

Parent Forum Meeting (Autumn Term)
Friday 13 November at 2pm (via Zoom)

In attendance: Lynne Osbourne (Head Teacher); Emily Turnbull (Parent Governor and Chair); Bryony Clark (Reception); Zoe Greenall (Year 1); Jo Loch (Year 2); Alison Cheshire (Year 3); Heidi Bolwell and Karol Freeman (Year 4); Rachel Gribben (Year 5); Sarah Jones (Year 6)

Apologies: Lisa Robinson (Year 5) and Claire Simpson (Year 6)

Actions from the last meeting

1. Classes are currently unable to visit the school allotment due to Covid, but the hope is that these visits can resume in the spring. LO confirmed that the school will retain its allotment January. When visits do resume, parent volunteers will be needed for Reception to Year 2.
2. In relation to the request that weekly learning summaries are included on the class pages on the school website, LO said it was too much to ask of teachers at this stage. She will discuss with the teachers at the start of next term.
3. ET reported that it would be too expensive to build into the school website the functions of the School Association website (currently through the PTA Events website) as it would require bespoke software to be created. AC has editing access to the School Association Page but needs training on how to use the content management system.
4. LO apologised that the online booking system for parent consultations wasn't available last term this was because the consultations were on several different days and the system is unable to cope with this type of arrangement. She hopes that it will be available for the next parent consultations in the event that these have to be done by phone again.
5. ET reported that there don't appear to be any free video resources on the Kathy Weston website but there is a podcast covering many different parenting topics. See <https://www.drkathyweston.com/podcast>
6. LO said that clubs are heavily impacted by COVID due to the need to keep bubbles separate. It's not possible to have outside providers come into the school at the moment but the one exception she's been able to make is for football as childcare provision. All clubs are listed on the school website.

All the positive comments sent by parents were noted and appreciated.

Preparedness for local closure or bubble isolation

LO gave an overview of the plans for remote learning in the event of closure or bubble isolation.

For Nursery and Reception, this would be delivered mainly through Tapestry. For Years 1 to 6, the plan is to use Google Classrooms to set work and for pupils to send work back for marking. All remote learning would be set on the class pages of the school website.

The format would be similar to the remote learning provided during the previous lockdown in that there would normally be one maths, one English and one other subject learning task each day. Worksheets can be provided as alternatives to some lessons, which parents have said they struggled to get their children to do in the earlier lockdown. Due to safeguarding, it's not possible to do live teaching although there may be some pre-recorded video lessons.

LO said she was aware of 2 families in the school who did not have access to tablets or laptops. She has asked parents via a newsletter to let the school know if they don't have access to IT or wifi. The Department of Education will provide 1 free laptop for the school to allocate to a vulnerable family. KF said she has some devices that could be used by families if needed and LO agreed to investigate the feasibility of this suggestion with the Computing Lead.

RG asked if there could be Zoom sessions again in the event of a prolonged lockdown or closure. LO agreed that the Zoom sessions were a really positive way for pupils and teachers to keep in touch but they can only be done by staff who are present in school. The intention would be to offer a Zoom well-being session per week for any class self-isolating although this may not be the class teacher hosting.

If an individual child has to isolate, there is two weeks' remote learning on the school website and the class teacher can send work via email.

LO will ask staff about Purple Mash and whether it's possible to set tasks before earning time to play with avatars. (Post meeting note: LO checked this and nobody knew about this function).

Wellbeing and mental health

In response to the suggestion that flushable wipes be available for children in Reception, LO said they are expensive and not environmentally friendly.

In relation to outdoor play, LO explained how KS1 and KS2 bubbles are kept separate at lunchtime. Forest School is not suitable for lunchtime play as it disturbs the wildlife and the Forest School is an outdoor learning environment rather than a play area.

There is no room for outdoor table tennis tables but LO would welcome suggestions for outdoor games involving smaller areas and pieces of equipment. It was noted that the children have been enjoying playing basketball.

The field is very muddy and children would need a change of shoes/wellies. However the current lunchtime timings are so tight, they would lose playtime if they were having to change their footwear before and after going out to play. LO said there are also staffing ratios to consider but she will speak to staff members about this.

