

# Pennoweth Chair of Governor's Blog

## April 2017

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

**April** is a strange month in school with a chunk missing for the Easter Break but the work of the school and governors continues throughout. However on return we were soon in the thick of it with a visit from Tony Bloxom from the School Commissioners office. re the Coasting Schools Agenda, then a full governing board meeting and a myriad of questions about preparation for OFSTED, SATS and transition.

The highlight apart from my usual visits to nursery was the opportunity to help kick-start the Key Stage One Pirates Project with a story helped by their suggestions and the singing of shanties. As usual for groups of Pennoweth children, behaviour was exemplary and their enthusiasm excellent!

I heard from someone who comes into various local schools to do assemblies that behaviour at our school is the best from their point of view!

It is heartening that our Governor strategy to improve the building and surrounds, to pay TAs to support lunch time duties, forest school and investing in the pastoral team has seen so much progress in not only the behaviour and engagement of our children but also the school's standing in

the community. Wendy (the clerk) came across a number of unsolicited comments on social media that painted Pennoweth in a very favourable light!

**Academy Status** and joining a MAT. Our visitor from the commissioner indicated that we had a need to make 'rapid' progress towards joining a trust in order to secure the support and infrastructure that is waning in the local authority. As a result of the commissioner insisting we look at a 'local option' we reviewed the Redruth /Camborne school with the Rainbow trust and some Redruth Learning Group schools but this quickly stalled. Then we looked at the Crofty Trust which is a set of primary schools which includes Pencoyls, Portreath, Teloweth, Roskear, Rosemellin and Weeth, whose presentation we liked very much. There followed a comparison with our original choice TPAT and although there are many advantages to Truro and Penwith Academy Trust as governors we decided that the Crofty option was worth pursuing and that engaging in dispute with the school commissioner was not a bridge we need to cross when so many other priorities need to be juggled.

With this blog I have attached the '**Improving Governance**' questionnaire in Word and PDF format and it would be helpful if Governors could fill this in and return it to Wendy, our clerk. For other reading the blog and the questionnaire it gives a snapshot of the skills and knowledge volunteer governors are *supposed* to have to carry out their tasks. If you would like to do something really worthwhile and be a governor, don't let it put you off!

Having a personal history of teaching in year 5/6 for many years I am acutely aware of the pressures of the summer term with the test preparation and waiting for the results that seem to be the key judge of our year no matter how much anyone says that there are more important factors! In that spirit I attach **my letter to teaching staff, on behalf of the governors.**

*Dear all,*

*The Summer term and the joys of tests, assessments and end of year reports is with us. As a governing board we really do appreciate your incredible work and dedication, even when we ask really difficult questions, and we are well aware of the stresses and strains of the profession.*

*I have already told a few people that on the night before this Term began I awoke at 3:30 in a cold sweat after a dream in which I realised I had not taught any decimals all year and it was three weeks before SATs. As I retired from 3 decades of teaching year 5/6 in 2009 it just goes to show how deeply ingrained in our psyche the job becomes! I do my best each year to release as many of you as I can for a few hours to do reports, or whatever you need to do most by taking your classes and doing music and storytelling and I intend to do it again this year. (Apologies to nursery – I won't offer the same to you because I come in so regularly and I will endeavour to keep my Thursday mornings!)*

*So if you would like me to do a two hour session with your class please send me a date and an alternative – first requests will take precedence!*

*When I do the sessions it is particularly helpful to have another adult in the room who knows the expected behaviour of class- though I realise that TA time is rather sparse in KS2 in the afternoons.*

*On another matter I would like you to think about the governing body.*

*Your staff governor is Julie Andrew who does a really fantastic job and represents you all... but mostly the TAs.*

*Hannah, who was a co-opted governor stood down due to added parenthood responsibilities after working very hard for us for a number of years so it would be fantastic if we could co-opt another member of the teaching staff.*

*Responsibilities and commitment:*

- *Two full governor meetings a term 6pm – 8pm (we are always prompt!!)*
- *A couple of curriculum committees 5-6pm.*
- *Other committees are appointed as best suits the interests and skills of the governors.*
- *Some induction training*

*The big issues affecting us at the moment include OFSTED preparation, the coasting schools agenda and the knotty problem of joining a multi academy trust as well as how we spend money on the premises, sort out salaries, support staff wellbeing etc etc!*

*So let me know of interest in either issue and if you want a deeper conversation about the governors before committing yourself just grab me for a chat.*

## **Recruitment and Retention of Governors.**

Underlining the pressures of a voluntary job like being a Governor, we have lost a number of governors in the last few months due to pressure of work, or family commitments but we are grateful to Alexia Hallgate, Alex Stainer, Emily Birch, Robert Tonkin and Hannah Crewdson for the service and wisdom they all brought to the board.

Most governing boards have a changing membership and most have a vacancy or two and I think there has only ever been one period of a couple of months when we had a full complement in my time as chair.

We do need to look out for potential members of the board who have relevant skills- just being willing and enthusiastic these days is not enough although that does help a great deal. The audit of skills will help identify the profile of the people we need to add to the team.

## **Meetings**

**The finance committee** met and as usual I was very grateful to my colleagues who speak fluent spreadsheet and are able to ask the tricky questions based on the figures. The head, bursar and school secretary are under a good deal of pressure until the budget is finally approved and it is a

big juggling act each year so my thanks to them too! As a topic school finance statistics holds little interest for me and I was glad to give it up when I retired however as a governor the way it impacts upon learning is key.

