

## Pennoweth Chair of Governor's Blog May 2017 - Jim Seth

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**Dear Pennoweth People (Governors, parents, carers, support staff, teachers and students)**

In this month's blog I have unashamedly lifted the May editorial paragraphs from the school Newsletter and reprinted them here. Our minds are very much set on a pending OFSTED inspection and maintaining our status as a 'good' school. Those three editorials communicate to parents a number of the aspects of school like those that *governors ask* questions about and need to see what the school is doing – and whether it is effective! The newsletter itself is clearly successful in:

- Communicating every – day business such as menus and events to those at home
- Publicises and asks questions about key educational matters that underpin the success or otherwise of our school
- Celebrates the achievements of our children in a very positive way.

Into the third week of May and already much has happened this term. The SATs tests for year six have come and gone and now we await the results and see whether moderation will mitigate the badly constructed reasoning paper which left children across the country both tearful and bewildered! The governors heartily endorse the heads point of view on SATs as expressed in the newsletter at the end of SATS week. As chair of governors I would not condone the boycott of national tests by the school, but I would have every sympathy with parents who do not want to put their child through them. Internal testing is quite another matter and is an integral part of assessing progress and discovering the needs of individual children, and that is what we are about; discovering, unlocking and securing the potential of every individual in the school. (And that includes teachers and to some extent, Governors and parents!)

*Tests, Reports, School Camps and Sports; It has been a busy week and the Year 6 children have coped very well with the challenge, the stress and the experience of SATs. I really must admit that over time I have become increasingly sceptical about the whole testing system and seriously question the relevance of putting children in Primary School through these tests. Recently, I read an article based upon findings from Neil Carmichael MP who, is Head of The Education Committee for the House of Commons, where he highlighted the negative effects of assessments in Primary Schools caused by the use of results to monitor schools. The committee recognised that although it can be one way schools can measure progress and identify areas children need to improve, there is too much emphasis upon the published headline results and therefore, for schools, there is too much riding upon a 45 minute test. The Education Committee recognised that: Schools feel under considerable pressure to 'narrow the curriculum' and/or 'teach to the test' and therefore be counterproductive to providing a broad and balanced experience for our children. It seems ludicrous to put such emphasis upon snapshot tests. It seems ludicrous to give a school a score where children have been ill for part or whole of the test; where a child has not performed as well as they normally do because they have been extremely anxious or, there has been a family issue at the time of*

*the tests or, where a child has not been entered into the test when they are working below the level of the test. It seems ludicrous that teachers are not trusted to judge a child's ability accurately and in such a way that ensures children have their needs met as soon as they enter secondary school. Clearly, the population have a chance to have their say in the forthcoming General Election. Education is a key issue and I would encourage you all to find out which political party will help education progress and make your vote count!*

## Attendance Data

We are under constant pressure from OFSTED to improve attendance and to cut the number of absences whether authorised or not; here is Rob Adams' request to parents.

*Lateness and Absence I am sure you are aware that schools are monitored very closely and one of the ways that schools are judged is by their attendance figures. Ofsted and DfE expect schools to achieve an attendance figure of 95.6 and any school that falls below that figure have serious questions to answer. We have, this week collated our figures over the past 12 months and we have fallen to 94.4% and although that may seem to be a narrow gap, it represents a significant number of days missed through absence. I am at a loss about what else we can do to increase attendance. Over the past few years we have: made the curriculum more relevant and appealing, introduced more music and creative lessons, increased the number of clubs for children to attend and developed a wonderful range of sports. We have changed the culture within the school, making it a safe place to be and considerably developed our Pastoral Team who do a fantastic job at alleviating barriers for learning and attendance. In addition to this, we monitor attendance very closely. Each day we check the reasons why a child is not in school, look for patterns and make phone calls home. Where there are concerns regarding attendance, we invite parents in to Attendance Clinics to explain the reasons behind absence and we look to find ways to help children get into school. Where absence is dire, we are duty bound to inform our Education Welfare Officer and families are prosecuted and can be subject to a £2000 fine or, in extreme cases, a custodial sentence. We have also laid on a morning collection of children who may have attendance issues or are persistently late for school. This week the media have devoted 'air time' to discussion about authorised and unauthorised absence. The Governors have agreed that absence can only be authorised where there is an EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCE and all holidays are UNAUTHORISED. We are also aware of families who have not been entirely honest with the school and taken children out for periods of time telling the school that their children have been ill. In cases like this I feel that it is very unfair to put their children in the difficult position of having to 'cover up' the reality at school! At this moment in time the Governors have not implemented the law, passed through Parliament, which authorises schools to fine parents for taking their children out of school during term time. I am appealing to you all to help improve the attendance at the school and get your child into school on time.*

Recently I was passed a letter informing the school of a family taking annual holiday in term-time. I have great sympathy with parents who feel the need to take holidays during term time, and as an ex-teacher, often wished that that was an option I could have had with my young family! We as governors, however, cannot grant permission or condone such action in the current political and educational climate.

As governors we are called before OFSTED and brought to account for the level of absence both unauthorised and authorised as one of the measures against which the school is judged. As a board and as a school we have refused to go down the route of fining parents, as suggested by the government, because good community relationships are important to us. It is important that the school continues to give the message that parents should consider planning their holidays so that they do not fall foul of the law and put the school under pressure to take actions that it would not normally countenance.

