

Parent Forum Meeting (Summer Term)
26 June 2020 at 2pm via Zoom

In attendance: Lynne Osborne (Head Teacher); Emily Turnbull (Chair/parent governor); Bryony Clark (Nursery); Zoe Greenall (Reception); Karol Freeman and Jo Loch (Year 1); Alison Cheshire (Year 2); Kirsty MacDonald (Year 4); Sarah Jones (Year 5); Hannah Horton (Year 6)

Absent: Heidi Bolwell (Year 3)

Apologies: Julie Allen (Year 4) and Louise Cooley (Year 6)

There have been many positive comments and thank yous sent by parents to the Parent Forum email address setting out their appreciation to the staff of St Mary's for all they have done during these difficult few months. Mrs Osborne was very touched and will ensure that staff see the comments.

Mrs Osborne also said a very big thanks to the Class Reps who have done such a fantastic job of sending out the home learning and for liaising with the teachers.

Actions from the last meeting

1. The opening time for booking parents evening appointments will be changed before the autumn parents evening in October moving away from weekend evenings to a different time TBC.
2. Morning lining up procedures will be different in September but what this looks like will be determined largely by social distancing requirements and government guidance. Years 3-6 will line up in the lower playground and Years 1-2 on the upper playground.
3. Used uniform items can be purchased from the School Association via the [PTA events website](#). It works like "Click and collect". People can browse and order available items from the PTA events website. Once the funds have cleared in the School Association bank account, the uniform will be put into a box which is outside the school office, labelled, ready for collection. Parents will be notified when items are ready for collection. Used uniform items can also be dropped in the box.
4. The school will aim to support no more than 6 charities/charitable events per year, with input from Mrs Bates and the School Council.
5. School dinners will be cake free from September, with the exception of Fridays.
6. LO looked at using text messaging for school communications but it's too expensive. LO plans to start using Twitter and the new school website to deliver more school communications and to reduce the volume of emails.
7. The Parent Forum email address has been set up and parents are invited to send comments or suggestions to the mailbox. These will be logged and taken forward either at the next meeting or separately, depending on the topics to be discussed at the next meeting.
8. LO intends to hold a parents coffee morning once every half term from September.
9. The school's behaviour policy has been amended, following its review and consultation. The revised version will be available on the school website within the next few weeks.

Return to school before summer

At the date of the meeting, children from Reception, Year 1 and 6 (the government's priority groups) were back in school, along with key worker children. LO said that under the current guidelines, the school has neither the space nor the staff to create further bubbles for other year groups to return. When questioned on part time hours and the arrangements made by other schools, LO said that staff are not supposed to switch between bubbles under current guidance which makes it difficult, even if the school had more space. Unfortunately, the current guidance states that the school is not allowed to use non school spaces such as Parish Rooms or Baptist Church spaces which had been suggested/offered. LO said it was a very difficult decision-making process with many logistics to take into account. There was feedback that some parents felt they were not aware of the reasons that certain decisions have been made. LO suggested she make a video for parents to help address this, which was welcomed by all the reps.

Hannah Horton (Year 6 rep) said she was very grateful for the Year 6 return as it is very important for these pupils to have a sense of closure from primary school before they enter secondary school.

“Farewell Days”

“Farewell” days have been organised for Years 2 to 5, and for those children in Year 1 who have not returned to school. Sarah Jones (Year 5 rep) said thanks to the staff for making it possible for the remaining year groups to be able to spend a day in school Jo Loch (Year 1 rep) said thanks for the Year 1 Farewell Day, which Mrs Stewart has organised. Following a suggestion from Karol Freeman (Year 1 rep), LO will ask Mrs Taylor to make a welcome video for the Year 3s who are coming in for their farewell day next week.

Online Learning

Some of the older year groups have recently had Zoom calls with their teachers. LO said that the reason the school did not organise these earlier was due to guidance which suggested that Zoom was not safe to use in this context. However, that guidance has now changed. There was discussion about Google classrooms. LO said that there will be training on this and it's something the school is planning to use for Year 5 and 6 from September.

September return

LO said she is planning on the basis of all year groups being back in school in September. The focus in the first few weeks will be on wellbeing and transition activities. LO confirmed that as a church school it was important that assemblies for collective worship were kept as these provide

learning opportunities in themselves. There is the possibility of using booster groups to help with catch up. LO believes that children will catch up quickly once able to settle back into school.

One parent had asked for learning summaries for each class to understand what had been looked at in a given week/period. LO indicated this could be available at the start of each term on the class page of the school website.

