



Teaching and learning

Q. The Ofsted inspection highlighted disadvantaged, most able and children with SEND, but it also pointed out that progress across the school for all students was not good enough. Will the school be keeping an eye on children who aren't in any of the three special focus groups? How will we improve progress across the board?

A. Yes, teachers are determined to improve progress for all our students and those who do not fall into one of the three groups identified will still receive their full attention. The evidence shows that raising standards for children at both ends of the learning spectrum inevitably raises standards for all. But there will not be a focus on certain children at the expense of others.

The Senior Leadership Team is drawing up a new 'Teaching and Learning' policy to help address some of the inconsistencies in teaching identified by the Ofsted inspectors. This will help give our teachers a clear benchmark for the expected standard of teaching.

New lesson observations are being carried out, as well as 'book looks' (a check of books throughout the year to check progress is being made, marking is consistent and the same learning is happening across the year group). These will allow us to identify best practice, as well as teachers who may need extra support in certain areas.

Q. What is the timeline for the action plan?

A. The school began work on addressing Ofsted's concerns the day after they left the building.

The acting headteachers and the chair and vice-chair of governors had their first School Improvement Board meeting with the local authority in December and the next is January 25. These meetings are for the local authority to hold the school to account. The Senior Leadership Team are also reporting monthly/ every six weeks to the Governors.

Many changes have already been made in the classrooms and children should be experiencing a shift in teaching already.

Ofsted will return within one year of the inspection to check that changes are being made (the school anticipates this will probably be around October time) and there will be another full inspection within 30 months. However, the school hopes to be able to prove it has addressed all Ofsted's concerns before that time. If the SLT and governors are confident these improvements can be demonstrated both quantitatively and qualitatively, we can invite the inspectors back earlier.

Q. Will all children eventually have an individual provision map (IPM)?

A. All the children at Balfour already have individual targets for their learning in maths, writing and reading which they will be aware of through feedback from their teachers. The IPMs are used for children who have specific educational needs or are currently working below expectations for their age group.

Q. Is the school considering the extra pressure children may feel if expectations of their academic performance is ramped up? How is the wellbeing of teachers being supported at this time?



A. The Senior Leadership Team are conscious that children pick up on changes and can worry about new expectations. Class teachers are making sure that any new changes are explained to the children and are being careful not to introduce anxiety into learning. Teachers have rallied since the inspection and have been offering their support to the Senior Leadership Team and each other. In addition to pre-existing staff welfare programmes, a couple of teachers have offered their services as a sounding board for any teacher who is uncertain or concerned about their work. There is also a telephone counselling service for staff called Carefirst.

Q. Has the school considered bringing in 'signing' in every classroom to help children who cannot express themselves vocally express themselves via signs?

A. Teachers who have children in their classes who express themselves via signing have been trained in this technique. It is possible this could be rolled out across the school in time.

Q. Can we have some workshops for parents to help children with their homework? Teaching techniques and the curriculum has changed so much it is often hard to help without introducing confusion.

A. The school already offers workshops with parents throughout KS1. It is certainly possible they could be offered to KS2 parents. There is a link to home learning websites on the school website (under: Helpful Curriculum Information for Parents) as well as the children's TED talks on maths techniques. However, the school is actively considering how to improve engagement with parents throughout each academic year to support their understanding of the educational expectations of their child and how they can best support their child's learning.

Q. We have always, prior to Ofsted, heard that the answer to everything is JONK. Have we now heard the last of JONK?

A. No, JONK is still very much part of the school's philosophy. What the Ofsted Inspection exposed was a lack of clarity throughout the school as to how the JONK philosophy should be appropriately applied in each year group enabling consistency of good quality teaching and learning. As a consequence the school is recalibrating the emphasis solely on what JONK stands for to one that applies the principles of JONK to best practice in teaching and learning. This will be achieved through the new Teaching and Learning Policy that is currently being consulted on with staff and pupils. A hold has been put on any extension to JONK, such as the proposed 'pedagogy', while the school works on addressing the issues raised by Ofsted.