LO said that currently the field is used for football and touch rugby as part of PE.

Miss Gill is delivering all the PE curriculum, with Mrs Christie as the overall PE lead. The PE curriculum encompasses a wide range of activities including dance, gymnastics, athletics and tag rugby.

It is hoped that Year 4 can resume their swimming in January. The target is to be able to swim 25m at the end of KS2 and this something that will have to be carefully considered as future swimming sessions are planned, especially if swimming lessons cannot commence in January.

LO confirmed that every class goes out each day for a run around the playground or p.e. activity within class. In addition, each class 15-minute wellbeing break before lunch where they do some mindfulness or a quiet activity.

LO set out the 'Bridging the Gap' agenda, which meant for the first term staff focused on looking at what children have missed during lockdown. LO feels that parents who are concerned that their children are not being sufficiently challenged should raise these concerns with the class teacher. It was noted that some Year 4 children have been really enjoying the times table challenges and progressing up the different levels.

ET asked whether any of the Reps had suggestions for people who might be able to help draft the School's wellbeing policy. It was agreed to send out a request to parents for volunteers

Curriculum

Mrs Bates will write to Reception parents in response to the various comments and questions relating to Reception.

LO explained that she wants Black History to be a core feature of the curriculum (not just a month) and that the curriculum will cover many important figures in Black History. She explained

that resources such as Twinkl have worksheets on Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King and not so many on non-American figures. Year 2 have been learning about Desmond Tutu.

In response to the request for more “real life” socio political topics (Year 5 comment), the Jigsaw PHSE curriculum covers some of this at an age appropriate level. LO said that as a Church school LGBTQ+ discussions need to be carefully considered and she also feels that **some of** these topics are more suited for secondary school curriculum.

In response to the question about E-Safety training, LO said she has sent some information on social media to Year 5/6 parents. She said that the E-Safety page on the school website needs updating. She’s hoping to organise an E-Safety talk in the spring by an E-Safety expert.

Donating items

LO said that the teachers will put together a class wishlist on each class page on the website for parents who wish to donate items to the school. AC reminded everyone that the School Association gets money from purchases if people are signed up for Amazon Smile.

LO said the voluntary donations have been used to pay for some amazing workshops such as Watford Football Club Diversity Day and the drumming workshop. She said that without these donations, these events would not have taken place.

AOB

Health & Safety

Discussion about the accident involving a Year 2 child who fell off the Trim trail and the School’s health and safety arrangements in light of this. LO said that all MSAs are first aid trained and all teachers and TAs will be receiving refresher training. The child concerned was taken to A&E by his parents. LO said that the school had reviewed the accident and, while confident that correct protocol had been followed, in future should a fracture/serious injury be suspected an ambulance will be called. LO said that an adult must be standing at the Trim Trail whenever children are playing on it and the children have been re-trained on how to play on it safely.

School Photos

LO said the school will keep the same company on as many parents have bought the photos. SJ said that a survey was done a few years ago and although the feedback was mixed, it was felt that the current provider was doing a good job on the whole.

LO said that sibling photos were not possible this year due to the need to keep bubbles separate. **Post meeting note:** the school will try to organise sibling photos to be taken at the same time as class photos in June.

The meeting ended at 3:07pm. Other AOB items and points raised in parent comments that the meeting did not have time to cover have been taken forward/responded to separately.

Actions:

1. **Parent volunteers for allotment visits:** LO to put an item in the newsletter early next year asking for parent volunteers from Reception to Year 2 to help with allotment visits, with class reps to coordinate the volunteers for their year groups.
2. **Weekly Learning summaries on class pages:** LO to discuss with teachers the feasibility of including weekly learning summaries on class pages.
3. **Website training for School Association page editing:** ET to arrange for website training video to be sent to AC.
4. **Purple Mash :** LO will ask staff about Purple Mash and whether it's possible to set tasks before earning time to play with avatars.
5. **Playing on field :** LO to ask Mrs Archbold whether it's possible for 1 staff member to supervise lunchtime play on the field.
6. **School Wellbeing Statement:** Reps to ask for volunteers to help draft
7. **Reception comments/questions:** Mrs Bates to write to Reception parents.
8. **Donations :** LO to ask teachers to create class wish lists and publish on class pages on website
9. **E-Safety :** LO to arrange for E-Safety page on website to be updated and to report back at next Parent Forum meeting on the E-Safety talk by Richard Maskray
10. **School emails :** ET to include on agenda for March Parent Forum meeting
11. **Charities -** ET to include on agenda for March Parent Forum meeting
12. **Reading -** LO to ask Mrs Zimet to write to Year 1 parents about the Phonics books.