Transition to new year groups

All children have been offered to meet their new teacher the week commencing 13 July. These transition sessions will be 2.5 hours long and be offered in bubble groups. For example, the new year 1 children will be offered 08:50 - 11:20 - Group A and 12:50 -15:20 - Group B. Children will not need a packed lunch/school dinner as they will only be attending for half a day.

LO said that she was surprised by some of the reactions to the announcement about moving teachers to different year groups. She explained that there are development opportunities for teachers when they move year groups and there is more creativity to the topics taught when teachers are moved regularly. The only teachers not to be moved this year are those in the Early Years, as these are very specialist skills.

The Year 5 and Reception buddy system will be continued in September and the idea will be for Year 5 to write letters to their new buddies so they can start the school year with those connections already made.

School reports are being written at the moment and will cover the period up to 23 March. The aim is for reports to go out on 10th July. Once received, there will be an opportunity for parents to speak to teachers by email or phone about the reports if needed.

There was some discussion about the timing of parents evening and whether it should be brought forward. LO said she would consider bringing them forward by a week or so, but holding them much earlier is not feasible.

Sarah Jones asked about the “Getting Ready” leaflets which are usually available at the summer exhibition and whether these could be useful for parents and children to help them prepare for the next year.

Wellbeing

LO said that staff wellbeing is a priority and that there will be a staff wellbeing day every half term. Mrs O'Dell is the school's wellbeing lead and she can be contacted via email (wellbeing@stmarys916.herts.sch.uk) on wellbeing matters.

LO welcomed the suggestions made by the Year 6 parents for wellbeing initiatives which could be implemented in the classrooms. In response to the question about Kathy Weston videos, Emily will look on her website to see if there are resources that can be shared.

LO outlined her plans for incorporating diversity and equality "All the same, all different" as topics to be built into the school life, rather than having a Diversity Week. She is keen to get a diverse range of speakers to the school to help achieve this.

In response to the question about library books, the school acknowledges that the books in the library are not as diverse as they could be. Mrs Zimet has come up with a list of books to add to the library to address this. LO said books are expensive so funding is an issue. Emily suggested that instead of sweets/treats for a child's birthday, the parents could buy a book for the school from a published list to help the school increase its library collection.

Community Involvement

There were some good suggestions about liaising more with Sunnyside Rural Trust to work with the school. It could provide a learning opportunity visiting the Trust's site (further New Road) in return for them being a charity that the school supports. The Trust also supports people with learning difficulties so this ties with the school's objectives on diversity and inclusion.

In response to the suggestion about having growing and allotment facilities as part of the new community garden design, this needs to be assessed as part of the overall planning for the use of this space.

Mrs Stewart asked for parent volunteers to help with Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 lunchtime visits to the school allotment. They go in small groups of 6-8 and each group goes once every few weeks.

Website

The School is currently having a new website designed. It will have a new, easier to use layout and will be more modern looking. Alison Cheshire asked if it could link to the School Association website and calendar. Emily and Alison will discuss separately and take forward.

AOB

In response to a comment requesting, more clubs and activities, LO said clubs and activities will be dependent on Government guidelines. Also no member of teaching staff has to do a club but most volunteer. LO will ask children what they'd like to have as clubs. If more parents volunteer to run clubs - like the running club - the school can offer more clubs.

Thank you and farewell to Louise Cooley and Hannah Horton, the year 6 reps, for their contribution to the parent forum. We wish you and your families all the best as you move on from St Mary's.

Actions

1. LO to make a video for parents about return to school and transitional arrangements (LO) (completed)
2. Mrs Taylor to make a video for Year 3 about logistics of Year 3 Farewell Day (completed)
3. Weekly learning summaries to be included on class website pages at the start of each term (LO & ET)
4. Bring date of autumn parent evenings forward by 1 week (LO)
5. Ensure "Getting Ready for Year x" Leaflets are on the relevant class pages on the website (LO)
6. Check Kathy Weston website for shareable video resources (ET)
7. Put on new school website a list of new library books that can be purchased by parents as a birthday gift from their child to the school (in lieu of giving out sweets) (ET)
8. Ask Class Reps for next year's Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 classes to ask for parent volunteers for school allotment visits (Bryony, Zoe, Karol/Jo)
9. Discuss and explore options for bringing School Association payments/booking system and calendar onto new school website (ET and Alison)
10. Ensure up to date list of school clubs is on the new school website (ET); ask children which additional clubs they'd like to have (LO)

Date of next meeting: TBC

Parent Comments and Questions

Return to school

Please pass on our appreciation to Mrs Bates for her videos and communication via Tapestry. It has been appreciated by the parents and has definitely helped the children with the transitions of joining her class in September. I feel I have been kept completely up to date with everything (N).