Q. As a 'Requires Improvement' school, will Balfour be given extra funding by the government or local authority?

A. The local authority will fund the cost of the Pupil Premium review, the cost of advisory support in reviewing the school's SEND provision and increased additional external school improvement support. The financial total of this support is likely to be around £5,000.



However, the Local Authority is supporting the school through access to networks, advice, information, best practice and buddying arrangements with outstanding schools that do not incur additional financial expense.

We have many very experienced and talented teachers in our school and we will be drawing on this expertise to help improve standards across the board.

'Most able' provision

Q. Why didn't the school already have a 'most able' policy?

A. It is not compulsory for a school to have a 'most able' policy and historically Balfour has not had one. However, it is now recognised that a clear policy would help teachers to understand how best to stretch our 'most able' students and a policy is currently being drafted by the Senior Leadership Team, in consultation with class teachers. It is hoped it will be approved at the next Full Governing Body meeting. A governor has agreed to be the link governor with responsibility for the 'most able'.

Q. How many 'most able' kids are there and how will you know if the strategy to address their needs is working? Is it too late to categorise them as 'most able' at the end of the year? Are you picking them up quickly enough?

A. There are about 300 children in the school who are classified 'most able' in either maths or English (or both). These are children who have finished reception or KS1 at above age-related expectations (Government-set criteria for 'most able').

However, this is just one of a number of criteria the school uses to identify our 'most able' children. For instance, if a child in KS2 had not reached 'most able' levels at the end of KS1 but reached above age related expectations at the end of year 3, 4, or 5, they would always be expected to maintain this level at the end of the following school year.

Our approach is therefore flexible. Every child's progress is measured half-termly and class teachers meet with year leaders to discuss this. This means that if a child suddenly develops a deeper understanding of a subject, this is picked up before the end of the year and noted so that the appropriate challenge can be added. (Similarly, if a child is not making expected progress at the end of each half term, it is also noted and addressed).

This data will also help show us if our 'most able' students are responding to new initiatives.

Q. When will the most able workshops take place?

A. We intend to hold them after the Spring half term. We are trying to schedule them at a time suitable for teachers and parents.

Communication between school and parents

Q. Several parents asked about the handwriting policy letter sent to KS2 parents. They expressed concern about the tone of the letter and the suggestion that children would lose playtime to redo handwriting work or spellings.



A. The letter had been intended to keep parents fully informed of changes that were taking place in the classroom and there had never been any intention to cause any child or parent anxiety. However, it evidently had caused parents concern and the Senior Leadership Team apologised for this.

They explained that on the day the letter was issued, the children had also been talked to by their class teachers about what the new expectations were. They had made clear that playtime would only be lost in exceptional circumstances.

Parents were assured that this is not a uniform policy for all children and is to be used when and if the class teachers think it would be useful for the child. Teachers know their children's abilities extremely well and know what they can expect of them. A child with dyslexia, for example, would never be kept in from playtime to redo a spelling test. Parent feedback about this letter has been very insightful. In the future the school will try to include clarification of how a new initiative has been introduced to children by the classroom teacher in parent letters to aide parental understanding of what has been communicated directly to the children.

Q. How does the school plan to communicate with parents outside of parent-teacher meetings, which are too short and too spaced out? Parents are one of a child's greatest educational resources but if a parent doesn't know how their child is doing academically in school, it is hard to support appropriately at home. Other suggestions included parent meetings at the start of each term to explain teaching goals and information to parents on children's progress before parent meetings to use as a starting point for discussion.

A. The matter of communication between school and parents has been under consideration by the Senior Leadership Team and governors since the start of this academic year. Parent Forums have historically been poorly attended and with such a large school community, it is difficult to find a line of communication that suits everyone. The school hopes to reestablish and reinvigorate parent forum meetings with a view to running them at different times during the school day/evening to enable as many parents as possible to attend, create agendas based on the issues that parents would welcome input on and potentially set up working parties on areas such as communication, transition, reporting pupil progress and attainment and homework.

