

Woodcote Primary School

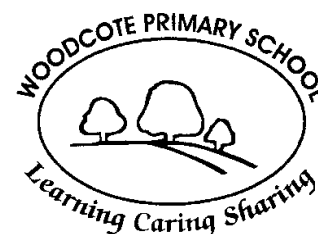
Reading Road, Woodcote, Reading, RG8 0QY

Telephone: 01491 680454

E-mail: office.2510@woodcote.oxon.sch.uk

www.woodcote-primary.co.uk

Chair of Governors: Helen Pearce Harvey



Welcome from the Chair

A warm welcome to all our parents, carers and members of the Woodcote Primary School community to the Summer 2023 Governor Newsletter. It's been a busy six months since our last newsletter with Christmas festivities, a Young Voices concert, Britain's Got Talent excitement and more recently the SATS (Standard Attainment Tests) for our Year 2 and 6 pupils. As we now move into the end of our academic year there is still much to do in the final weeks of term – sports days, transition days and the Year 5 and 6 play to name but a few.

The much-anticipated end of Primary School celebrations are well underway for our year 6 leavers, their residential trip to Torquay was a welcome break after a week of exams – much fun was had by all who went, including the teachers, with many children participating in activities they may never have done before! Might remove this??

In terms of the governing board, it's been a busy time too and some of the articles in this newsletter share more insights into this work. As a whole governing board we came together with the teaching staff in January to discuss curriculum across the school and to revisit the school vision and values. All involved found the evening beneficial both in terms of information sharing and, for the governors, a great opportunity to get a better understanding of curriculum progression throughout the school.

A final note from me, you will see further in this newsletter that we have a Parent Governor vacancy on our board. I would encourage all parents to consider joining the board. A parent governor is a critical link between the board and our parent community and is both rewarding and interesting. Please get in touch if you would like more information or have any questions about joining the team.

Wishing you all a very happy and hopefully sunny summer holiday!

Helen Pearce Harvey

Year 6 SATS Governor Invigilation

Year 6 SATS were held in the second week of May, and it is usual practice at Woodcote for a Governor to sit in as Invigilator. We offered our services and one of us spent our mornings with Mrs Wornham, her team and the children undergoing these assessments.

We are aware that these tests can be an opinion-dividing topic. Anecdotally in other schools, we have heard them described as highly stressful for children and too high a level of pressure to be applied at their age. As adults, our own thoughts on national standardised examinations take us back to GCSEs, A Levels and university exams. We vividly recall the atmosphere around those exams – tears and physical sickness were common! We certainly don't believe 10/11 year olds should be exposed to that level of pressure

On arrival for our invigilation, the children had had breakfast provided by the school and a play outside. They came back in chatting to each other and looking remarkably relaxed. After taking their seats, Mrs Wornham gave a little pep talk around the exam content and a reminder of what to expect.

Overall, whilst there was naturally a tone slightly out of the ordinary, particularly when the official papers were

opened, Mrs Wornham and her team struck a perfect balance of supportive, relaxed and calm in both what was said and how it was put across. The children as a group looked comfortable and at ease at the start, during and at the end of the tests. There were reports in the national press of children in distress after the tests but there we saw absolutely no evidence of this at Woodcote. As an objective viewer, this was not a group of children that appeared have been put to be under an enormous amount of pressure to perform.

SATS and other standardised examinations are likely to be part of education going forward for our children, and this set in Year 6 is their first real experience of that. We would like to extend our thanks and plaudits, on behalf of the Governing Body, to Mrs Wornham and the team for ensuring the best environment and atmosphere for the exams to be held in. This cannot be created for one day, and is reflective of the whole year and even the six before it.

Lastly, of course, congratulations to the children for their resilience and tenacity. We hope this experience of nationalised testing has been overall a positive one, and they enjoyed their Residential and the rest of the term's festivities.

Georgina Bickerton & Martin Towers

Resources Committee – Andrew Hawley, Chair

It's been a busy period for the Resources Committee since the start of the Spring term working on some key financial annual submissions to Oxfordshire County Council (OCC).

Schools Financial Value Standard (SFVS)

In early February the annual Schools Financial Value Standard (SFVS) statement was submitted to OCC. A lot of work goes into the preparation and submission of this return each year. For those not familiar with the SFVS, this asks thirty questions to governing bodies in six areas to help the school ensure it is meeting the basic standards necessary to achieve a good level of financial health and resource management. The areas covered by the questions are:

- Governance
- School strategy
- Setting the annual budget
- Staffing
- Value for money
- Protecting public money

When assessing in these areas one helpful resource available is the schools financial benchmarking website which shows how any one school's data compares to those of other schools. It was pleasing to see that Woodcote Primary School's data was very comparable to other similar schools.

This annual process always drives some really productive and helpful discussions between the school and governors, keeping a focus on some of the key challenges as well as identifying what the school has achieved and how it continues to move forward. Through discussions in these key areas a summary of actions has been put together for the school and governors to work together on in the coming year.

