few weeks ago there was an alarming incident when a car backed into a parent crossing with her pram. We are consulting with Camden as to what other measures can be taken. We are also consulting with Camden about the provision of additional cycle racks in the area.

The school also underwent an external Health and Safety audit. This was an extensive audit which looked at the school environment and the procedures in place. Cee and Derek worked particularly hard in responding to the audit and in maintaining very high standards in their health and safety responsibilities. We are pleased to report the school is likely to achieve an outstanding grade in the next few weeks. Many thanks to them and our health and safety governor Linda Starkey-Queen for their ongoing hard work in this area.

We are also pleased to report the school kitchen had a 5 star rating for its latest hygiene check. With thanks to Cee, Junior, Reda and the team for maintaining such high standards.

### **Governor Drop In**

The termly Governor Drop-in took place on Monday 14th March. This was arranged at short notice and with limited advertising so understandably turnout was modest. In future, dates for Governor Drop-ins will be scheduled annually so parents/carers can plan ahead. Topics raised by parents covered school lunches (suggested inadequate quantity of), Brookfield's engagement with the plans for Mansfield bowling club, Homework policy (a plea for parents to be made aware of the evidence/lack of evidence on the benefits of homework and a further plea for a more thorough parental survey of parent opinion in this area), ongoing concern at the slow pace of improvements to the Reception area playground, a request for a designated Art room in school and a question over whether the balance is right on who decides how PTA funds are spent.

Please do look out for the date of the next Drop-in which will be held this term. These meetings are a great opportunity to get things off your chest, raise constructive criticisms or offer positive suggestions - knowing that you will get a school response.

### **Finally**

We would like to thank all the staff for their continued energies and dedication. Highlights of Spring Term included World Book Day, The FAB painting project, the Junior Choir performing at the Royal Albert Hall and some great sporting successes including 90 children competing in the half marathon at Wembley Stadium. Staff have worked hard to develop the pupils as good learners and themselves as practitioners and have welcomed parents into school with PAC maths, open mornings and assemblies. For that and much more we thank them.

We also want to thank all those who volunteered their time and talents to the school this term. In particular we would like to thank the outgoing PTA chairs Anna, Becky and Karin for their amazing hard work over the last year. Through their creative and organizational talents £17,000 was raised by the PTA last year, money which will directly enrich the experience of our pupils. Just as importantly, the events they've held, have continued to foster the great sense of community we enjoy at Brookfield. We would also like to thank and welcome Sonia and Charlie as the new co-chairs of the PTA and Philip who will stay on as treasurer. We greatly appreciate them for taking up this important role in school life.

Best wishes

Governing Body  
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To find out more about the Governing Body please go to the school's website where full Governing Body minutes can be viewed. If you have any comments or suggestions we can be contacted by email at the address above or drop us a note at the office.