

Woodcote Primary School

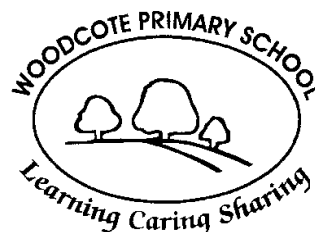
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Governor Newsletter – Summer 2019

Summer Governor Newsletter

Welcome to the latest edition of the governor newsletter, the second of the 2018/19 academic year, which we are (all too quickly) hurtling towards the end of!

In this issue we wanted to focus on several important areas that the governors have been working on in 2018/19, notably school finances and the question of academies. We hope you find this informative.

Overall 2018/19 has proven to be another busy and fruitful year for the school. Following our successful Ofsted inspection last September, our pupils and staff have continued to achieve academically and artistically, whilst also showing their sporting prowess throughout the year.

We wish them all a well-deserved summer break when it arrives in late July!

The newsletter has been prepared by various members of the governing body

Multi-Academy Trusts

We open our summer newsletter with information on an important subject matter to all of us as stakeholders in our school, that of Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs).

As way of background, MATs are groups of schools (often 30+) run on business-like lines, which receive funding directly from the government. At present we receive our government funding via Oxfordshire County Council's education department (OCC).

As we have noted previously, joining a MAT is something that we need to consider as a school. Whilst it is not mandatory, as we are sure many of you know there is pressure from central government for schools to do so.

What happens when a school joins a MAT?

- Its legal status is defined by a contract between the MAT and the department of education.
- School staff are transferred to the MAT.
- The school governors lose their legal status and the governing body may be disbanded.
- There is no legal requirement for a MAT to consult with parents (although many do).

Should Woodcote Primary School join a MAT?

To consider whether to join a MAT, we have set-up a specific governor working group, which includes the school's senior leadership team. This group's primary focus has been to understand how pupil educational

outcomes, the school's staff and the school's finances may be impacted if we joined a MAT.

We have talked to representatives from six MATs, which all claim to offer the prospect of improved pupil and staff outcomes with the impact on school finance being generally neutral.

Some of these claims appear credible but further validation will be required. We have also continued to monitor the option of staying with OCC, in effect the 'do-nothing' option. Although funding constraints over the past few years have impacted on the amount of support OCC can offer schools, continuing with OCC remains a credible option.

What about other schools?

We have also spoken with other primary schools in the Langtree catchment area and, if appropriate, we may be able to cooperate with them regarding possible MAT options. To-date the majority of local primaries have not joined a MAT. Langtree has been an Academy for some time, whilst Chiltern Edge has been directed to join a MAT following poor Ofsted ratings.

What happens next?

The working group will report its recommendations to the school's governing body by the end of 2019 but, in the meantime we will continue to keep school staff and parents updated on progress.

School Budget 2019/2020

The Resources Committee, which encompasses Finance, Buildings and Maintenance, plus Health and Safety, has recently been through the budget process for the financial year 2019/2020, which runs from April to March.

The Governors within this committee have a responsibility to sign off on the budget and, after considerable review, were happy to do so. The budget has now been submitted to Oxfordshire County Council (OCC).

As part of this review, the committee also considers our income over a three-year horizon, the majority of which (90%) is based on the number of pupils attending the school.

However, with the government adjusting the funding formula last year, the result has been a reduction in funding per pupil in Oxfordshire. This is why so many local state schools are focused on attracting pupils, and have started to advertise their schools, perhaps more openly than ever before.

Whilst low class sizes are preferable from a parent perspective, a fall in total pupil numbers has an adverse impact on school funding and potentially what we are able to offer. The members of the Resources Committee are very mindful of this situation and, as such, a major focus point is how to attract additional pupils to the school. Alongside this we are always looking at additional revenue streams that can be tapped into, either through fundraising, grants or other government subsidies.

The school's cost base is also considered in detail. After accounting for major expenditure streams and our running costs there are minimal funds leftover to support school improvements (we do not receive any

funding for premises maintenance from OCC) or extra pupil opportunities. We work extremely hard to make the funds we do have stretch as far as possible – always putting the children first and ensuring we continue to offer the best for our pupils.

How Can You Help?

We are exceptionally proud of Woodcote Primary School and believe we have lots to shout about to both existing and prospective new parents. Our curriculum provides our pupils access to a wide range of learning opportunities, not just within the core curriculum framework but also in non-core subjects such as sport, music, art and drama.

