

19 April 2016 Surlingham Parish Council Meeting – Annual Parish Council Meeting

Evelyn Hicks – Chair of Governors

Thank you for the opportunity to report to you the activities of the school over the past year and to update you on progress.

As an overview - I think it would be fair to say this has been a year of two halves:

- The first half was about getting action plans and processes in place to respond to our Ofsted Report. This was an unsettling time where policies were being embedded and the focus was on ensuring that we were doing everything possible to raise standards. Due to the determination of staff, parents, and governors, standards were significantly better in the SATS in the summer and you can read the details in a previous report that I gave to the Parish Council.
- The second half was about stabilising the leadership position and regaining the confidence of the community. I believe that we have been successful in doing this although we still have more to do. In this second half of the year, the schools have been doing well and are back on track to be good and better in our next inspection.

Activities this year

I'm hoping that you have had more information about what the children have been doing through 'surlingham.org', 'Eleven Says' and the local press. There have been too many activities to mention them all here, although I will mention a few to give you a flavour:

- The world war 1 project that led to an exceptional Christmas performance, written and performed by children, telling the story of the Christmas truce in 1914. Performed beautifully and such a moving story - there was not a dry eye in the house.
- The pantomime trip –thoroughly enjoyed by the children, who behaved impeccably.
- Learning about Buddhist customs during their work on China by visiting Padmaloka, the Buddhist Retreat Centre in the village.
- Continuing work with 'Wheatfen' where children learned about the Stone Age through forest school activities.
- Our children were commended by judges at the Norfolk Music Festival in St Andrews Hall for their performance and good attitudes.
- Possibly my favourite – judging scones that the children had designed and made for a 'bake-off'.

There have been many exciting activities where children have been learning in the community and in each case they were welcomed, they were engaged and a real credit to the schools. You, as a community, have every reason to be proud of your children.

Our staff also deserve recognition. In addition to their normal heavy workload, they have been committed to embedding the marking and feedback policy, so that children know how to improve their work, which is a major feature of our action plans. Governors have worked with the senior leadership through the year to monitor progress. I can report to you that this hard work and dedication of staff is paying off in terms of the progress the children are making.

We could not have made such improvements without the support of our parents and friends of the schools. In our recent survey of parent views, our parents said:

"My son's teacher knows him inside out and he enjoys his learning."

"I was impressed with how my concern was handled and revisited at parents evening detailing what measures had been put in place, the benefits, and how it was working."

"Thank you once again for offering parents the opportunity to provide feedback and suggestions. I do value the work of the governors and thank you for the time that you all devote to improving our school."

"Our children seem to have made great progress so far this term. In particular, our eldest, whose attitude to learning is considerably more positive; he is far more focused and is really proud of his achievements.

Of-course there are challenges that we still face

1. I'm sure that everyone is now aware that we have a resolution to Mrs Murphy's position. Mrs Murphy has stepped down as Headteacher, to spend more time with family and to explore new challenges and would like to thank everyone for their help, support and good times. We wish her well. Mr Burbage, who has been standing in for Mrs Murphy, will now return day to day responsibilities to our County Headteacher Mr John Marshall-Grint to support us through the next stage of our journey.
2. The Governing Body is therefore looking to appoint a Headteacher for September. This is a challenge because, once again, the political landscape has changed with the government's recent white paper insisting that every school become an academy. It's an added consideration for any applicant wanting to become a Headteacher.
3. In addition, the size of each school is a concern for the Governing Body (and for potential applicants). Even together as a federation we are below Norfolk's and the government's optimum number of children. So the challenge will be to navigate a steady course through the next few months and year so that we can adapt to changing circumstances. Something we have become very good at.
4. Our most immediate challenge is to ensure that the new interim assessment framework, which the government introduced for this year only, is understood not only by our teachers, but also by our community. It is significantly different to what was in place before. The exemplification materials have only recently been released by the government and moderation is arranged to ensure that we can get up to speed quickly with all the changes. This is a national issue facing every primary school in the country. We are doing everything within our power to meet the challenge.
5. It is important to us that our community acknowledges all the good work that has been done locally and that it is slow to judge us harshly for things beyond our control. The last challenge we face, that I would like to mention here, is to ensure that we work well with a Parish Council that is supportive, encouraging and proactive in promoting the schools to local families. I would welcome a member of the parish council to consider becoming a governor. We need your support and look forward to working with you in the coming year.