

Brookland Schools' Governing Body Newsletter April 2011

Chair of Governors: Sara Gibbins



Dear Parent/Carer

As the second term draws to an end we are writing to you to keep you informed on some of the recent work of your Governing Body. For an overview on our role please go to either www.brooklandinfant.co.uk and click on 'About Us', then 'Meet the Governors' or www.brooklandjuniorschool.co.uk and click on 'Our Community', then 'Meet the Governors', then 'Role of the Governing Body'.

New Junior School Parent Governor

We were very sorry to lose Hilary Solomon from the Governing Body. She was a parent of children at the school for 9 years and an active parent governor, particularly in her role as SEN link governor, for 8 years. Her valuable contribution has been much appreciated. Many of you voted in the recent Junior School parent governor election as a result of which we have been joined by Mark Leibling. Mark has a child in year one and a child in year four and can often be found in the playground at drop off and pick up.

You will find updated photo posters of our Governing Body in the playground noticeboards. Some of you will have taken the opportunity to speak to us at the recent E-safety meeting in the Junior School. Feel free to approach us in the playground at any time if there is something you particularly wish to discuss or we can be contacted via one of the school offices. Your child's teacher and the Head Teachers are also always happy to speak to you and hear your thoughts and they should be your first point of contact in most circumstances.

Improving Access

Over the last few months considerable work has been undertaken to improve access to the school. That work has now been completed and we thank you for your patience whilst it was in progress.

School Travel Plans

As you know, we have been engaging with local residents to understand and attempt to find solutions to address concerns about traffic outside the school. You will have received a copy of a letter that was sent to local residents outlining the main areas that we hope to address and which have been included in an addendum to the 2010 School Travel Plan. You may have noticed the speed bumps and the white line at the foot of the driveway which, it is felt, have already had a positive impact in encouraging vehicles to drive more slowly and carefully.

We are now looking at the 2011 School Travel Plans and your children will have answered surveys to help inform that process. In the Infant School you will be asked as

a parent/carer to fill in a questionnaire on this subject; the Junior School carried out this consultation process earlier. Your support in our initiatives for encouraging more children to walk at least part of the way to school, which will be a significant factor in improving the traffic situation, is greatly appreciated.

Academy Status

You may be aware that the Government has put in place legislation that allows schools to take Academy Status. Becoming an academy gives a school greater freedom from the Local Authority but also imposes additional responsibilities. We are currently of the view that the benefits are not sufficient to our schools for them to take this significant step but we are carefully monitoring the situation. As more schools choose to become academies the level of support Barnet is able to provide may diminish making a reassessment of the situation necessary. At this stage, only one Barnet Primary School, Independent Jewish Day School, has started the process of becoming an academy; three Barnet Secondary Schools have already secured academy status whilst another seven are in the process of doing so.

Infant school building development

As you will be aware, although the school secured planning permission for an extension to the building and enhancement of our nursery facility, the final costings came in well above budget. Meetings with the relevant professionals to find an alternative, less costly, scheme are ongoing, overseen by the premises committee and the finance committee. We will, of course, keep you informed.

Absences

In spite of requests by the schools, and by ourselves in our last newsletter, a number of parents are continuing to remove their children from school during term time, for unacceptable reasons such as holidays. This disrupts both the child's education and, at times, their friendships. Moreover, it suggests a lack of appreciation of the time and effort teachers dedicate to delivering a high level of education to our children.

In addition, the high level of absences in the Infant School may have a significant impact on the judgments that are made at its next OFSTED inspection, which would be a very disappointing outcome for all. Please help us to maintain the high rating of which we are all proud by not taking any unavoidable term time days off.

School Development

The governors and all the school staff have been working hard on setting the school priorities for the coming year. The school budgets have also recently been set.

Secondary school transfer

Together with governors from three other local primary schools (Garden Suburb, Holy Trinity and Martins), we have continued to be active in seeking to find a resolution to the concerns that many of you have expressed to us about the limited options open to your children when transferring to secondary school.

In February governors from the four local primary schools (including Brookland) met with the Head Teacher, Chair and Vice Chair of Governors of Christ's College School to discuss the school's decision to remain as a single-sex school.

The governors at Christ's College have decided to apply for Academy status. For more information please go to the Christ's College website.

In March the governor group met with Martin Lavelle, the Head Teacher at Whitefield, to learn more about the changes that have been made since the school took Trust Status in 2009 and as it moves towards Academy Status in 2011. The meeting was very interesting and we were enormously impressed with what we heard and observed whilst we were there, in particular the positive ethos of the school, the number of children aiming towards the very top academic grades, the close monitoring of each child's progress in all areas of the curriculum, the way the sports specialism is used to encourage a healthy lifestyle in all its pupils, the availability of subsidised extra curricular activities and the pastoral care. Mr Lavelle subsequently arranged a meeting at Avenue House, inviting all parents of children in Years 5 and 6 to meet with him to hear about the school for themselves. He is keen to assist any parents who would like to see the school for themselves and will arrange an individual tour accompanied by either himself or one of his senior staff on request; please contact their school office (020 8455 4114) to arrange a time.

Meanwhile we are re-engaging with the Local Authority to see if other options can be found.