

SPEEN CHURCH OF ENGLAND SCHOOL

Flowers Bottom Lane, Speen,
Princes Risborough, Bucks, HP27 0SX
Tel/Fax: 01494 488321
Website: www.speen-cofe.bucks.sch.uk
E-mail: office@speen-cofe.bucks.sch.uk
governors@speen-cofe.bucks.sch.uk



December 2016

Dear Parents and Carers,

As we come towards the end of another busy term, thank you to all the parents who attended the September Governor and PTA meeting, the coffee morning in November, who have helped the School in all the many ways that we greatly appreciate, or who completed the recent parent survey. These provide us with valuable opportunities to meet and communicate with you and get feedback on what we are doing well and what we can do differently. I am taking this opportunity of my regular letter to provide an initial response on matters raised, and to suggest the best means for you to gain more information where you feel this necessary.

Independent arrival at school.

Some parents who have previously escorted their child into the School have queried this system, which has not up to now been the firm requirement for all children at our School. Encouraging children to arrive independently, as practised in the majority of infant and junior schools, has both behavioural and emotional benefits. It is the School's duty to support children in their personal and emotional development, and increased independence in the formal school setting is an important element of this in the vital first years of education. Recent feedback from our Year R parents confirms that they and their children enjoy this independence. In practical terms, you are no doubt aware, there is a need to reduce congestion in the cloakrooms in the morning (which also, of course, provides a calmer atmosphere in which children are better able to settle and prepare for the school day ahead). We would like to emphasise that the new morning arrangement does not affect the School's long-standing open door policy for any specific enquiry related to your child, which most definitely remains. Teachers are available at the end of the school day or by appointment at other times to suit.

Measuring attainment.

Since September 2015 the new National Curriculum has been introduced across all primary schools with an entirely different descriptive model of progress measurement, which has presented significant challenges for teachers throughout the country, both in terms of tracking progress and explaining clearly to parents the attainments of their children. In short, when pupils move from Foundation Stage to Year 1 their progress through the curriculum for English, Maths and Science is measured by a specific set of criteria within these headings:

- Working towards the expected standard
- Working at the expected standard
- Working at greater depth within the expected standard

Further details of the criteria can be found here on the government's website where you can access documents that describe the criteria and how they are used for each of the three subject areas:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-curriculum#curriculum-by-key-stages>

Speen School's teaching staff have spent a great deal of effort to work through the consequences of the Government's major change for what your children learn and how this is assessed. The options to track and report on progress have been evaluated and professional judgement has been used to identify how best to do this. Details of your child's achievements have been discussed at the recent parent consultations and if staff have an identifiable concern about a particular child's level of progress this will be raised with parents and interventions to address it developed and put in place.

The School continues to review the many new and different systems on offer to track attainment, and if staff consider that an alternative method would be best for this School and its children the Governors will consider a recommendation to make a change. Currently, we believe the existing system remains the best available. Any system of course needs to be proven to be effective in improving outcomes for children, which is always the priority, affordable for the School and not too time-consuming for overstretched staff.

Deployment of staff.

The school currently is privileged to have the highest ratio of staff to pupils in our recent memory (1:8); this figure is comparable to, or in some cases exceeds, that of local independent schools. Our very high teaching staff/pupil ratio is achieved with just one full time Headteacher, two part time Class Teachers, three part time Teaching Assistants and one full time Teaching Assistant. With ever-increasing pressures on the school budget, Governors support Mrs Nayna in using her vast experience to deploy teaching staff in the most effective configurations to ensure the best learning outcomes for all children. The School is devoting more resources than ever before directly to provision of, and support for, teaching for your children; and Mrs Nayna herself is teaching for three days a week (more than for many years and considerably more than official guidelines for a Head Teacher, considering the leadership and administrative duties that are part of the role).

In Year R this year Mrs Hayman is teaching a class of 15, a small cohort considering the government maximum (and norm in most state schools) is 30. The Teaching Assistant recruited to assist Year R last year when funds were more readily available is currently deployed primarily to provide dedicated care for children with additional needs. Historically this class has only had one teacher, with additional teaching assistants deployed only when circumstances dictated or, in particular, if funding allowed and it was where additional classroom resources were most required. When the deployment of staff for this year was discussed between Mrs Nayna and Governors we were in strong agreement that the arrangement that has been put in place is well suited to the current Early Years and Foundation Stage. However, the format is reviewed on an ongoing basis and we will keep you aware of changes in any staff deployment.

For Years 1 and 2 (Key Stage 1) Mrs Lidington is the Lead for delivering the curriculum, with an increased team of 3 part time teaching assistants as support to allow differentiated learning. This again has historically been a commonplace and successful class configuration, when indicated as the right approach given pupil numbers and the range of abilities. They are taught individually in small and large groups, year groups or as a whole class according to the subject and children's needs. Personal targets are set and teaching interventions focused on progression towards those targets. It is certainly a benefit of a small school to be able to focus on each child and their needs, tracking their progress and attainment very closely.

