



Parent Council Meeting

Wednesday 29th January 2025



Present: Laura Jackson, Emma Richards, Claire Bartlett, Emma Welsh, Serena Gahir, Sarah Copeland, Susan Knott, Avtar Sandher, Lucy Stanley, Ali Carr, Diana Nicklass

Apologies: Katie Rudge and Claire Taylor

Chair: Laura Jackson **SMT:** Gemma Thelwell and Robyn Morrey **Minutes:** Claire Mansfield

Robyn Morrey, Assistant Head and Inclusion Manager was introduced to the PC by Gemma Thelwell.

Points raised by Parents:

Letter to Year 5 Parents requesting a deposit of £100 for PGL in Year 6

There was a lot of feedback from parents about this request. Parents felt it was too early for them and the children to be thinking about PGL. What if their child didn't want to go when they got to Year 6. Would the deposit be refundable? Could there be a meeting for parents about PGL to enable parents to make an informed decision? Parents also wanted to have an idea of the over all cost and the amount saved by paying earlier, is it worth it?

GT agreed that there should have been more information and time for parents. Information about the merits of paying the deposit in advance should have been more detailed. She will check with the finance team and enquire about the deadline on 1st February. She assured parents that the letter was sent with good intentions to secure an early bird rate but acknowledged this time had missed the mark. Year 5 parents will be sent more information.

There was some discussion around other schools in the area going at different times during Year 6 which may have a positive impact on the cost. These schools have not been particularly fortunate with the weather. Summer costs more. Dorridge has traditionally gone at the end of Year 6 as a right of passage and celebrations which marks the end of KS2 and moving on for the children. PC were happy that the children were also that little bit older.

Homework

There still appears to be differing opinion among parents about homework being set during the week. This is a regular point raised during PC meetings. Some parents prefer to have the weekend to support their child with homework. Some homework set is not appropriate or achievable. Too much homework in Year 2. Mathletics appears to present differently according to the device or the operating system.

SMT felt that homework was for week nights and weekends were for family time and switch off. In an attempt to cater for all it was suggested by PC that homework runs from Monday to Thursday or Tuesday to Friday, however, that would not allow time for teachers to mark the books and set homework for the next week. KS1 homework is optional – not an expectation, parents/children not expected to spend more than 10 minutes on a single piece of homework. Parents were encouraged to feedback to their teacher about their child's ability to do the homework if it was something they insisted they hadn't covered in school. Additionally, a child who is struggling may need different homework set or additional help in school. PC weren't always convinced that children had previously been taught things that were set as homework.

KS2 Year Leaders wrote to parents this week reminding them of the Homework Policy and expectations. There were some concerns that a lot of children have not been doing their homework. Setting homework was preparing children for secondary when, in Year 7, there is an expectation to manage different subjects and deadlines. Year Leads in Year 5&6 catch up with children who haven't completed homework during Friday break. Missed deadlines mean behaviour points at Arden. Some homework is set with a 3 day deadline.

Parent Council suggested that because of the way Mathletics is marked online, could that be left for the weekend?

It was appreciated by all that it's not always logistically easy to complete homework during the week with working parents, clubs and tired children. If children only have time to do one thing, make reading the priority.

SMT will consider and feedback.

School Meals

A point about variety of dishes was raised. Generally, it appears to parents that chicken bites, sausages rolls and panini (which is essentially a sandwich) appeared a lot. There was very little variation on the veggie option with quorn featuring heavily. There was a request for a Halal option.

The menu is a 3 week rotation. It is well balanced and the portion sizes are controlled. Options are supplemented. KS2 have a salad bar, fruit, bread and butter. KS1 can add to their meals with cucumber, carrot sticks, apple and bread and butter. Calendar events are also marked with a special lunch being offered, for example, the kitchen served Veggie Noodles and Tempura Chicken for Lunar New Year.

PC discussed that some parents would not wish for their child to be served Halal food. Preparation requires different equipment. Statistically 3.7% of our children are Muslim. Huge cost implications for a small percentage of children.

Historically, introducing too much variety leads to a large amount of food wasted and hungry children.

PC raised concerns from parents about the amount of sugar in desserts. These are sweetened with fruit puree and vegetable such as beetroot and contain much less sugar than something shop bought or baked at home. Because they are freshly baked and eaten immediately there is very little sugar and no preservatives added.

Time to drink in school?

Children have access to their water bottles in the classroom. Teacher set the rules and routines for drinking during lessons and children are aware of this. Some allow the children to have their bottles on the table or they can leave their desk to take a drink from where their bottles are kept. This could be by the sink in the classroom. Morning break allows 20 minutes for children to drink and eat a snack. Lunchtime offers water in jugs on the tables and children are permitted to take their water bottles with them outside during breaks and PE. Milk is an option for all and EYFS children are encouraged to be independent and choose themselves when they want to sit at the snack table with friends to eat a piece of fruit and have a drink. KS1 children are offered a drink of milk or water just before they go outside for break and can take their fruit with them. KS2 children have access to tuck and milk in the KS2 hall and can take a drink from their water bottle during morning break. Children are reminded by their teachers at key points throughout the day to take a drink. EYFS and KS1 children have access to water fountains in school.

