

Governor Newsletter

As the Christmas break approaches, we invite you to reflect with your children over the holiday period on how they have benefitted from some of the school developments seen during this term.

Underpinned by the launch of school community our renewed child-centered school vision, there have been several high impact changes since September, focussing on enabling the children to flourish in a whole child sense. This in turn is supporting them to become happy and successful learners, and ultimately to achieve better outcomes.

Some experiences you could ask your child to share with you include:

- the richer and broader curriculum, including a higher priority for music and art as part of daily school life, developing coverage of difference, diversity and equality, increased opportunities for caring activities and projects, and extended extra-curricular activities;
- the immersive irresistible curriculum and resulting learning experiences that have started to become more adventurous, engaging, experiential and child-led
- the children's creative ideas for use of the imagination studio which, following training of our Digital Ambassadors, will be increasingly used to support learning in a highly engaging and visual way (the latest exciting plan is for a Houses of Parliament experience to support debating skills development);
- the improving use of the outdoor environment
- the transfer and integration of ICT learning into the classrooms and across the curriculum, enabling ICT engagement on a daily basis and in response to specific needs, and also bringing the opportunity to learn more about the technical support aspect under the leadership of our new Digital Ambassadors.

During our recent governing board monitoring day in November, we met with many of the children and they talked passionately (and in many cases incessantly!) about these improvements in their school and we are sure they would also love to share their experiences with you.

You may also like to draw your child's attention to the support provided by the Family Worker, Mrs Carr, for all aspects of children's welfare. Another theme this year is to increase the pastoral care, including self esteem and social connection support through mentoring, available to all children to encourage their health and wellbeing development. It is important that all the children know this valuable resource exists for them should they need it.

We would also like to share Governors' termly performance data update

Following feedback, at the end of last year, we committed to a new termly update to share information about the school's position.

Since our last update, 2017-18 performance data has been published and we have been working closely with Bucks County Education to challenge this data and school-wide operation to continue striving to raise outcomes for all our children.

The following provides an update on our highest priority performance outcomes.

Priority 1 - progress

We continue to see further evidence of improving progress. This is our most critical school development priority as the progression of our children has historically not been strong enough. Our data shows a clear rise in the attainment and progress of our disadvantaged children last year. It also shows an increase in KS2 achievement of greater depth – in reading, writing and spelling / grammar – which also indicates improving progress prospects.

Priority 2 - maths

Last term, we reported on our specific subject weakness in maths, and on early signs of improving maths progress. We can see evidence of improving maths outcomes in our internal progress tracking. However, our 2017-18 year-end position still reflected the historical decline in maths attainment due to issues over time that were identified but not effectively addressed and the need for maths to remain a critical focus.

A new whole-school maths scheme has been introduced this term which supports teachers in planning, brings continuity and progression in the teaching of maths throughout the school, and supports mastery and greater depth. And we are looking to further stretch our most able children with additional maths specialist support

Priority 3 - phonics

We have now experienced a 3-year decline in phonics, with a drop last year to below national level, making this area a heightened priority in the school development plan. A phonics audit has already been completed this term to highlight required improvements, including whole-school phonics training that is taking place in January. We will continue to monitor and challenge for improvement in this area as we move into the next term.

Priority 4 - improving in-year progress tracking

Improved tracking of children's performance is now in full swing. A new tracking system has been implemented, enabling us to better monitor in-year progress and see how individual or specific group learning needs and any required interventions are identified and acted upon quickly. It has also enabled us to provide improved information to you about your children's progress. After the Christmas break, we will be looking closely at the first data drop of this academic year and challenging for further evidence of outcomes improvement. We look forward to sharing more on this with you in next term's update.

In summary, whilst our circumstances remain highly challenging, great things are happening. As previously mentioned, we are working side by side with Bucks County with regular in-school meetings planned for next term to continue to drive outcomes improvements and address some community concerns arising from our transformational change process. We continue in our resolve to make our school a place where every child can succeed and achieve their best, and we look forward to seeing and sharing more progress towards this.

We would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank our staff for all of their efforts this term. In a recently published Ofsted: Teacher well-Being and Workload Survey, sadly a key finding was that 76% of teachers reported that their job impacts negatively on their mental health. The HSE reported that Teaching is one of three professions with highest reports of stress and depression. Staff well being is a high priority for us as a Governing Board and we will continue to invest in CPD, coaching and mentoring and other initiatives to support our staff.