Other comments raised by parents - LO to provide written replies

Parent Forum November 2020 Parent Comments (Nil return Nursery and Year 3)

Positive Feedback

1. Thank you to all the staff for settling the children into this new environment. The children seem so happy. (Reception)

2. Dropping the Reception children off at the gate and not going into the classroom is a great idea. I know previously parents could go into the classroom but I think this works better. (Reception)
3. I think that Mrs Osborne and all the staff at St Mary's deserve congratulations for all their amazing organisation and handling of the COVID situation. It's obviously been effective so far as we're still open! Plus they've managed it in a very calm and friendly way, which is beneficial to everyone. Really love the way they are up for trying new ways of doing things to see if it works ie one way systems, staggered start/finish times etc. I think it's working well currently. (Year 1)
2. I think the work you have all done in school focusing on wellbeing has been great. I think the children have settled back into as normal a school routine as can be at the moment, and with all the changes they've adapted well due to the hard work and friendly staff. Thank you 🙏 As much as no one wants another lockdown, I think the school has been very informative and kept in touch well on this subject. Hopefully the things put in place will help home learning to go smoothly. Overall I just want to say thank you to all the staff, for everything they do, especially in these trying times. You keep our children safe and happy, and sometimes that's a very hard thing to do! Keep smiling 😊 (Year 1)
3. Thank you to everyone involved in getting the kids back to school, settling them in and ensuring they continue to be happy. It's been such a difficult year for everyone in different ways but having a routine has been so helpful in my family and my children adjusted so much easier than I expected to life back at school after the extended summer. I appreciate there are lots of moving parts and constant changes to accommodate and I think you're all doing a wonderful job. (Year 1)
4. Response to ongoing pandemic as everyone has come back to school has been excellent. I know the teachers have worked really hard to make the transition back as smooth and stress free as possible. I can imagine it's been difficult to balance the lack of clear government guidelines with anxious parents' concerns. I think it's been managed really well, so thank you to everyone. (Year 2)
5. It's been great to be able to offer feedback on some of the procedures, particularly around drop off and pick up and to see this being listened to and actioned. I think this now works really well. Mrs Osborne's presence in the morning and afternoon is really appreciated - it sends such a good message. (Year 2)
6. Thank you to all staff and Mrs Osborne for the care and support they give to the kids during these strange times. It is down to the staff that my children feel safe and happy going to school each day (Year 2 and 4)

7. Well done to the school on settling the kids back in so well and getting them used to the new routines. My two really are loving being back to some form of normality. (year 2 and 4)
8. Love the music at drop-off. Really positive and happy start to the day. (Reception & Year 2)
9. My son really enjoys Newsround at snack time. Really good addition to the day. (Year 2)
10. I thought the format of the parent consultations worked really well. Miss Gray seems to know the children so well already and in such a short space of time ! That gives me a lot of reassurance as a parent that my child is in good hands, particularly when we haven't had the chance to get to know teachers in the usual way this term. Mrs Bates' focus at the consultation on wellbeing and settling in was also reassuring as this has been the main priority for me as a parent. Really good to know the school is on the same page and to be able to have the opportunity to talk about that. (Year 2)
11. Thank you to all the staff for making a remarkable start to a difficult year. My children have loved coming back to school. (Year 4)
12. We feel very happy with the positive changes that the school has made recently re update to library books / stories to include diversity and also 'soft start' in the mornings reduces congestion/ stress and helps my child feel more independent. (Year 5)
13. My child is working well facing forward and is less distracted also having water bottle to hand seems to be working re drinking ! (Year 5)
14. Very pleased that the school is choosing more local charities to support like Sunnyside can I also suggest another local charity People Not Borders who organise collections and supplies for refugee families and they did even have a drop off point at St Mary's church? (Year 5)
15. Water bottles on the table is great, my children actually drink water now (Year 5)
16. There has been a real positive shift since Mrs.Osborne has come onboard and this has been felt. Many thanks. (Year 5)

Preparedness for bubble closure/lockdown

Year 1 - no comments

Year 2

Is the school thinking about an online provision like online teaching? Purple mash is great but it can't replace face to face.

