



Governor Newsletter – Spring 2019

Ensuring clarity of our vision, ethos and strategic direction of the school is an important part of our role as the TDS governing board. Taking the first part of that task (**our vision**), it has been great to see the whole school community working together in shaping the school's vision which is now being embedded across the school;

'To equip every child with the knowledge and self-belief to be happy'

Thank you to all 202 parents who took part in our recent online survey. The parent survey ran alongside two further surveys for children and staff. All three surveys had high engagement and are indicating that we are working strongly towards our vision, with the results on enjoyment and happiness scoring:

- ☆ **Pupil survey 'I enjoy school' - 86%**
- ☆ **Parent's survey 'My child is happy at school' - 89%**
- ☆ **Staff survey 'I enjoy working at this school' - 91%**

The outcomes from the full survey are under review and were discussed at the full governing board meeting with the school Senior Leadership Team (SLT) to recognise strengths, and talk about how areas of development align with the strategic direction of the school. The outcomes will contribute to our school development plan for 2019-20.

Our success as a Values-based school is cherished by all and embedded firmly within the **Ethos** of the school. We know from talking to pupils, staff and parents/carers how important values are to our school and we are now looking to build on this further by becoming an UNICEF Rights Respecting School. This award will recognise the achievements of our school and our children in putting the United Nations Convention of the rights of a child into practice inside and outside the school environment. You can find further information [here](#).

Looking towards our **Strategic direction** for our school, in-line with our school development plan, we continue to work towards providing 21st Century classrooms, investing in better IT resource and adding capacity for incorporating IT more in everyday use. On our monitoring days we can see the increased use of more easily accessible IT in our classrooms, for example for child-led research, and how the children are embracing this.

The innovative Imagination studio continues to be developed and utilised more through the curriculum. It has been a learning curve for all and it is great to see the facilitation of this learning between our staff and children truly demonstrating learning, growing and succeeding together. The studio is also now also being used by the Montessori Pre-school, and the feedback from all children continues to be extremely positive.

Our staff are increasingly using the school's outdoor learning spaces as we encourage and challenge them to be creative and to not be afraid to move the classroom outside (despite our changeable British weather!). We are delighted that our outdoor teaching practise will also be shared with other schools in the summer term.

Our school's outdoor setting, and focus on 21st Century classrooms help support the embedding of our 'Irresistible Curriculum'. The spring term theme 'turrets and tiaras' saw a stunning start with mysterious dragon eggs and a fabulous finish with a whole school living history 'mediaeval banquet', with a feast, dancing and singing. We know how much the children value mixing with different year groups and it was fantastic to see our staff and children dressed up enjoying the event, bringing the **whole school** together and creating memories that will last a life time.

The wellbeing of our staff is extremely important, helping to ensure that they are encouraged and supported to perform at their best. With this in mind, we are expanding and investing in Continual Professional Development across the school. Over the Easter holidays governors and parents came together to help surprise staff by creating a beautiful summer balcony. Overlooking the playground and rolling Chiltern Hills, our staff can now sit at picnic tables, take a well earned break, or have a bite to eat in the sunshine, whilst enjoying the view.

Moving to the other important elements of the role of the governing board:

'Holding the Headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils, and the effective and efficient performance management of staff' (Teaching, learning and assessment / Outcomes for pupils)

Our school is absolutely committed to inclusive **Quality First Teaching**, where **all** children have access to quality teaching from their Teacher. We recognise high quality teaching as a key success factor for **all** learners. We also continue to monitor the use of our Teaching Assistants to ensure that the facilitation of learning is maximised.

We embrace the child-focussed Reggio Emilia approach through our Irresistible Curriculum, which looks to create a love of learning.

The governing board regularly review the school data with the SLT. With an aim to become more efficient and effective, a new tracking system was implemented at the beginning of the academic year and this is becoming more embedded. There are now more frequent pupil progress meetings between School Leaders and Teachers which are becoming more focussed on 'progress' and not just on 'attainment' in-line with our school development plan. From the increasingly transparent representation of school performance, implemented by Ms Taylor, and our SLT's open and collaborative approach with the governing board, it is important to note that we are aware that our historical data's vulnerability and inaccuracies. We expect this to take time for this to work through in SATS results, most likely impacting negatively on progress scores, but it's important and fair to the children that the school moves forward based on reliable data.

Performance Management of staff

Teacher recruitment and retention is, and will remain a challenge for all schools. Recognising this, we are supportive of more innovative approaches, including more flexible recruitment models such as a 'temp to perm' model which contributes to ensuring that we recruit and retain staff that fit with our high expectations and focus on Quality First Teaching.

'Overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure its money is well spent'

As we have previously reported, our financial audit outcome of 22 limited judgements (based on historical findings), have now been fully addressed and has now moved from a rating of 'limited' (red) to 'substantial' (green) a fantastic outcome following the monumental effort and commitment of Ms Taylor and Ms Giles. The governing board continue to monitor school finances to ensure that our school invests well for the sustainable benefit of our children and that our school receives value for money.