## **Full Governing Board**

A good couple of hours of robust conversation and a really helpful and clear head's report which got our questioning going! Personally I am pleased that the board gave a unanimous go ahead to carry on looking at the Croft Trust helping us to keep on track for a reasonably fast conversion.

Staff wellbeing was an important topic that we will keep on all future agenda along with safeguarding and other regular items. As a school our policies on this are very supportive in allowing time for funerals, access to counselling, allowing time for parent teachers to visit their child's school events, help with return to work after illness etc. However we are not complacent about this and are determined to give a ready listening ear to the needs of our tremendous staff.

One of our major decisions as a board was to provide an extra teacher in the mornings to reduce class sizes and to enable better ability grouping which has proved very successful. In upper key stage two our other decision to fund teacher or specialist interventions in the afternoon has had a marked effect and shows the benefits of the wise spending of pupil premium money. Hopefully this good practice can be rolled out in lower key stage two as well if the budget allows. I have coupled this with staff well being because one of the factors which decreases the effectiveness of interventions for our needy children is staff absence and we need to keep an eye on how this affects learning and consider strategies for ameliorating the consequences.

## **Data meeting- with Jason Hurr and Key Subject leads.**

I have appended my notes for this hugely informative meeting below because it shows governor questioning and just how hard the school is working to use data to inform practice to do the best for Pennoweth Children. Thanks to all who attended!

**Friday 21st April 2017 - Governors meeting with Jason Hurr to look at assessment, tracking and data. 9:00 onwards**

Present: Jason Hurr,

(Staff) Danni Fogg & Claire Hitchens-Todd (English & Maths Subject Leaders)

Governors: Jim, Deborah, Karen

This was a very useful and productive session in which Jason showed us the school tracking data in some detail and explained the assessment arrangements. The two members of staff were on hand to answer governor questions about practice, staffing and materials used.

Governors asked (GA)

GA: What are the main issues in tracking progress?

Issues around accuracy of assessment at the end of year although this is not so bad in Y2 & Y6 where it is more ingrained in teacher's way of thinking.

GA How do you ensure consistent recording of levels / standards?

Children have to meet all the statements to meet the criteria e.g. making expected progress etc in maths and English.

GA What assessment material do you use? Rising Stars?

Rising Stars used to be used but it no longer reflects the SATS paper so other materials are used including ABACUS

GA does Rising Stars cover the curriculum?

No-

GA What about ABACUS? Does it correlate with Jason's system?

yes with Mappix assessment

GA Do you use it?

yes!

GA Is setting the flight path for children at 6 points progress enough?

No.

There was a discussion around this which will be followed up at other meetings about how a more rigorous target might be set... eventually. Governor mentioned the need to correlate this with the report from the School Commissioner's representative looking at Coasting Schools agenda in the school from the previous day.

JH emphasised the need for staff to get to grips with assessing whether children were "on course" for an end of year target.... rather than actually at it.

GA How do you moderate?

with teams within the school, pupil progress meetings and externally through the Redruth Learning Group meetings.

DF said there was a need to moderate across phases as well as in phases to ensure consistency.

GA when was the Last Local Authority moderation?

not for some time, but likely this year because of having two NQTs in Y6.

GA are the NQT assessments secure?

yes- all checked by team leader Helen Gaskin

The next discussion was about how the tracking information was used and how it was disseminated to staff and about the problems caused by staff (teachers and TAs) absence

GA Do Teaching Assistants know how valuable they are? Do they feel valued? How do you know?

GA Do TAs have ingrained the feeling "if I don't go to school then vital interventions will not happen?"

there had been much completely unavoidable illness during the year including accidents, surgery and maternity leave. Staff had been told of the importance of regular attendance.

GA Do you keep a context folder for each class?

not as such - the teachers use a Venn diagram to show where children are in terms of pupil premium, vulnerability etc.

GA would a context folder be useful as it would show an inspector at a glance other aspects such as inward mobility in the year. ( A good place to see this in action is St Meriadoc Junior who are pleased with the system)

GA if more than six points progress is needed how might this be accomplished?

- Spreading the load across the school not just Y6
- precise / surgical interventions (evidence of success in upper KS2 where afternoon interventions sort out issues raised in the morning)
- Good staff delivering interventions
- Better mapping of children eg what happens to those in foundation with a good level of development or what happens to the phonics test failures?
- pitching expectations higher
- moving from compliant learners to proactive learners.

GA do you have class learning forums

DF did and was keen to point out the benefits.

At this point JS left the meeting (so no more notes ) to lead a Pirates story and music session with KS1.

## **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 when I know I will be in school:**

(Missing from this list- the date of the informal governors meeting and any curriculum meetings)

Wednesday 3rd May 1pm - Danni's Class (KS2)

Thursday 4th May - 1pm - Fiona's class (Foundation)

Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> May 1 pm Claire's class (KS1)

Thursday 11th May - Lara's class (Ks1)

Tuesday 16th May 4pm Finance Meeting

Thursday 25th May 1pm Heather's class

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

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

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

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

Tuesday 13th June 8:30 - 12 noon - Head and chairs briefing St Ives

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

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)

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

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