



5th November 2015

Dear Parent / Carer

Governing Body Update

Time flies when you're having fun! It certainly seems to at Oswald Road, as I can't believe we are already halfway to Christmas. It has been a great start to the new school year and, judging from all the excited noises I hear, the children are really enjoying themselves at school. It seems that every time I come into school at the moment there is a steel-pan lesson going on. It sounds fantastic, but I think Mrs Howard might regret letting them practise next door to her office!

As well as the steel-pans, there are several other new initiatives this year, including: forest school type activities for Year 3, Commando Joe's and a series of listening events, parent focus groups and parent forums. The governors are keen for the school to try new approaches to education, even if they might seem unusual at first.

As with any initiative, the school and governors discuss the pros and cons before they are approved. The school will assess their impact over time and review this with the governing body. Our main priorities remain safeguarding, to deliver outstanding pastoral care and be a champion for inclusive education. We should all be very proud of being part of a school which celebrates the uniqueness of our children and strives to help all our children learn within a mainstream environment. The governing body continues to challenge the school to cement and build on the good standards of teaching and learning and outstanding results that have been achieved during the past few years.

There have been a number of changes within the governing body itself, with last year's Chair and Vice-Chair both having concluded their tenure. On behalf of the school and Governing Body, I would like to thank them both for their commitment to improving the school over many years, and wish them the best of luck in their new professional roles. During the summer term, we undertook a review of the governing body through an independent national leader of governors. The review highlighted a number of challenges facing the governing body, which we are now addressing as a priority. These included governor training and support, communications and confidentiality, and handling of complaints. The governing body has put together a comprehensive action plan to address each point. A copy of the independent review and action plan is available in the governor newsletters section of the school website. Recent changes to school governance place a greater emphasis on independence and skills to ensure that governors are able to robustly challenge as well as support the school. This will form a key part of governor recruitment across all vacancies. We will be writing to you later this term to seek volunteers to fill a parent governor vacancy.

Looking ahead to the rest of this year, there are several important strategic priorities for the governing body. The government is preparing a new education bill which will apply only to local authority



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maintained schools such as Oswald Road. This is likely to add to the current powers, with schools rated as "inadequate" being automatically converted to academies, and a new definition of "coasting" formally added to the Ofsted categories of schools. The indications are that "coasting" schools will cover those which seem to be performing well on the surface but are not achieving the expected outcomes for their students. Under the current regulations, we are very confident that change would not be forced upon us; however, proposed changes to the way student progress is assessed could lead to many maintained schools falling under this new categorisation of "coasting".

The governing body is responsible for defining the strategic direction for the school and we feel that we have insufficient information about the different options and whether any of these might benefit our school. We are therefore about to commence a fact-finding activity, which will study and analyse the changes that similar schools have made during the past few years. It seems probable that all local authority maintained schools will come under pressure to adapt and change during the next few years. There are various different options for schools (of which becoming an academy is just one of many).

During the year, the governing body will review these different models and determine whether any of these match the ethos and vision of Oswald Road. One reason for bringing this to everyone's attention is to allay concerns that any decision (if and when a decision is taken) will be made without full consultation with staff, parents, carers, students and governors. We understand that the issues surrounding academy schools, in particular, are a concern for many people, and undertake that this process will be carried out in an open, fair and sensitive manner, setting aside any individual views. The governing body has no predisposition to any particular option and the default position is for the school to remain under local authority maintenance. If, at any stage, the governing body becomes convinced that a different model (other than being local authority maintained) is the best choice for Oswald Road, we will clearly set out the reasons at that time as part of a full consultation with the school community. Please be assured that any recommendation made by the governing body would be based on protecting the ethos of our school that we all value.

Last but not least, the governing body wants to hear from you! We are carrying out a survey of all parents/carers. This explores a range of topics and is also your chance to provide feedback. We plan to use the feedback as part of our planning for the next school improvement plan, which will come into effect in April 2016. A link for the survey can also be found in the governor newsletters section of the school website and will also be sent out by email, but the school can also provide a paper copy if you prefer. The school will also be holding a Parent Focus Group, prior to writing our School Improvement Plan, where we will be inviting you in to share ideas.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Price
Chair of Governors



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