PARENT COUNCIL MEETING - Tuesday 3rd November

PRESENT - Stuart Cole, Verity Barker, Emma Hayward, Abigail Wright and Gary Soars

ARISING OUT OF ISSUES RAISED BY PARENT COUNCILLORS, THE FOLLOWING AREAS WERE DISCUSSED:

School dinners:
Feedback and various suggestions were offered by parents regarding school meals. In response Mr Soars said that he would pass the comments on to the school's catering manager as well as explaining that:

- Menus were based on those provided by the Essex School Meals Advisory Service and subject to government guidelines which are soon going to be revised. He said that, more than any other service that is provided by the school, due to varied tastes he would struggle to satisfy everybody in this regard.
- As someone who consumed the meals most days, Mr Soars believed the meals to be of good quality, particularly given that only £2.60 was charged for a two course lunch.
- He would look into the possibility of parents, particularly those of younger children, choosing their child's meal prior to the school day.

Breakfast and after-school club
In answer to parent queries, Mr Soars said that it would be difficult to increase the capacity of the school's breakfast and after-school clubs for premises reasons but he had recently changed the deadlines for bookings so that all those who took up places used them in an effort to free up capacity. He also said that the price of the breakfast and after-school clubs were frequently compared against other schools and that he was therefore happy with the current pricing.

Communication:
Recent lapses in communication were brought to Mr Soars' attention - he said that the school tried hard to give parents the information they needed as far in advance as possible but acknowledged things could be better at times (such as conflicting messages issued to the parents in one year group about wearing school uniform or PE kit on photograph day - going forward, there will be no PE/games on such days).

INSET days
Mr Soars said that the school would not be grouping all of its non-pupil days together to provide a break for children during which parents could book a cheaper holiday - he said that this would not be using such days for their stated purpose (staff training, lesson planning etc). The school does however put most of its non-pupil days on Monday or Friday should parents want to go away for the weekend thereby avoiding tricky childcare issues that might arise if midweek days were chosen.

Reception induction
Mr Soars said that, whilst acknowledging that it is not overly convenient for parents, he was happy with the current two and a half week induction period for the new reception cohort. When he contacted other schools, he found Edward Francis to be at the median in this respect with some schools having longer and other schools having marginally shorter periods until the children's first full day. Parents are told of the school's arrangements in this regard on the prospective parent tour and the school's reception staff felt that the process was necessary for the children to make a good start to life at the school.

Swimming gala
Mr Soars said that the school used to be involved in an annual, inter-school swimming gala held at Clements Hall prior to the pandemic and has asked the local school sport partnership to make such arrangements again. Unfortunately the school swimming pool does not have sufficient space around it for an intra-school swimming event that could be attended by parents.

Website and blog updating
As was expressed in a newsletter earlier in the term, the school is aware that some content on the school website needs uploading and is working hard to address this. Mr Soars said he would prompt teachers to keep the year group blogs regularly updated.

Mothers and Fathers Day sales
A parent association committee member was present at the meeting and she said that she would pass on the suggestion regarding appropriate gifts for grandparents and estranged parents. Mr Soars recommended that any parent who wanted to influence the work of the Parent Association and the events that it runs should join the committee.

Curriculum

The school's emphasis on cursive (joined up) handwriting was questioned. The current national curriculum states that children should have joined writing and to achieve the expected level at the end of year six, writing must be neatly joined. The writing framework states that, 'Fluent handwriting is a significant predictor of positive writing outcomes'. Other organisations including the handwriting and dyslexia association recommend joining writing to reduce cognitive load. It can speed up the process of writing and support the learning of spelling too.

Mr Soars passed a suggestion about alternative reading challenge rewards (other than Ralph the Reading Dog) to the school's English subject leader.

Photographs

The cost of school photographs was discussed as well as whether a formal end of year six photograph could be offered. Mr Soars explained that, in recent years, the parent association has provided a year book to every leaving year six child.

Secondary schools/11+

In response to a question, Mr Soars said that a meeting for year five parents regarding the secondary school application process would be taking place in February. It would be then that an '11+ club' would begin for year five children.

Painting overalls

Mr Soars said that painting aprons/shirts were available in every class to protect children's uniform when they were painting.

Animal mess

Mr Soars said that the school does its best to ensure that all animal droppings are cleared before the children access the site but acknowledged that it was a challenge given the amount of foxes that appear to enter the site overnight.

Year three end of day arrangements

Mr Soars said that he would consider delaying changes to the end of day arrangements in year three (normally after Christmas children are not met at the classroom door by their parents but are let out of the classroom door and expected to meet an adult on the school site before making their way home).

Thanks:

- Praise was received for the school's catering manager in his efforts to meet various dietary requirements.
- Positive feedback was given to the school's inclusion team for the support offered to children with additional needs and their families.