All progress on the school Ofsted Action Plan will be included in the fortnightly newsletter which is also available on the website. Policies and examples of school teaching techniques (for example, the maths mini-Ted videos) are also online.

The school wants to hear more from parents about how best to communicate with them (is it by letter, email, text message, meetings?). The intention is to improve communication and to continue the conversation with parents. (Please let the school know your ideas, contact details are at the end of this document).

It is evident from the parent forum meetings that many parents are unclear on how pupil progress and attainment is measured and how this relates to their child. As a response to feedback following the parent forum meetings last week, the school now plan to hold specific year group meetings at the beginning of each academic year to explain expectations to parents around children's learning which will include how we measure progress. In addition to this the school will also publish on the website expectations for each year group for reading, writing and maths. This will enable parents to have a better understanding of the skills required to reach age related expectations or greater depth.



The school reporting system is also due to be reviewed. Twice-yearly reports or a more concise end-of-year report are both under consideration.

Parents can always ask to speak to their child's class teacher if they have any concerns.

Q. The school has a history of strong dogma. Will it now listen to parents if they are uneasy or dislike that dogma? How?

A. See above answer. These Parent Forums are the start, not the end, of our communication with parents. By coming to these events, parents can make their feelings known. The Senior Leadership Team and Governors believe the school must work collectively and can only be as good as the sum of its parts - this means including the views of all parents and children.

Q. How are you going to make use of parents? Many have teaching or other expertise that they would gladly offer.

A. There is a parent skills audit on the school website and parents are encouraged to fill this in. The school's business manager is reviewing the audit and will approach parents with particular skillsets to join working parties on the areas identified for improvement. An example is a parent who has organised exhibitions in New York coming in to talk to Year 5 students on the links between science and art.

Other questions

Q. Had the SLT/FGB ever challenged the HT on the shortcomings identified by Ofsted?

A. The composition of the current Full Governing Body (FGB) has been in role since September 2017 with newly allocated lead responsibility for statutory requirements, these include Pupil Premium Strategy, Health and Safety, Safeguarding, Finance and SEND as well as matters of good governance such as interpretation of data and information. In this time the FGB have received training from the National College of School Leadership and the Local Authority pertaining to each area of individual and corporate responsibility. As a consequence the level of and approach to scrutiny applied to the school has changed significantly. For example, the week prior to the Ofsted Inspection, the new lead governor for SEND conducted their first assurance visit. The areas that he identified for improvement matched those that Ofsted identified the following week. Governors were able to demonstrate this to the Ofsted Inspector with evidence.

However, owning the deficiencies identified by Ofsted and remedying them is the responsibility of all of us - Governors, Senior Leader Team, Local Authority, school staff, and the community within which we work and serve. As a state school, there is no single owner of the provision but a team of professionals and accountable officers who are the guardians of the taxpayer investment in the future educational and learning opportunities for our children. It is within this context that we are building a positive Ofsted Action Plan and revised School Development Plan.

Q. Some parents feel uncertain and unsure because they do not know when the headteacher will be returning and who is in charge. Can you reassure us?



A. Mr Staricoff is currently absent from work for personal reasons, in his absence Ms Loader and Ms Mulholland are Joint Acting Headteacher. Their photographs are on the school website and are in the newsletter. Ms Loader is Acting Headteacher Monday and Tuesday and Ms Mulholland Thursday and Friday. They share the responsibility on Wednesdays and Ms Mulholland is on site Monday to Friday. They are both making themselves available at drop off in the mornings and pick up in the afternoon but please remember there are multiple entrances to the school so if you can't find them at your usual entrance, please do check the others.

PLEASE EMAIL ANY UNANSWERED QUESTIONS TO office@balfour.brighton-hove.sch.uk OR SEND LETTERS IN TO RECEPTION OR VIA YOUR CHILD ADDRESSED TO MS MULHOLLAND AND MS LOADER.