A request came from a parent for school to consider installing a water filtration system in school but the initial and ongoing cost of this to supply 700 children would be beyond what school could support.

Site Security

Parents are concerned about the monitoring of school gates during the day and after school. Gates are open to allow parents in for school drop off and pick up and remain open for parents to pick up from After School Clubs and Darby's until 6pm. Staff monitor four cameras in both offices from 8am-4.30pm. As an extra precaution the black gate to the KS1 playground is secured with a padlock during the day and Nursery garden is gated with an extra lock.

School plans several Fire and Lockdown drills for staff and children throughout the year at differing times of day.

Fire and Lockdown alarms have different bell sounds and all are aware of procedure for both. School has regular visits from our Compliance Manager who observes both drills. A recent Safeguarding Audit confirmed all required procedures are in place and adhered to. School may consider stipulating that parents are not permitted to come on to the school grounds with forgotten items during the school day to reduce traffic through the gates.

Spaces in Darby's

School is constantly juggling space in Darby's. The demand is high. Darby's have recruited new staff to allow for more children to attend within required ratios. Darby's Manager is constantly reassessing the situation.

Videos and Visitors

Termly Newsletter and Weekly News highlight dates of visitors, events and curriculum in school. If parents think a particular subject or visitor may cause their child distress they are to contact their teacher for more information.

Smartphone Update

Alderbrook School held a Smartphone Free debate this week and invited all who were interested to attend. PC discussed the need for children to have a smartphone and felt that it wasn't necessarily the phone but the Apps that were accessed on them. Apps suitable for children over 14 years of age are being accessed by Primary age children. Parents and Staff who attended the meeting were educated about the tech and images that children are exposed to. Boys tend to use theirs for gaming and

messaging whereas girls use TIKTOK and Instagram which exposes them to the dangers of comparisons. The Police were present and talked about criminality.

School has requested a copy of the presentation and will share the information to support parents in making informed decisions for their children. SMT will collaborate with Arden and the rest of the Trust. The key message was to create a Smartphone free school. Our current policy states only Year 5&6 children are permitted to bring a phone to school in line with the walking to and from school independently policy. It requires children in Year 5&6 to leave their phones in a tray secured in their classroom during school hours.

Children without a phone can feel isolated. The idea is for Parents to come together and agreed can we all support it. The aim is to information share. Parents present were willing to be part of a working partnership. It doesn't necessarily need to be a blanket ban, suggestions to reduce screen time, no bedrooms, checking what they have access to etc. is a good starting point as parental controls can be easily overridden. Secondary are allowed to have their phones, children rely on their phones for lesson and homework timetables.

Wake up Wednesday is a regular message sent to all via DOJO by SMT and is well received by parents. SMT will be writing to parents before half term with more info.

Positive Feedback

December Checklist created by VJ was a real success for all

The children loved the KS1 'Everest Expedition'

Reception parents are amazed by the progress in reading in just over one term – thank you.

MFL Opportunity for a future Trip to France for Year 6 children – French Friendships

Year 3&4 parents have been sent a presentation and survey about the possibility of a French Trip in Year 6. One proposal is for a trip to PGL in Year 5 with a 3 day trip to France in Year 6. Just over half of the parents responded to the survey. The general consensus was that parents would like more information before we progress. Miss Gee will be in touch with more information.

Communication - Is always a hot topic!

SMT has had some feedback from a parent about messages to the Parents Council and was concerned that an unbiased view may not always be presented during the meeting. On the flip side, Parent Council Representatives and SMT discussed that the points sent to be raised during the meeting are increasingly negative and not constructive.

In an attempt to remedy this, parents will be asked to send the points they wish to make via email to an inbox specifically created for Parent Council s22parentcouncil@dorridge.solihull.sch.uk

Further to this, SMT made a plea to Parent Council. During the weekly meeting with the Leadership Team there was some concern about the correspondence coming from parents via Class Dojo and into the school office. It was felt that parents needed a reminder about Dojo etiquette. There as been an increase in traffic from parents via Dojo. Parents need to be encouraged to think about the content, timing and tone of their message before they send it.

Teachers are passionate about doing what's right for our children. Parents need to be reminded that teachers are professionals doing a job to the absolute best of their ability at all times. Teachers are often faced with negative messages that have been sent late at night. The school office endeavours to include all information needed via email or the Weekly News. Often parents don't read what is sent before responding swiftly. Dorridge prides itself on our open door policy and values parental feedback, however, not to the detriment of staff wellbeing. Mrs Ashe and Mr Fortune, Chair of Governors, will be writing to parents about this matter.

Next Meeting: Thursday 6th March 2025 1.30pm in the Hub.