## **Transition**

As an ex-teacher of year six for many years, this time of year highlights, for me, secondary school transition and the need to make sure that my class were itching to get on with the next phase of their schooling and not worrying about it. This was coupled by a tinge of excitement at the challenges coming up in the new class and trying to build relationships before they went off for the summer. As a school Pennoweth works tremendously hard at these transitions and I have spoken with several parents who have said wonderfully positive things. There follows Rob's letter to parents that outlines the strategy perfectly.

*We are moving rapidly towards the end of another year and the beginning of a new academic year in September. Therefore, I think that it is important to let you know about the support available to help children settle into their new class. For children entering into our Reception class there is a well tried and tested transition programme. Miss Tonkin will be writing to all our new children and families in the next few weeks with details of the transition programme but, in the meantime, here is an outline, Miss Tonkin will arrange appointments to visit all the pre school settings and will meet all of the children who will be coming to our school. This will be followed by an opportunity for all the children to visit their new classroom. Later this term we will invite all families to come and meet the staff as well as have a tour of the school. This is a great opportunity to ask questions and talk through individual concerns. We also like to do home visits and meet you in the comfort of your home and this is followed by a letter sent directly to your child welcoming them to the school (along with a small gift). For children currently in school and moving to a new class within the school, we organise a Transition Week where the children are taught in their new classroom, with their new teacher and alongside their new classmates. Staff at the school have been looking at potential class groupings. This process is very lengthy and involved and we consider carefully, age, ability, friendship groupings, boy/girl mix and staffing. We will inform children nearer the transition week (therefore not causing additional worries) and by observing closely during Transition Week, it is a great opportunity to see how it will work and where potential issues may arise.*

Interestingly two parents recently said to me that one of the things that impressed them most about the school was that the headteacher seemed to know their child and that child's motivation and needs. This is a key part of transition, listening to parents and balancing their desires with the needs of the school in terms of class structure to ensure good relationships, appropriate competition and aspiration and the needs of teachers!

### **Academy Status Update:**

#### **Consultation meetings with the CEOs of the Crofty Multi Academy Trust.**

The conversion from Cooperative trust school (where Governors already pay staff and are responsible for buildings etc) to Multi-Academy Trust rumbles on slowly even though during election season no decisions are made by the Commissioner's Office.

As a board we cannot afford to stand still and our strategy is to put ourselves in the best place to serve our children and the school community. The key features are:

- Joining an organisation with a joint responsibility to make sure that all its members are successful and has a collective responsibility.
- To preserve the individual nature of Pennoweth School, including the uniform but to join with like-minded schools who share our ethos.
- To be able to access rigorous, helpful, targeted support that will ensure that school improvement in all its facets continues to go forward.
- To preserve, as far as possible, our financial autonomy, together with local governance in an organisation that will enable us to make the best use of the funds available in ever more challenging political circumstances.
- To join with a local organisation as stipulated by the South West School's Commissioner

There is a process of 'due diligence' to go through with questions to be answered but the feeling amongst most governors is that the Croft Trust meets with the features outlined above. When we have the answers to our questions, such as, "what do we get for the money we pay in?" we will meet and make a final decision. Then it will be up to the commissioner to decide if the change fits her vision for the area.

#### **Recruitment and Retention of Governors. (Potential New Governor News)**

We still need to find some new governors, particularly if they have some of the skills we need. Some governors have not yet filled in the skills audit sent out by Wendy and it would be really helpful to have it, even if you bend the question sheet to be able to say what you think! It will help shape our future programme of governor training. In the meantime I have a potential new governor coming to see us on Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> June when we have our Curriculum Committee at 5pm. She is Shoni Haswell and works for the Spectrum Charity.

#### **Head & Chairs Meetings**

We try to meet for at least an hour on a weekly basis. The conversations will be wide ranging and will cover a number of topics e.g.

- Staff absence / well being/ monitoring / changes / development/ performance management

- Attendance data and the implications
- Exclusions and behaviour- strategy for deployment of TAs
- Building and groundwork project updates
- Information about and from visitors to the school
- Updating policies
- The kitchen and meals
- Any sudden events that might impact on finance
- Parents, parent visits, consultations, expectations etc
- Continuing Professional Development opportunities for all
- Academy strategy
- Special Needs and the work of the pastoral team.
- Strategy for staff returning from maternity leave.
- Latest data, lesson observations, progress

Much of these conversations is necessarily confidential but all other items come back to governors in meetings or the blog- eg attendance, transition and SATs

### **Looking Forward to the rest of this term**

It would be super to have some company when doing the story telling sessions with different classes- perhaps a good excuse to do an informal learning walk too.

### **Here's my calendar for the rest of the term:**

(Missing from this list- the date of the informal governors meetings)

Tuesday 6th June 1pm ( Lauren's class - Ks1)

Wednesday 7th June 1pm (Rebecca's class covering Sarah S)

Thursday 8th June 1pm Kate's Class (KS1)

5pm Governors curriculum committee (SEF & other important documents)

Monday 12th June 1pm Mark's class (KS2)

Tuesday 13th June 8:30 - 12 noon - Head and chairs briefing St Ives  
4pm Governors finance committee

Wednesday 14th June 1pm - Polly's class (KS2)

4pm Governors premises committee

Thursday 15th June 1pm - Rebecca's class (KS2)

Monday 19th June afternoon: St Andrews Church- Recycled Tales event as part of the arts festival in which Pennoweth Children are involved. (A good opportunity to compare behaviour / engagement of our children with other schools)

Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> June – Diocese of Truro Safeguarding Trainers meeting 11am  
Full Governing Board 6pm – 8pm

Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1pm Heather's class

Thursday July 11th 1 pm - Sarah Delaney's Class.

In addition to these days there will be interviews for new teaching staff, nursery visits and any informal monitoring visits.