

Parent Forum

Spring Term 2023

Staff Present

Deborah Howard- Headteacher

Ellie Linton- Communications & Marketing Manager

Format

At the start of the forum we asked parents to write answers to the following questions on post-it notes and put them on big pieces of paper:

What do you want to share?

What do you want to ask/raise?

What's going well/highlights?

The answers that parents submitted were then used to structure the discussion at the forum. Some parents emailed their discussion points in advance as they were unable to attend the meeting. These were all raised and noted during the forum.

We also had a separate piece of paper called the 'carpark', which parents could add post-it notes to throughout the forum so that these items could be addressed at the end of the meeting.

What's going well/highlights

"Generally, school is doing amazing. The energy is fantastic!"

"There was a lovely atmosphere at the PTA Big Dig- families love the opportunity to come and spend time in school at the weekend."

"Commitment to trips has been lovely to see across school."

"Thank you to the school for continuing to hold face to face parent's evening. I think most parents would agree that it's beneficial to have the opportunity to see books and discuss progress face to face."

"Low pressure/sustainability emphasised with celebration days/ fancy dress has also been welcome and helped with these discussions at home."

"Trips, all the clubs. Amazing, positive, friendly staff."

"Ducklings in Reception- big win!"

"Thank you to the school for continuing with 'take a look Tuesday'."

"The feedback through Tapestry from the Reception team is amazing! It's great that parents can put their own pictures on there, which helps bring home and school life together."

"Christmas performances were amazing- accessible for all children."

You Said : We did

Thoughts on TLM and streaming- effects on confidence and mental health, feeling of two tier system. Concerns that children have been upset by it in Year 2- feeling not good enough and impact on self-esteem. As a parent I would prefer mixed ability tables. This system feels like it has had a knock on my son's confidence and it feels like a lot of pressure on them at a young age.

DH explained that the TLM was introduced as a post-Covid catch-up model. It meant that we could move away from the afternoon intervention model, which many other schools use, which means that children needing additional support were missing out on foundation subjects such as history, science etc. The other model that we'd considered was before and after school tutoring, however this was not something we felt would work for us and have the level of impact needed. We also felt that additional hours before and after school wasn't appropriate for all children and also may well not be able to be accessed by all children.

The TLM was introduced to plug the gaps in maths and English post-Covid, and the spread of ability meant that splitting the children into groups for these subjects allowed us to have more targeted teaching for the children's needs. With regards to the concerns about this being the same as streaming, DH explained that with streaming it can be the case that there can be low expectations for children with most needs, however the TLM turns this on its head as the TLM1 groups tend to get the most experienced teachers and TAs teaching them and the expectation as a result is for there to be amazing progress for these children. We've also ensured that the TAs who are based within the TLM model are not allowed to be pulled for cover. This means that we have consistency and a real focus on making sure we provide exactly the content of teaching that that class needs to progress. There is no 'bottom set' mentality and behaviour issues do not factor at all- there is just a focus on high expectations whilst nurturing the children to achieve their very best and make them feel amazing for it by celebrating this progress.

DH acknowledged that as a mum she had concerns about the group mix ups meaning that some children would be separated from their friends in the morning, however we have noted that this model does mean that children are able to make friends with children from other classes in a way they wouldn't have been able to previously. We do a lot of pupil voice at our school and so are constantly reviewing the model. Feedback from parents has been that some children are feeling unhappy with elements of it, and this is being taken into account as part of our constant evaluation.

DH emphasised that the TLM was not introduced as a learning model, it was introduced as a catch-up model. However, impact has been seen and there is so little money for support staff across school, that it all needs to be considered carefully. The options to replace TLM cannot be afternoon interventions, or groups being taught outside of the classroom by a teaching assistant (grouping because there is only one class-based teaching assistant across the classes in the morning). We are therefore reviewing with staff at the moment about whether or not to move forward with it.

We also need to consider teacher welfare, as the model does create a lot of extra work for them, such as handing over for parents evening etc, and the teaching of the TLM1 can add extra workload demands. We know that we can't go back to the afternoon intervention model, and we do not want to move to TAs leading teaching of the children needing additional support out of the classroom on corridors, so a move forward would need careful consideration of all these factors. One parent asked if we could make use of parent volunteers, however DH explained that this would be incredibly difficult to manage and quality assure.

You said

“Would it be possible that when an email is sent out to parents regarding an event which needs payment, such as school trip or extra curricular activities, that this coincides with finance putting the payment on ParentPay please. It's greatly appreciated having forwarning but as a parent it would be good for me (I think this is for other parents too) to be able to immediately, after reading the email, log on to ParentPay and make payment. I know you send reminders out but a 'going live date' is not included in the communication only the 'to be received by date'.”

“With regards to sweets in school. I have noticed that there is often mention of giving sweets to the children as a reward. I thought that the school had a healthy eating approach and in the past parents have been asked not to bring in sweets for birthdays and not to allow their children to come to school with sweets. I personally do not think sweets/biscuits should be used as treats as part of a normal school day. However, sweets as part of a special event is another matter, such as an end of SATs party or bake sale for charity. The difference being that parents are aware of when sweets are provided and they can provide alternatives if they want to.”

We did

EL has spoken to the Finance Team and a system is now in place so that an item is made live on ParentPay before or as the letter is sent to parents, so that they are able to log on and pay immediately.