Annual budget submission

With the current challenging economic climate this year's annual budget preparation and submission in early May was one of the most challenging that the school and governors can remember in recent years.

The submission to OCC must include a three year budget plan that does not show a deficit in any of those years (i.e. predicted income in any given year must be equal to or greater than costs).

We are in the same position as many other schools in both the area and the country. With the tightening of government budgets, school funding is not keeping up with the unprecedented rise in costs schools are experiencing. All are having to find new ways to balance the books to ensure that pupils continue to

receive all the learning opportunities that are so important for their development. More than ever in the coming years schools will be reliant on local communities to support them in any way they can. The Resources Committee are exploring a number of opportunities and options with the school in this regard.

In the meantime, the experienced teacher team here at Woodcote Primary School continue to work very hard using their skills and experience innovatively so the children have the best learning opportunities and experience.

Given the situation, this year, as part of the school's annual budget submission we decided to submit a letter to OCC asking that those responsible for school funding at both OCC and the Department of Education look at school funding as a whole as a matter of urgency. Other schools in the area have also taken steps to voice their opinion and dissatisfaction with school funding and the challenges this brings in varying ways. We will continue to support this in any way we can and keep in close communication with other schools.

Finally, a big thank you to Jane Gillman and Liz, and members of the Resources Committee for their support and hard work on the financial aspects of the school in recent months.



Standards and Achievements Committee – Martin Towers, Chair

As we have previously outlined the Standards & Achievement committee meet termly to review areas of the running of the school that relate to achievement and performance.



Monitoring Visits

One key area that the S&A committee has oversight of is governor monitoring visits. An annual monitoring plan is agreed between governors and the school's leadership team which will look at several curriculum areas in the course of an academic year (more so this year as we seek to catch up on visits that were not possible during the pandemic).

Each visit usually involves two governors who will have an initial meeting with the curriculum lead teacher to discuss the particular curriculum area, including, for example, curriculum intent, performance data across the various year groups, areas of possible effective practice or any concerns the school may have. We will also look at how priorities for the curriculum are identified in the

school's annual improvement plan. Governors will then visit several classes, talking to teachers, teaching assistants and pupils across selected year groups. Each visit takes around two hours.

These visits give governors a much better understanding of how the school works and help us identify and focus on areas where we may be able to provide support for the school. What we do not do is make any observations on teaching - we are not experts in teaching and this is not within our governing remit.

For 2022/23, monitoring visits have already taken place in maths, early years, special education needs and safeguarding with English and science planned for the summer term.



Meet the New Governors!

Sarah McGurk - Parent Governor

Sarah has 2 children in the school and has lived in Woodcote since 2014. Though born in Kent, Sarah lived in Canada for 10 years where her elder son was born. As a result, he is fiercely Canadian as well as British!

Sarah works in London as an insurance underwriter and has served on several boards in the past in various capacities. In her professional life she has served on the class panel at Lloyd's of London as co-Chair, is a serving member of the PLUS London committee, was a former Parish Councillor in Woodcote Parish Council for almost 5 years and currently volunteers on the Friends of Woodcote Primary School committee as an ad hoc member.

Sarah wants to help the school to achieve its maximum potential and to ensure the passion and enthusiasm of the various stakeholders in the school are used to optimal advantage of the children in its care.

When not working and commuting or being with her children, Sarah can be found sailing, walking her energetic dog Piper, working in her garden sanctuary or (very occasionally) skiing!

Sarah Strudley – Co-opted Governor

Sarah has been a teacher for over 25 years, and now works as Vice Principal at a school for deaf young people in Newbury where she has been since September 2022.

She has extensive experience of working with a governing body as the staff governor and more recently as an associate governor of a large all-through special school.

She has experience of being a senior leader in two schools and therefore brings many transferable skills to the work of a co-opted governor. Throughout her career Sarah has worked with young people with a range of special educational needs and disabilities and she is passionate about ensuring we have a school system that enables everyone to achieve their best.

Sarah has lived in Woodcote for 11 years and has always been aware of how central to the community the Primary School is.

Join the board.....our governor vacancies

We currently recruiting for a Parent Governor to join our Board.

This is an incredibly rewarding role, and an opportunity to use transferable skills to benefit the school and community.

If you, or somebody you know, might be interested in joining the team, please contact the Chair of Governors on:

chairofgovernors@woodcote.oxon.sch.uk.



Finally...thank you

Governors would like to take this opportunity to thank the staff for the outstanding job they have continued to do providing an exceptional level of provision to the pupils at Woodcote Primary during the 2022/2023 academic year.

We would also like to thank our pupils for continuing to be amazing and of course you, the families and wider community for continuing to support the school.

We also couldn't let Mrs Pearson leave us without a special mention. She has been a central part of the governing team, sitting on both the Standards & Achievement and Communications committees. She has made an outstanding contribution to these committees and the board as a whole and we shall miss her very much. We wish her the best with her future plans and hope she won't be a stranger!