I would appreciate any opportunity for children to go back to school before the end of term, even if just a day or half day. (Y4)

Is the school making contingency plans in the event that things are not back to normal in September? Can the school look at using an online school system like google classroom to access? Especially if the situation is going to continue.(Y4)

Many Year 4 parents have expressed concern that their children will not be going back to school before the end of term. Can more days be offered to children not currently at school yrs 2- 5 as other schools have done, on a part-time basis ? Possibly by reducing hours / days of current pupils to accommodate all the children. There is lots of concern over wellbeing and children upset at not being able to return before the end of term and also worry that it is too long if things are not more back to normal by September. (Y4)

Has the school considered all options to allow more year groups a return to school? The Parish Room and church could be used? Westfield have also offered a split week option for all years and it seems a shame that our children aren't being offered this too. If nothing else for their mental well-being and the ability to see their friends (Y5)

For year 5 and 6, the impact of Corona will be widely felt. How will any gaps in education be accounted for? Can we remove homework club and have a twice-weekly catch-up club for example at school? Or limit assembly time to focus on learning? Playtime opportunities will be essential so would not want those removed but wondered if there are any creative ways we can consolidate learning but also, not miss out on vital year 6 work in preparation for secondary school. I think this is most important over community involvement just now. The school has enough to do getting our children back (I think we can assume social distancing will be dropped by September to make it work), and getting them up to a standard that will get them ready for Ashlyns. That is the best wellbeing gift they could probably have. (Y5)

Transition to new Year Groups

Will the buddy system still be operational? It's such a valued part of entering into school life for Reception children and the buddies. (N)

Today's Zoom call hosted by Mrs Zimet, for the year 2 class was brilliant. Quite emotional and hugely appreciated by the children and parents. Why could a weekly Zoom call not have been put in place weeks ago? I did suggest it early in lockdown to Mrs Zimet but It wasn't taken up (Y2)

Also on the Lockdown theme, what will a catch up plan look like? There was already a huge range of abilities across the class which would've been exasperated in lockdown as some children have done lots more work than others. (Y2)

Regarding transition into year 5, will the children (or parents!) be given details of any topics, subjects etc that the children need to be aware of to work on before they enter year 5? (Y4)

Would it be possible for year 4 children to have a recorded video message or a fun zoom meeting (maybe with a game included) with the year 5 teacher? So they become familiar with her and do not become anxious on returning in September? (Y4)

Could the school hold a class zoom session (or similar) with their current teacher (and ideally new teacher) before the end of term? The teacher can control it so that all the kids are muted automatically (to avoid a free-for-all) but I think it would be nice for them to see each other (Y4)

Can we look at having a parents type evening? Maybe online or emailed or by phone before transition to year 5? (Y4)

Wellbeing

I'd like to say how much we appreciate everything that the school is doing for our children right now. My child went back into Year 6 this week and felt very cared for and safe (Y6).

Daily gratitude cards for children - perhaps the school could invest in some to help the children identify things they can be grateful for? Or the children could design them? (Y6)

Initiate a daily routine in class - ask the children to share something they are grateful for. (Y6)

"Paying it forward" can make a difference to other people and give yourself a feeling of satisfaction and wellness. Create some ideas for children or the school as a whole to do something to pay positivity forward (Y6)

As parents/carers, how can we identify the needs of those around us and how can we best offer support? (Y6)

Are there any recorded videos (on the Kathy Weston website) on wellbeing topics to share with pupils or parents and carers? (Y6)

Community involvement

Front garden - could this include veg patches for children to work on? Could we team up with local nurseries/gardeners and sell produce at church/school events?

Could we have more use of outdoors including outside lessons and exploring our local community area including regularly into learning?

Could the school run any sessions outside? Could the school borrow/hire a gazebo?

More use of school allotment and maybe a visit to Sunnyside Rural Trust as they now have some animals and local produce to look at

Other comments

In light of Black Lives Matter, does the school have a range of diverse books in the library? (N)

I would welcome the opportunity if, post lockdown, we could continue to receive a brief weekly breakdown of the learning objectives the children are learning in school, particularly in English and maths. It could accompany the curriculum letters at the start of term, for example? (Y3 and 6)