



July 2016

Welcome to what we hope will be the first of a series of regular updates following forums held between parents, governors and school staff to discuss the progress and performance of the school and its pupils.

We should be clear from the outset that the intention from these meetings is to improve communication between the school and parents. We also hope to look at and find solutions to some of the issues parents find or to feedback positive feelings to the school and staff. We should be clear from the outset that specific or personal issues will not be addressed through these forums nor will we be able to discuss ongoing complaints or matters being looked into but we may be able to help point parents in the right direction if the issue raised requires further or more detailed investigation. We hope that these meetings will lead to positive improvements and we will try to feedback information or updates where possible or appropriate. It may not always be the answer or outcome that you hope for but we will listen and try to find the answers to your questions.

The first forum was held on Friday 1st July and was attended by Mr Ian Miles & Mr Jonathon Jankowski (Governors), Mrs Debbie Biggenden (Executive Principal) and a number of parents. As this was the first such opportunity to have such discussions it covered a lot of ground and we hope that we can cover some of it in this update. This is to help ensure we keep all parents involved in the schools progress and can get feedback and comments from those unable to attend.

The meeting started with Mrs Biggenden outlining the structure of the schools governance, there seemed some confusion as to how the Trust and Cluster was organised and managed. Oaks is an LAT primary academy within the Maidstone cluster, it has its own Development Group which meet to discuss matters pertaining the school and this board feeds into the main Academy Board for the Cluster who oversee the management and leadership of the academies within the cluster. While there is a great deal of shared ideas and discussions on best practice each academy is able to represent their individual views through the Chair of each Development Group.

Uniform, it was discussed that the issues faced using Tesco could not have been foreseen and they as a supplier let down the academy and parents very badly. Once the extent of the difficulties faced by the parents in getting uniform was identified the academy acted to support parents who were unable to get the correct uniform. A new supplier has been sourced and initial feedback is good, if you have a question regarding sizing it may be possible to speak to the school to check sizes before ordering; however one of the parents present stated that if you contact the suppliers directly they will help with sizing charts and any other information. Although it is important for all pupils to wear the correct uniform the academy recognises that it may be necessary for it to be replaced as children grow out of existing uniform. Any new uniform will be ordered through our new suppliers.

Communication between parents and teachers was discussed and the school will look at possible ways to explore additional options for further improvements. This will provide parents with more opportunities to give and receive feedback. It must be remembered that teachers are very busy and do try their best to pass on important information but on occasions this does not happen. It is requested that at home time when the teachers are sending the children to their parents/guardians that if you wish to discuss anything you wait until all pupils in the class are dismissed or the teacher approaches you. This is to ensure that the teachers focus is on making sure the pupils get sent home safely. It is also possible for you to request a meeting with a teacher and they are always more than happy to discuss matters with parents.

Communication of events is an ongoing issue which the academy is aware of. It does make every effort to ensure that as much notice is given however we do acknowledge that this is on occasions not as much as some parents would like or need. We will look at ways we can improve the calendar and notification of events to see if we can make sure parents have plenty of notice in future. The academy will also work with Friends of Oaks to coordinate different events as often parents think that PTA events are managed directly by the academy.

It was suggested that parents do recognise that the academy listens to our parents we need to further improve the feedback the academy provides. Both Governors and Mrs Biggenden assured parents that all issues risen by parents do get passed on to the relevant people including the Governors however felt this was a really valid point. As a result we will be looking into ways of ensuring the feedback is given to individual parents or parents as a whole when issues have been highlighted.

The use of Contact Books also came up as a possible way forward. There were mixed views on this but again another important point was made by a parent stating that this would require a teacher to check up to 30 books a day and she would rather have the teachers time concentrating on the child and their learning. This supports the academy's view however Mrs Biggenden will take this back to staff to discuss before any decision is made.

Water Policy; The school has a water only policy for drinks and requests that parents only send water bottles containing this into school. Parents questioned why the policy is enforced so strictly, this is because in the past where the school has not done so parents have sent children in with unsuitable drinks (including Energy drinks) and this can have a detrimental effect on the child's health and learning abilities. This is the same reason that the school asks that chocolate and other snacks are not included in packed lunches. The academy has extended Healthy Lifestyles status and although we do host events that may consider 'unhealthy' options such as special day tuck shops it is always checked with Healthy Schools before going ahead. This policy will not be reviewed or changed as it is in the best interests of the pupils.

Parking outside the pedestrian entrance at the junction of Mangravet Avenue and Sutton Road. This is an ongoing issue that the school has raised with parents on numerous occasions and in a number of ways. Parents feel that other parents who park on the double yellow lines or near to the crossing point outside the school gate are endangering the pupils of the school. There have been a number of near misses and we are fortunate given the increase in traffic in that area, as well as the blind bend leading from the Park Wood side of the junction, that we have not had an incident where a child has been hurt. We have looked at and contacted a number of people for help and support with this issue but there does seem to be a number of parents that still feel that parking in this area is an ok thing to do. Please be aware that by stopping or leaving your vehicle in this area could potentially put a child in danger. We will revisit this issue with Kent Police and their Road Safety Team and include the pupils in devising a campaign to highlight this issue as it in their interests that we stop people from parking here. There is always plenty of space available further along Mangravet Avenue or Oak Trees Avenue where you can park to drop off or pick up your child. If you have a specific reason that you need to park close to the school then please contact the academy who may be able to make suitable alternative arrangements.

Oaks has come a very long way in the past few years and now has almost filled its school roll. With this the challenges of dealing with an increased number of pupils and parents whilst operating with the same number of staff have also grown. The academy does all it can to ensure your child receives the best possible education in the safest and most encouraging environment. We will continue to listen to parents and offer opportunities to provide your feedback.

Ian Miles
Parent Governor

Mrs D A Biggenden
School Representative