Leadership and Management

Leadership stability has been a high priority for the governing board for quite some time and governors have been striving to secure stable leadership and are therefore delighted to have appointed Ms Taylor as our permanent Headteacher following her time from Sep 17 as our Interim Headteacher.

We are also delighted that Ms Giles has been appointed as our permanent School Business Manager since taking on the Interim role in Feb 18, and is doing a fantastic job of tackling a wide range of improvements across the school.

We continue to monitor the implemented dispersed leadership model and are also still considering options for further leadership roles and will announce these as soon as we are in a position to.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

There is no doubt that our children are an absolute credit to our school. It is always a pleasure to visit and talk with our children and we are so proud to often hear positive feedback from external visitors to our school about what a delight our children are.

We are committed to ensuring that pupil voice is heard loud and clear and the Head boys and girls regularly attend governor meetings as our Junior Leaders, talking about the leadership impact they're having across the school. For example, the recent 'Great Homework Debate' will inform our homework policy going forward.

Our school like all others, however, does have some incidents of poor behaviour, and our staff do all they can to ensure that they are dealt with swiftly. Recent survey results show:

- ✓ **Pupil survey results 'Behaviour is good at my school' 80%**
- ✓ **Parent's survey 'The school ensures that pupils are well behaved' 87%**
- ✓ **Staff survey 'The pupils behaviour is at least good at this school' 86%**

Wellbeing of pupils is also important and our family worker and mentor scheme and are now embedded ensuring the safeguarding and continued support for the wellbeing of the children. We are proud that our recent application to become an NHS Mental health trail blazer pilot school was successful.

We are also proud of our increasing working relationship with Chiltern Wood School, collaborating and sharing best practice together. It was great to hear such praise for our children at the recent parent meeting on how the chances of entering mainstream school has increased for some of the Chiltern Wood children that are learning in our school. We are also so immensely proud of how our children openly talk to us about and understand the importance of inclusivity for all.

Community Engagement

Thank you so much to the 83 parent/carers that attended the parent meeting on 3 Apr 19.

On the panel we had representation from governors, SLT, Bucks County Council, Chiltern Wood, Montessori and the Parish Council. We had the opportunity to be honest and transparent about some of the challenges that our school

has been facing and how difficult it had been to overcome these and also muster support for our school, which was last Ofsted rated 'Outstanding' a long time ago in 2007/8, through those times.

We have provided below a follow up to some questions received at the time and following, which hopefully will be of help.

Why did we not hold this meeting earlier?

We have wanted to hold this meeting with you for some time, but unfortunately until we had claims cleared, and independent reports undertaken which confirmed our analysis of the school's position (i.e. prior to the arrival of Mrs Taylor, the school was significantly underperforming on a number of levels and since then has been undergoing many positive improvements), we were not in a position to present back to you.

Will you hold more meetings such as these with the parents?

We will look to hold one more follow-up meeting towards the end of the summer term. Parents/carers need to be confident that we are all working towards the same aim for our children and our wish would be for parents/carers to trust the decisions the school makes. Moving forward, a parent forum is currently being set up that will look at ways in which parents/carers can work positively as partners with school.

Why didn't you get Ofsted in and when will the next Ofsted be?

The governing board and School Leadership team took a decision a number of months ago to pro-actively engage with Ofsted. However, due to the historical 'Outstanding' rating we do not know when we will be inspected. The inspection system is currently under review so this may change, in the meantime, we will continue to self-evaluate using external educational professionals.

At the parent meeting you talked about an independent review having been completed into Governance at The Downley School, are you able to tell us more about this?

The external review of governance at The Downley School was carried out one year ago by an independent consultant at the request of the governing board, as is best practice, in May 2018. The independent consultant completed an extensive review, using the Ofsted framework at the time. The review was conducted using governing board papers covering a 12-month period, separate meetings with the Headteacher, Chair of Governors and other representative governors, and attendance at governing board meetings which also involved children and staff.

The outcome of this review recognised many strengths, along with some suggested areas to develop further, which the governing board have embraced and have been pro-actively making improvements in accordance with this guidance. We will report further on this in our annual statement.

Whilst it would not be appropriate to issue the full report, we are happy to provide the conclusion (verbatim) which should give you a flavour of the report:

'This is a school and governing board going through transformation. There has been a step change in operation and understanding of the board's role under the leadership of the strong Chair.

The governing board takes appropriate and direct action to engage with the school in specific strategic issues. What was clearly visible throughout the review and meetings with governors was the passion the governing board had for the school and the time and commitment governors were willing to invest to the benefit of the children, parents and recognition of their role within the wider community.

Overall, this governing board has clearly improved its work and focus on data and school improvement.'

What do I do if I'm still not happy?

We have much to celebrate at our school and are delighted with the positive results of the recent surveys undertaken; however, we do recognise that there are times when you may have a concern. We would always encourage you to come in and talk with staff. **Please do not use social media, such as Face Book and WhatsApp, as this is having an extremely detrimental impact on the morale of staff, children and the community.**

All schools are obligated by the statutory requirement from the Department of Education to comply with their school Complaints and Resolutions policy (available on the website).

We wish you and your children all the best over the summer term enjoying the next whole school theme

'Out of Africa'