

FROM THE GOVERNING BODY

Welcome back

The summer holidays have flown by in a flash and Autumn is knocking at the door. Hopefully, everybody has managed to take advantage of the unusually sunny weather to have some fun and recharge their batteries over the holidays.

Communication

Over the past year, the governing body has made some changes – for the better, we hope. We have welcomed some new members to the team and have taken steps towards a better-organised and more focused approach in order to make a greater contribution to school improvement.

It also involved parent/carer surveys towards the beginning, and end of the academic year. The results of those surveys were discussed at governing body meetings, and are shared with you later in this newsletter.

We would also like to keep everybody informed of news “*from the governing body*” once each term. It’s important that parents and carers understand what the governing body does and who its members are, so this newsletter represents the beginning of regular communication with you, and we hope you find it informative.

Parent survey May 2016

Thank you to everyone who took part.

52% of surveys were returned, which is 16% less than last November. It was disappointing to see such a drop – if you have any suggestions on how we could improve this in time for the next survey around Christmas time, please let us know.

The feedback was generally very positive.

The wellbeing of children is felt to be good, and most pupils enjoy coming to school.

Communication is perceived to be good, but relatively few people use the school website (www.ashtonceprimary.co.uk) which you may know was completely overhauled last year.

Learning is viewed positively on the whole, but a small number of people would like to see their children – who sometimes say that lessons can be too easy – challenged more. There was also a comment on the relevance of extensive homework projects with long deadlines.

The perception of safety, including online safety, was very encouraging, and the number of people who said they were familiar with the new safeguarding section of the school website climbed to 82% from 48% last November.

Although more people said that they understood the role of school governors and noticed them around the school, this could still be improved.

Of course, there were other issues, but we wanted to give you the headlines. Needless to say, your views form a part of the school’s self-review and feed into important discussions and decisions.

The years ahead...

For some time now, the government agenda has included a commitment to encourage schools to convert to ‘academies’. Of course, governments are known for changing their minds, but it seems likely that conversion will be necessary at some point in the future.

Regardless of what may or may not happen, the school has a duty to research the various options

and be ready with a plan; burying heads in the sand is not a plan.

So, what's an academy? The real difference between a school and an academy is in the way it is funded, overseen and supported; local government no longer plays that role. Instead, schools choose either to create or to join a group of other academies (a 'multi-academy trust'). Academies are still inspected by Ofsted.

As the possibilities become clearer and details materialise, parents/carers and the community will be involved. For the moment, it should be a source of reassurance that the governing body is exploring the options, and that no final commitment will be made without a proper consultation with all concerned.

School improvement

At the beginning of October, the governors will come together with the teachers and teaching assistants for an evening, during which the priorities for improving the school will be discussed and decided.

School improvement priorities relevant for the coming year will take into account the views of the staff, parents/carers, the governing body and the local authority (LEA).

The school improvement plan on the website will be updated to reflect this in due course.

All change!

There have been some changes on the governing body over the past year. We welcomed Nigel Milner and Philippa Key to the team and, since then, have added two more governors.

Sherry Gladwin is an education consultant who brings invaluable experience both in school improvement and as a lead Ofsted inspector for many years. She is dedicating a significant amount of time and effort and is already a key member of the team.

Shaun Harker works for BP, designing commercial premises, focusing on maximising use of limited space. We can see how his vision will come in very handy at Ashton.

Mark O'Callaghan and Helena Lee have both served on the governing body for many years and have sadly decided to step down. We would like to thank them both very much for their dedicated service to the school and its children. There is a vacancy for a new parent governor and an election will be held in the very near future – please have a look at the information which was sent out with the last school newsletter.

We also have a new, very skilled and experienced clerk to the governing body. Information about him, and our governors, is on the school website.

Alex Rowe, who has been chair since September 2015, has very reluctantly decided to step down to make more time for his son, Elliot, who has significant learning difficulties which only became fully apparent last year. He has loved being involved with the school and thanks everybody for their support and wishes.

From the (new) chair

Understandably, Alex has stepped down from the governing board and I (Nigel Milner) have agreed to take his place as chair. I have been a governor for about a year and I'm still learning about what makes an outstanding school and how governors can offer the support and challenge to help achieve this. Fortunately, I will be helped by an experienced team of governors, including Sherry Gladwin, as vice-chair.

We are always interested in hearing from potential new governors; please do get in touch.

Feedback

If you have any feedback or suggestions, please send an e-mail to ashtongovernors@gmail.com. We will be pleased to hear from you.