We would like to ensure that many of these additional non-core subjects are maintained well into the future, but this will naturally depend on our financial circumstances.

One way for you as parents to help support the school is by becoming ambassadors in the wider community and sharing what a wonderful school we have here in Woodcote.

Also, any additional income streams we can access are incredibly valuable to the school. Accessing grants and fundraising are vital. If your workplace or a family members' work place offer matched funding for fundraising events we would love to hear from you. This could make a real difference to the school. Also, if you are aware of any grants that we can access, or you have experience in putting bids in for grants we would also be delighted to hear from you.

Thank you for your continued support of Woodcote Primary School, we hope this article helps you to understand just how important that is.

Governing Monitoring Visits

Did you know that governors undertake monitoring visits during school hours and recently helped with the administration of the school SATS exams?

These occasions help provide governors with an opportunity to see school life in action. Observing the children performing their SATS exams ensures these were conducted in accordance with government guidelines, whilst monitoring visits provide an opportunity for governors to monitor aspects of the school development plan (SDP).

Note that a governor monitoring visit is not a formal observation of teaching – we're certainly not qualified to do that, but it does provide an opportunity to see how specific aspects of the school work in practice and to check progress against certain

strategic objectives.

During these visits we primarily:

- Find out more about the school
- Observe that the school is implementing the policies and actions in the SDP
- Learn how these policies work in practice
- Talk with pupils and staff to gather their views on the school

Our findings from these visits are discussed with the full governing body where any recommendations will be agreed. Mrs Hunt will also share any relevant feedback with the teaching staff.

Friends of Woodcote Primary School (FOWPS)

It's been a tremendously busy year for the Friends of Woodcote Primary School (FOWPS). The group, which operates as a fundraising committee made up of parents and staff, who organise and run – with the help of other parents – a variety of events throughout the school year.

Given the ongoing squeeze to the school central budget from the education authorities, these fundraising events are vital to support our finances. In 2018-2019 alone, FOWPS have arranged events for both pupils and parents and raised over £6,000.

Events have included:

- > Christmas Fair (raised £1,870)
- > Quiz Night (raised £1,200)
- > Discos (raised £578)
- > Beer and Gin Festival (raised approx. £2,500)
- > Community Centre Coffee Shops (raised £368)

FOWPS have also run cake sales for each class, with the money raised going directly to those classes. These make approximately £50 each time.

The money raised from these events has contributed to the funding of a number of school facilities and activities including:

- > Refurbishment of the Yr1/Yr 4 outdoor area
- > Subsidy of the coach to Young Voices;
- > Subsidy of annual class trips;
- > Playground markings;



Five masterchefs at work during the Gin and Beer Festival in late May

- > Contributing to the funds being saved towards a new school minibus

The annual FOWPS Summer Fair will be taking place on Friday 28th June, 5:30pm-7:30pm. This is set to be another fun-filled evening with tombolas, traditional stalls, ice creams, a bouncy castle, barbecue and refreshments. FOWPS are likely to need lots of help running stalls, so please look out for sign-up sheets.

On behalf of FOWPS, a huge 'thank you' to those parents who have helped make these events such a success. FOWPS are always looking for additional help so please get in touch with a member of FOWPS, or the school office, if you would like to be involved.

Finally...meet the Governors

In a new feature for our newsletters, we find out a little more about our governors. In this edition we meet Paul Smith, our resident economist who primarily helps the school with the sifting and interpreting of pupil performance data.

Paul hails from Hull and arrived in the world in October 1979 (which, for those good with numbers means he is 40 this year). He moved 'down south' in 2002, finding his way to Woodcote in 2014.

He lives with his wife Anna and children, Adam (10), Isabelle (8) and Olivia (5). Paul notes that he comes sixth in the household after their dog, Barney.

Paul works in Bracknell. His firm recently moved there from Henley and he seems quite unhappy

about this (although he'd never let on about it!)

An avid football fan, Paul strangely supports two teams Hull City and Reading.

Rather than being a whiz with numbers and data, Paul continues to daydream about being a musician and enjoys playing the guitar though notes he is currently 'between bands'.

Amongst his favourite things are chocolate and Tuscany where he and his wife were married in 2008.

Interestingly Paul was once held up in an off licence by a man with a fake gun (we hasten to add not in Woodcote!).