DH explained the background being our current stance on 'healthy' foods in school. We used to ask parents to not send in any 'unhealthy' foods to school for their child's packed lunch or snack, however after consultation with parents and professionals we have tweaked our policy so that it is more considerate of the impact language can have on potential eating disorders. We do not confiscate or ban particular foods now if they are unhealthy, however if we have a particular concern about the foods that a child is regularly bringing in to school then our Health Lead would have a conversation directly with those parents. We have kept in our policy about not handing out birthday sweets, as this is something that our parents felt quite strongly about, and our governors felt it was best to keep it as it was to remove pressure on families to bring anything in on birthdays. However, we are noticing that sweets are being used as a reward increasingly across school by some members of staff- it does tend to be further up the school, in KS2, and has crept in after Covid. In the new academic year we will look at addressing this by sending out a reminder to staff (and parents) about no birthday sweets and not using sweets as a reward.

You said

"Dojos and plastic toys as rewards- I feel that it diverts motivation and in a similar way to streaming it makes the children compare themselves to each other academically. What could the alternative be?"

"Stackable credentials- big focus at the moment in HE sector- what (if any) plans for primary?"

"Can the school bring back 'freestyle Fridays' please. I think it would be great to give the children something to look forward to and to mark the end of a busy week ."

"I have enquired about this before but can the school bring back class assemblies please."

We did

DH explained that Dojos are used by some teachers but not all classes use this system. We have not done a lot of work as a school on internal motivation, so this is something that we'll look at as a staff. One parent explained how well received the postcards home have been, and suggested we could make use of Chorlton bike deliveries to save money on postage.

DH explained that our curriculum leads all work on a progression document for their subject, which maps out step-by-step exactly how the subject builds up over time. Ofsted would look at this when they come in to inspect school.

DH explained that this was something we used to do for the last half hour of every week- children could choose what they wanted to do in the classroom, and it linked to our behaviour policy as children could be denied this freestyle time as a consequence for poor behaviour that week, and this therefore supported positive behaviour choices as they wanted to access it. Unfortunately, the curriculum currently means that we now have no spare time for this to take place during the week as teachers have to keep so tightly to their planning and not divert from the weekly timetable of subjects. In staff welfare meetings it has come up that teachers would like to have the time to stop and enjoy some more relaxed time with their class, perhaps as a weekly class enrichment where they could all do an activity together that was not linked to the curriculum. With this in mind, we are working with our Curriculum Lead (Kat Rowe, Assistant Head) to see what we can scale down to make the time for this.

School is looking to re-introduce some face to face assemblies in September.

You said

"Cars, parking and traffic around school are a nightmare! Appreciate that school is already working really hard on this with comms etc, and the planters have been a welcome addition. Some schools use School Streets, however this really needs to be on every day to have real impact. The health centre seems to cause a particular issue on Nicolas Road. There seems to be a reluctance of people to walk to school. Parents could organise a walk to school bus as a safety in numbers type approach."

"School dinners- could we get student choices on ParentPay or some other platform so that we can know what our children are eating?"

"The recent maths and reading workshops for reception were amazing! It would have been good to run them earlier in the year, as the strategies I got from it have been really useful so I'd like to have known them sooner!"

"Industrial action- has there been any news on pay?"

We did

EL explained that we have tried encouraging parents not to drive to school, but without luck. Approach at the moment is to speak to the owners of the precinct carpark to see if there is an agreement that can be sought to allow parents to make use of this for free during pick up and drop off times. If this isn't possible, then making use of any grace period and reminding parents that they can park here and walk to the nearest gate with their child (as parents do not need to use specific gate anymore, as they did during pandemic).

DH explained that unfortunately we don't have a system like this in our school, however she does know of a school where the parents can choose what their child will have that day using an online platform. We will look into this to see if it is possible to get and if the cost would be worth it for reducing food waste (although noted that we currently have very little food waste due to careful planning and monitoring by the kitchen team). We can put the weekly menu back on the parent newsletter, however, so that parents can see what choices their child will have that day and discuss with them in advance.

DH suggested these could be run as part of transition in future.

DH explained that school had not yet been informed of any agreements that had been made on pay as a result of the recent strikes.

You said

"Creativity- importance of it on health/ wellbeing and future jobs, not just those in typically creative roles. This is what industries and universities are saying. How valued is creativity in school- it doesn't seem that the children's art is displayed in class, or that they bring pieces home, and we don't get to talk about this subject at parents evening. How is this celebrated if it is how children shine? It feels like there's such a big focus on maths and English at the moment- when we come in to look at the books, at parents evening- and this filters down to the children and makes them think that these subjects are the most important ones."

We did

DH explained that we try to ensure that there is a balance between making sure we teach the national curriculum, which is very focussed on maths and English time allocation wise, but also focussing on the foundation subjects. We have never narrowed our curriculum (even in Year 6) and are very lucky that our governors continue to support us offering the carousel model of music, art and PE, which many schools do not offer due to the relative cost of having specialist teachers cover PPA time as opposed to TAs. The balance we have at the moment is the best that we feel we can offer with the curriculum we are set. What we can do is look at how much we focus on the arts during parents evening and when parents come in to class to look at the books. With regards to children's art work being up in the classrooms- there's been a shift to having displays more for learning aids in the classroom, and keeping them more calm and neutral. However, we do have a lot of children's work on display in the corridors (these mirror all subjects) and also in our new art studio and up the stairs in our 'art gallery' display. In art we are also looking to start using portfolios, which the children will take up with them to their next yeargroup so that by Year 6 they have a sketchbook full of their art work. One parent suggested that having work on the wall could be used as a reward. It was acknowledged that reporting and what parents see could have a greater focus on the creative subjects. One parent explained how expression on mediums bigger than notebooks/sketchbooks could be good for behaviour and sensory positivity. She agreed to share a link to the Creative Health Strategy with DH & EL, which outlines this in more detail. Parents also acknowledged that it would be good to get a bigger picture discussion at parents evening- talking about not just foundation subjects but also how the children are with their friends etc. DH also noted that her weekly assemblies could be a good opportunity to celebrate the arts.