Year 4

For homework and remote learning, could we request more worksheet type material pls? We had a lot of brilliant creative/imaginative work set for us at home (eg write a story about...) BUT sadly we found it hard to engage our children without classmates and a teacher inspiring them. It could take literally hours of parental input to get 10 minutes of writing. We (and I believe many families) largely gave up on these types of tasks in lockdown. So it would have been great to have more straightforward worksheet style alternatives as well, that kids can do on their own, so at least some work was getting done.

Does purple mash, or whichever provider the school is using, make it possible to set tasks before earning time to play with avatars? I found it hard to manage without constantly monitoring it, so ended up using it less.

Year 5

Are there still plans to implement something like google classroom in case of another lockdown situation or home learning due to isolating ? We only have access to one desktop at home currently for 2 children and myself

We have a laptop and so can work remotely but it would be useful to know what the school's plans are in the event of a) the whole class being put into isolation and b) individual children being put into isolation (e.g. because a family member tests positive). Conceivably a child might be in 2 weeks isolation and yet not be ill – would work be set by the school and would there be online classes in that situation?

Year 6

If yr6 go into isolation (or the school is closed) then they should be set remote learning for their full day's classes each day of isolation. Eg: If the class were due to have 5 lessons in school, then I would expect that 5 full lessons worth of work is set for remote learning each day.

Given the importance of the year, SATS, and secondary school transfer I think this is a critical requirement. The pupils need to be prepared as best as possible for secondary school, and when in secondary school the level of remote learning is significant with the 5 periods of each day having mandatory work set. If St Mary's can adopt the same principles it will serve to prepare the pupils, plus mitigate the lost opportunity for learning.

My request for all lessons each day to have work set for remote learning is associated with isolation and school closure, not sickness.

Wellbeing and mental health

Reception

I wonder if we could ask about face masks at the gates? I think I'm going to start wearing one because it reminds me not to get too close to people. Once I start chatting I so easily forget about distancing!

Going to the toilet independently is a new thing for Reception children, could there possibly be an option of flushable wipes for them as these clean better than toilet paper

Year 1 - no comments

Year 2

PE - it sounds like year 2 will be picking this up again after half term. This is great news as I think fitness and physical activity are so important for the children's mental health and well being. Could we get some information about what this will look like given the ongoing restrictions ? I'd be keen to see this feature in the daily timetable as much as possible, if practical.

I'm concerned a bit about the whole catching up approach. Both of mine have been saying they are finding it all quite easygoing and in particular are bored in maths. If the homework they are getting in maths is a reflection of what they currently do in class I'm not surprised as it doesn't seem very challenging. I'm worried about this actually affecting their mental health in a way.. mine thrive on learning and on a challenge and get a great sense of achievement from it. I don't want them getting bored/losing motivation etc. I completely understand there will be some children who really need this type of catch up, but I think it's really important to also cater for those that don't...(Year 2 and 4 parent)

In terms of what's done well, the RE curriculum seems to be a favorite amongst mine. (Year 2 and 4)

It would be great to see more opportunities for extra curricular clubs (I know this is difficult with current conditions), not just sport but drama, lego etc. (on that note, are parents allowed to run clubs in the current climate or does the bubble system prevent this?) (Year 2 and 4)

Year 4

For some children, the greatest impact of COVID on wellbeing is not anxiety but boredom - stuck at home with busy parents and siblings. My kids returned to school craving social interaction and new challenges/learning (especially with the rest of life so restricted), but I keep hearing 'it's too easy', 'it's all stuff we've done before'. It's a testament to the great work of the teachers that these children are asking for more, and some repetition is necessary for all, but I'm concerned catch-up has gone on too long and there's a tendency to equate wellbeing with

staying in the comfort zone - this might be the right approach for some children, but please recognise wellbeing can look different for others.

Year 4 outdoor time seems to be quite minimal.