Our staff are all doing their best in the extremely challenging and an ever increasingly demanding educational landscape are we are all striving for high educational and pastoral standards and we ask that the impact on our staff's morale and well being; leaders, teachers and support staff, is considered whenever interacting with them.

We are now working closely and meeting regularly at our Full Governing Board meetings with our Senior Leadership Team and Junior Leaders (Head and deputy boys and girls). Governors have been keen to increase pupil voice and have been tasking our Junior Leaders in working with us to do this. Our latest challenge is to take the lead in the Great Homework debate! This is always a divided subject and we look forward to seeing the outcomes of this debate in the new year.

Also in the new year, the Governing Board will continue to focus on looking strategically at the future leadership of our school and are considering ways to involve our school community. We will look to create a parent/carer forum in the new year which focuses on working with school leaders to develop school improvement and parents as partners. If you would be interested in becoming involved, please contact the school office at office@thedownleyschool.co.uk.

These initiatives will continue to drive our school towards becoming a place where every child can truly succeed and achieve their best. We continue to learn grow and succeed together to achieve our vision to equip every child with the knowledge and self-belief to be happy.

We look forward to sharing more progress in the spring term. In the meantime, best wishes for the festive time.



THE DOWNLEY SCHOOL
"Learning, Growing and Succeeding Together"

You may be interested to see some of the school improvement projects/developments completed / on-going since Sep 17:

- ☆ Vision re-launch
- ☆ Imagination Studio (Immersive learning room)
- ☆ Curriculum updated / Irresistible curriculum introduced
- ☆ Science gold award
- ☆ Safeguarding audit
- ☆ Safeguarding online introduced including written behaviour monitoring
- ☆ Safeguarding improved – New entrance lobby / sign in procedures
- ☆ Infrastructure improvements
- ☆ Teaching and learning audit
- ☆ New maths scheme
- ☆ SEND audit
- ☆ Learning Support Assistants strategically and flexibly deployed
- ☆ Collaboration with Chiltern Wood - SEND expertise and best practice shared
- ☆ EYFS audit
- ☆ Reggio Emilia approach introduced
- ☆ Subject leadership rebooted
- ☆ Educational psychologists
- ☆ Pupil premium focus
- ☆ Progress addressed
- ☆ Teacher recruitment
- ☆ Computing integrated into classrooms/across curriculum
- ☆ Investment in ICT - new laptops, smart boards etc
- ☆ Learning environments renovated
- ☆ Learning outside the classroom in place
- ☆ Forest School training completed
- ☆ Links with other schools established and developed
- ☆ Target setting and monitoring
- ☆ Assessment / analysis
- ☆ CPD delivered and organised
- ☆ Additional Intervention rooms created
- ☆ Introduction of arts, music, bands, artists
- ☆ Introduction of teacher-led clubs
- ☆ School staff handbook produced
- ☆ Policies updated

- ☆ Target Tracker implemented and tracking updated
- ☆ Equality objectives set
- ☆ Rights respecting schools
- ☆ Emerald class (Chiltern Wood)
- ☆ New environment policy in place (inclusive)
- ☆ Chickens
- ☆ Pond renovations
- ☆ Show racism the red card
- ☆ Consultation improvements
- ☆ End of term reports to parents in line with survey outcomes
- ☆ Development of dispersed leadership
- ☆ Improvements to EYFS learning environment inside and out
- ☆ Improvements to playgrounds
- ☆ Introduction of playtime toys
- ☆ Election system for head boy girl
- ☆ British Values/ assemblies and events
- ☆ Daily assemblies
- ☆ Singing assemblies
- ☆ Newsletters/ blogs
- ☆ Staffroom improvements
- ☆ Library reorganisation
- ☆ Parish council links
- ☆ Online registration
- ☆ Anti-plastic campaign
- ☆ Great homework debate in progress
- ☆ Inter school games with Chiltern wood
- ☆ Tournaments
- ☆ Enterprise weeks
- ☆ Fund raising
- ☆ Financial audit
- ☆ Parent pay introduced
- ☆ Cash free school
- ☆ Schools Financial Value Standard compliance
- ☆ Uniform online
- ☆ Governance audit
- ☆ Governor development
- ☆ Increased pupil voice through Junior Leaders
- ☆ Website updated
- ☆ Sports coaching