How can parents support teaching in the School?

Parents have asked how they may help their child develop their learning at home to support the curriculum. You have received details of how to log on the Active learn maths homework and Purple Mash cross-curricular learning. English homework is sent home weekly and daily home reading practice is essential for good progress to be made. Each term the teachers send home information about topics being covered and each week there is a very brief resume in Mrs Moore's Monday reminders in addition to a Big Question for parents to discuss with their children in order to develop

their thinking skills. The staff's own experience and a large body of educational research data show that where parents find time to help their children with homework it has a positive impact on learning outcomes.

Parents in Year 1 and 2 are encouraged to use the reading logs as a means of communicating any observations about their child and their learning. Staff welcome this and find it useful, so please do continue and prompt your child to show the teacher any comments you make. If you feel it appropriate, please do ask for a follow-up meeting to allow clarification and to ensure agreement on how best you can support your child's learning at home. I urge you to use such meetings to make your Class Teacher or the Headteacher aware of any questions you may have: all the staff are committed to providing answers and/or additional detail so that you understand the teaching strategies being used and to help you as parents to play your part in your child's education.

Wider parent briefings.

With maintaining good communication in mind, the School will host another Parent Forum on 26th January. This will focus on Maths, including advice on how you can help at home. Please let Mrs Nayna know if there is another subject that you have questions about and we will do our best to include it, or keep a note of it for a future meeting. There will also be a short presentation on the very important topic of Attendance and how it affects your child's future learning. The meeting will follow a similar format to last year's on the new curriculum and how the School addressed its new requirements.

Most schools held similar meetings on the new curriculum because it was such a big change for parents, teachers and children, and your feedback indicated that our meeting was well received and was informative. Now that the new curriculum is embedded we did not think it appropriate to repeat the same meeting content this year, but in response to parents' concerns and desire for better understanding of how their children are taught we intend in future to hold meetings at the beginning of the Autumn Term to provide an overview of the curriculum for the year ahead. There will be one session for Year R parents, and one for Year 1 and 2 parents. We hope this will provide good context for you, and will help to allay any initial uncertainties or concerns about what and how your children will be taught but you are, of course, always welcome to gain further understanding by speaking directly to class teachers. We anticipate that the meetings right at the start of the school year will also be an opportunity to get to know your child's teacher and obtain important information on how to support your child's learning, which will be particularly important for new starters and children moving between class teachers.

Parent survey.

I started this letter by saying how much the School values your feedback, and the parent survey is a very important channel for you to have your say (not least for Governors, most of whom do not see you as regularly as School staff do). We analyse and report the survey findings to help decide on the immediate actions and strategic priorities that the School should implement: results from this year's survey are very timely as the Governing Body has been working a updated three-year School Development Plan this term. I am sure you will understand, however, that it is difficult for Governors to evaluate the importance of an issue to parents as a whole, and to prioritise resources to address opinions expressed by parents, if only a very small number of surveys have mentioned it. This is why I want to once again encourage those of you who have not returned the survey forms (unfortunately still a large majority) to please try to find the few minutes it needs to do so. The last parent survey had a return rate of over 90%, which was fantastic and gave Governors the confidence that we had a good understanding and appreciation of parents' views and concerns; the response to the current parent survey is only 25% and we have to be more cautious to commit to actions that take up staff time and burn our scarce budget when we do not know what the "silent majority" of parents think. Your contribution as stakeholders is an important part of Speen School's future.

And so this busy term is rapidly drawing to a close. We have recently had the very successful Christmas Fair, so expertly organised by our wonderful PTA whom we thank for their support and various fundraising efforts. In a few days we have the Christmas play performances, with this year's production promising to be a wonderful expression of talent and energy from our pupils. Last, there will be the end of term Nativity Service. The staff put in a great deal of extra effort at this time of year to make these events possible, and their hard work and creative endeavours whilst they are juggling their other teaching duties manage to deliver such memorable events for children, parents and grandparents, for which we are all extremely grateful.

Finally, a note of thanks goes to Mrs Brewer who has been working with Year R and Year 1 this half term as teaching cover in Mrs Hayman's temporary absence. It has been very good to have her back in the School and we are extremely thankful for her help. Mrs Hayman will definitely be back for the start of term in January, and I hear rumours that we may even see her in School before Christmas.

On behalf of your Governing Body, I wish you and your families a very happy and peaceful Christmas, and the very best for 2017.

Yours faithfully,

Eamonn Barrett
Chair of Speen C of E School Governors