Year 5

Could the forest school area be used during lunchtime play to create more space ?

I would like to see more activities outside and more exercise/movement built into the day. My son really struggled during lockdown with being less active and all children learn better when they move more. Daily mile is a great initiative but I'm not clear how often the children do it?

I also wonder whether the SA could help to fund outside equipment such as table tennis tables?

On mental health, there is a fabulous charity called Stormbreak <https://www.stormbreak.org.uk/> which has been set up to improve mental health in primary school children. They provide support to schools – email hello@stormbreak.org.uk to get in touch with them.

Can they spend as much time as possible on the field, so as to spend time outside whatever the weather, perhaps with boots that are kept outside...?

Is there an opportunity for the children to take on more responsibility / have 'jobs' that contribute to the school to give them a sense of ownership, pride and involvement in the school?

There has been a real positive shift since Mrs.Osborne has come onboard and this has been felt. Many thanks.

Curriculum

Reception

I thought they were brilliant, but my child didn't want to watch videos on Tapestry over lockdown. Could we have a few printable resources as well please? Like the letter and number form sheets and maths activities.

For those years still on the Oxford Reading Tree, is there any kind of online access or book swap that could be continued remotely? It was hard to find appropriately staged reading material during lockdown

Could the children do a virtual show and tell with emailed pictures, or bring in items at the beginning of the week to be quarantined in a box? It's such a valuable experience for them, it would be great to find a way.

Year 1 - no comments

Year 2

Pleased to see Black History month mentioned and the request for more diverse books. It would be good to see a focus on cultural diversity through the curriculum and school activities. Does the school go beyond the curriculum in this area - is it given any additional focus ? Teaching seems to be on american figures - Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks etc - do we teach black british history ?

Homework structure is working well for us. Pleased that it's been fairly light touch in the first term. It's taken us a bit of time to get back into the swing of school life.

Year 2 and 4

I don't feel the more able get stretched enough. I think they need more opportunities for challenges and not just to be given a harder worksheet to complete, but also need teaching of some more challenging concepts.

Year 5

With the children in year 5 now having access to smart phones will there be a talk on E-safety and an update to parents regarding current Apps /social media ?

I think the focus around Black Lives Matter and Black History Month has been wonderful. This may already happen, but love for there to be more 'real life' socio-political topics being touched on that children wouldn't necessarily be spoken to about at home (eg LGBTQ+ / powerful women in history/today / career inspiration at an early age...)

Donating items

Year 2

- I would be very happy to donate /gift items to the school. I thought the request for books was a great idea and I was pleased to be able to contribute to that. I'd be happy to receive a list of things that would be of benefit or were needed - perhaps with different monetary values (higher /lower) so that we could donate depending on what we could manage financially that term.

- Similarly for treats and extra activities given the challenges the SA have in raising money at present. The african drums were a real hit as was the trip to sunnyside - very happy to contribute to events like this. I think there is real benefit in these types of activities particularly at the moment.

Always happy to donate. Loved the book list and we loved the books (had a read before donating). One off financial donation was a great idea and made it really straightforward. I always donate uniform but would be happy to donate and maybe school could sell secondhand things that are always needed like summer/winter coats, wellies, hats/caps, book bags, fancy dress (wish there was a second hand Victorian outfit option 😄), sporting equipment etc. Toys too!! (Could specify good condition and working toys only)

Year 4

Thumbs up for the 'buy a book' on your birthday idea. How do we prevent us all buying the same ones?

AOB

Reception welcome pack

I feel it would have been nice if when my child started Reception we received an online Welcome pack with pictures of the teachers and teaching assistants, and a bit of info about them. For example I had no idea Mrs Hawkes took the class on a Friday. I don't really know much about the Oxford reading books and how the levels work, what day PE is, what day reading is etc. The lunch menu was not explained in terms of how they use the colour system. Obviously I don't expect a detailed plan of the week but some topline info would be helpful. (Reception)

Lollipop Lady

Just a random AOB if appropriate about Karen the crossing patrol/lollipop lady. She often asks me what's happening about school opening/closing, times etc and this week which entrances/exits parents are allowed to use etc. It's obviously fine and I'm happy to let her know but it seems she's not getting any comms from the school? Due to the way she's contracted perhaps it's not the school's responsibility to do so but just thought it would be helpful if she could be kept in the loop on things? Just a thought (Year 1)

