

Governor Newsletter

After what seems like a whirlwind Autumn term we are pleased that Ms Taylor has quickly established herself as Headteacher and will be with us for 2 academic years. In a challenging climate for school leadership recruitment, governors have taken the decision to extend Ms Taylor's appointment to give the staff, children, and parents of The Downley School a period of stability.

By extending the term we have given time for renewing and implementing a clear and ambitious vision (as required by Ofsted, but equally very necessary for any school in challenging and changing times). This will set the strategic direction of the school, taking into account the views of those newer to our school community as well as benefitting from the experience of those that have been part of the community for a while.

This enables us to fully benefit from Ms Taylor's vast expertise and skills and to consider our longer term strategic options. This decision is against the backdrop of formal inter-school collaboration which could have a possible impact on our leadership model and aims to place our school in the strongest possible position for future success in an ever-changing educational landscape.

Over the Autumn term we have focused on the school's development plan for this academic year. Our Safeguarding Governor joined senior leaders attending a successful school safeguarding audit and our Chair of Governors and Chair of Curriculum and Standards have joined teachers' meetings. These have generated inspiring ideas towards our vision of a creative, interesting, fun and enriching teaching and learning environment for our children and staff. Governors have been making their visits into school and also came in for a monitoring day in November.

We were also very privileged that the Head Girl and Head Boy along with their deputies joined us at our Full Governing Board meeting for the very first time to present on what they would like to achieve this year. We look forward to exploring more ways of involving our children in our school governance and influencing school life generally. Following this meeting, we set a Governor Leadership Challenge giving them an opportunity to put into practice their manifestos which they presented at the meeting and which helped them get their roles in the first place. Please watch this space for updates on their outcomes.

There are many exciting things happening this year in our school.

All year groups are starting to learn outside more and there is a lot to look forward to in this area as the weather improves. We would like to take this opportunity to thank and recognise the incredible dedication, creativity and hard work of our staff who always look to diversify and create dynamic, engaging classrooms - be they inside or outside.

The school has also just signed up to a 'young rangers' scheme to help us develop the pond area. We have begun to clear the back field (previously unused) and plan to extend this further to include the pond itself. The time that parents / carers kindly spent with us to clear the area is greatly appreciated by all at the school as we now use this on a regular basis. This will link with our development of a forest school and work has begun with Chiltern Wood School on this.

We have changed the way in which we lead our school by moving towards a more effective dispersed leadership model. Mrs Thomas is the phase leader for foundation stage, Mrs Gippert for key stage 1, Ms Taylor for lower key stage 2 and Miss Maund for upper key stage 2. Within this structure governors are able to support, monitor and challenge more clearly in order to meet the needs of all of the children and staff. We are also able to develop our emerging leaders through a clear model for succession planning. You are welcome to meet with the phase leaders to discuss any queries or concerns and there will also be an opportunity to meet and see more about the vision work at a 'Meet the Team' event at 3.30pm on 28 Feb and at the forthcoming parents' evenings.

We are pleased to announce that Mrs Carr is now our school Family Worker. This is a new role, with Mrs Carr being there to support the holistic values of our school. We all want our children to receive the best education at all levels and this includes their pastoral care. She is not class based, although she may support children in class, and is here to support all families should you have worries or concerns about your children.

School leaders have introduced an innovative 'irresistible curriculum' that has a stunning start, marvelous middle and a fantastic finish. These elements make any project exciting and provide valuable first-hand experiences for the children to draw upon. It has been proven to work alongside other systems the school uses, such as Pie Corbett's Talk for Writing. You will be asked to volunteer or contribute to some of these 'irresistible' events and help to make the children's learning even more unforgettable.

We are all looking forward to another successful Parent Association-led camping event this year. And the school will be taking part in pancake races on the playground, an Easter Bonnet Parade, Diwali, Eid, and Mum & Dad in school day, to name but a few other exciting highlights. The school is also starting a distance running club linked with the 'Golden Mile' initiative. We would love to hear from you if you are a keen runner and you would like to volunteer for the Golden Mile and help bring in so many well-being benefits including fitness and mental health advantages.

Working collaboratively is now an essential part of the educational landscape. We have some amazing, talented people within the school, as well as areas to develop. By working with others we are able to share good practice and learn from our peers. One valuable link we have already made is with neighboring Chiltern Wood School, and we are exploring another with a similar school within a different authority to give us a wider perspective.

As a values-based school, the value of the month continues to be important – information about the value of the month and the monthly newsletter are shared on the school web site. We are also reviewing our coverage of the broader personal, social, health education (PSHE) curriculum to ensure we are keeping our children safe, healthy and prepared for life and work, and we are looking forward to the return of a revised form of the enterprise scheme.

We have had staff leave for a variety of reasons this academic year. Regarding ongoing staffing arrangements, governors and the senior leadership team look to align these with the requirements of the school development plan and also the funding available. We, along with all schools in the county, currently await to learn of the new formula funding allocation and to understand the impact this will have on the financial position of our school. We still look to explore other opportunities to increase income and are considering options to let the building once improvements are made to the school environment to ensure facilities are of a very high standard. Currently the school is addressing improvements to the building.

We have also recently bid farewell to two governors, Jonah Graham and Chris Gentry (who served for an astonishing 26 years!). We thank them both for their contribution, efforts and commitment to our school. We currently have vacancies for co-opted governors. If you have a passion for education, some time to volunteer, skills and experience that would contribute to the governance of our school, then please contact us on the email below for further information.

These are times that are both exciting and challenging for The Downley School. Staff and governors alike are driven by a desire for the best possible education and best possible outcomes for our pupils. If you have any questions or comments on any of the above or anything else relating to the school you can contact the governing body at governors@downley.bucks.sch.uk

We aim to keep in touch in future by contributing to a new two weekly school newsletter which Ms Taylor will be introducing very soon.



THE DOWNLEY SCHOOL
"Learning, Growing and Succeeding Together"