Year 1 Reading Books

The only query I had but this may not be relevant or substantial enough to bring up outside our year 1 group is the new reading books in year 1 (and possibly reception?). We haven't been getting on with them at all. They are based on phonics and unfortunately the story and content of the book seems to be less important. We find they are hard to read as they are like tongue twisters and the sentences often don't make sense, which is not helpful when learning to read. The 'story' often finishes abruptly with no obvious 'ending' and some of the words used are quite strange to use for young children learning to read eg. I popped on the mop? Their granny is in child education and is an expert in teaching children to read and has written hundreds of books on the topic (quite a few schools including St Mary's have her books!) and she's also discussed them with other experts in the field and they also agree that the books are not great. Mainly, we don't enjoy reading them as they don't seem to have an interesting story and don't seem to make much sense! However, if they have spent money on obtaining these new books, we will of course continue with them but just thought it worth a mention. I thought the Biff and Kipper books were great! Could we just continue to use those or similar? (Year 1)

Emails

There are so many school emails! Somehow I feel these could be streamlined so that information is delivered in a more condensed and more effective way. Eg: A regular weekly

School newsletter with information and clear dates for parents diaries. (I'm not sure if the newsletter I've seen is weekly?) Parents would then know to look out for the Friday newsletter and what to reference for the following week. This info can then be used by class reps who can text parents to remind them of relevant things. Collate all daily emails into one and send it at the end of the day - unless it is year group specific or urgent. (So many emails are just 'pinged' out; info is passed on - ✓.) Sometimes there are 4-6 emails in a day and then each one may require opening a PDF! So my feedback is could the school consider a more effective way of communicating lots of information. (Year 1)

Health & Safety

Has there been a review of Health and Safety procedures following pupil broken arm? In particular around first aiders, the response to the incident on the day and play time cover. I would be interested to know how many first aiders there are and how often refresher training is delivered. Also whether the climbing areas are monitored at play times. I know these things happen, but some assurance that the right protocols are in place and have been reviewed would be appreciated. (Year 2)

School photos

Comments from more than one parent about the quality of the school photos. Specifically, that the photos are not great, the photographer is not good at getting the children to smile and the parents don't buy them as a result. This has been an issue over several years and has been raised previously. I'm not sure whether the school gets any money from photos purchased but if so, they are missing out if parents aren't ordering photos because they don't like them. (Year 5)

I'm disappointed that the recent school photos didn't include an opportunity for a joint sibling photo as it would be the last one at St Mary's. It is understood that both Westfield and Bridgewater have committed to hopefully providing a sibling photo in the New Year. Hopefully this may be an option at St Mary's, and the January Reception starters would also be able to have a first school photo. (Year 6)

Charities

Very pleased that the school is choosing more local charities to support like Sunnyside can I also suggest another local charity People Not Borders who organise collections and supplies for refugee families and they did even have a drop off point at St Mary's church? Year 5

Road safety:

- Will there be road safety training for the children?
- Was wondering about road safety talk/ lesson especially as some of the children will be taking part in their cycling course? Has this happened or will it be happening soon? Year 5

Buddy system

is there a non-contact way in which the year 5 children can still act as 'Buddies'? It's a shame for them to miss out this responsibility (Year 5)

Year 5 & 6 residential trips

Re the school residential trip that was previously supposed to be in May and then October 2020, the children are now supposed to be doing this in May 2021 but a few months later they will be going on the residential trip in year 6. Would it make sense if they combined the trip and just went on one and possibly went on short local activity trips eg to Aston Clinton green park or great/little gaddesden as extra? (Year 5)

Lunches

My son is very happy that hot lunches are back but says the portion sizes are far too small and that the year 5/6 children have the same size portion as the year 1 children. Can this be reviewed? (Year 5)

Meet the teacher

Are there any plans for the class teachers to do a zoom "meet the teacher" session for parents? (Year 5)

Uniform

As it is getting colder, will the school uniform rules be relaxed if the classrooms are very cold (as the windows are open)? (Year 5)