



Feedback from Parent-Governor Meeting 4th November 2013

As part of its role to set the strategic direction for the School, the Governing Body held one of its regular open discussion meetings with parents on 04-Nov-13, and several issues were raised. Many thanks to the parents who attended or submitted questions – this input is very valuable and is appreciated by the School and the Governing Body.

This letter aims to summarise the issues and questions and reflect the discussion that took place. Some of the questions could be answered at the meeting, others the governors took away for further consideration, and some issues related to operational aspects of the school, which it is not the role of the Governing Body to address, but were taken away by the school senior management team (SMT).

Specific questions and responses

- 1) Why is the school in the situation of having split classes?

The simple answer is that a lack of money has caused the problem. The governors do not want to have split classes but the school had a significant budget cut in 2013 and had a long debate about the best way to manage the money available. This means that the school is currently short of half a teacher. The school does not know yet what funding it will have in April 2014, and generally has to start planning before firm figures are available; this is simply the way that school funding works, and is not particular to Leven School.

The number of pupils in the school has a direct effect on funding, so it varies from school to school. It also varies between Local Authorities, so schools in Hull, for example, receive significantly more per pupil than schools in the East Riding Authority. Changes to funding are also made during the year, so for example we recently received some new funds from something called the Pupil Premium, which is aimed at helping disadvantaged children. The school SMT and Governing Body are currently discussing the best way to spend this extra money in the long-term interests of the children.

The Governing Body will produce a guide to school funding for parents and guardians to help to explain some of the issues and highlight the constraints that these issues place on schools by the end of the year.

- 2) What actions are being taken to address the concerns and frustrations of parents and guardians relating to the split classes?

Many parents had come into school to observe classes and expressed concerns at how the current split class model was working. It was good to hear that so many parents had taken up this valuable opportunity to visit the school, and it was useful to hear their feedback on how the teaching model was working.

One of the main issues, that parents raised, was that children in Foundation, Year 1 and Year 2 sometimes seemed to be taught at the same level when they were in mixed classes, so that some pupils seemed to be repeating work that they had done the year before, and there seemed to be an inconsistent approach to children in the same year when they were taught separately. There was a concern that some children were not being taught at a level that was appropriate to them, and a feeling that changes would need to be made quickly to address these issues.

The staff teaching Foundation/Year1/Year 2 have met to discuss ways that they can improve consistency across these classes, and some changes have already been made. These will be kept under review and adjusted if necessary. The whole split class model is also being reviewed, and the input from this meeting was a valuable part of that process. Further changes are being planned, and discussions are underway on the best way to spend the extra funding that the school has recently received.

There were some questions over whether the balance of teaching and non-teaching time for teaching staff could be adjusted to help with some of these issues. There are limits to what can be done in this area, as teachers have to have what is called planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time, which means that they cannot be teaching in the classroom all the time. The Headteacher is also teaching in Year 5 and Year 6 this year in addition to his responsibilities leading the school.

Other issues

- **Communication**

It was felt that the school did not communicate very well, and that no visible changes had been made since this was raised by parents at a meeting earlier in the term. The examples that were given were that much of the information on the website was out-of-date, the blog and Twitter feed had not been updated recently, the Composite Classes policy on the website did not reflect the current situation, and the parent/governor meeting itself had not been well advertised.

This is clearly an issue for many parents, and one that the school and governing body have been discussing this term. One immediate action that has been taken is that a lot of the content on the website has been updated, and this will continue over the coming weeks. The governors are working closely with the school to update the remaining content and improve the website.

There were also concerns that class teachers did not always know what their pupils were covering when they went into split classes in the afternoon, and this made it hard to get a view on how children were progressing at parents' evening.

Communication from parents to the school is seen as very important, and the issue of parent questionnaires was raised. Under the new Ofsted guidelines, the paper questionnaires have now been replaced by an online version, which parents can fill in at any time.

<http://parentview.ofsted.gov.uk/parent-view-results/survey/result/13261/current>

Communication will be a focus area for the governors and the school in future, and we will be making improvements in the way the school communicates both with parents and internally.

- **Marketing**

It was felt that the school could do more to market itself and attract new pupils both into Foundation and across the school. Some of the material in the school reception is now very dated, and shows pupils who left the school some time ago. Again, this is clearly an area where improvements can be made, **and the displays in the reception area will be reviewed and updated.**

Tools such as the website are also a potentially valuable marketing tool, and this will form part of the focus for the governors. **The school has recently taken over the running of the Leven Village website, and while improving this will be a longer term project, it will help to raise the profile of the school and bring it into the heart of the community.**

The aim will be to raise the profile and improve the reputation of the school so that prospective parents are encouraged to bring their children to the school.

- **School targets**

There was some concern that the school was not achieving some of the targets that were outlined on the website. It may be that these are out of date, and this will be looked at as part of the review of the website.

- **Balance of staff resource**

Given the pressure on funding, some parents felt that it would be useful to review the school budget against similar schools to identify potential areas for cost saving, and to see if resources

could be rebalanced to provide more teaching resource. Reviewing the budget is something that the Governing Body does regularly, but it might be useful to bring an external perspective.

One parent had reviewed the school budget data (2010 -2011) available on the Department for Education website, and had suggested that areas such as administrative support could be examined. The data for 2010 - 2011 showed a particularly high spend in this area because the School Business Manager was helping other local schools, but this also brought more funds into the school which more than offset the extra spending. However, examining trends in the budget over a longer period might be a useful way to identify potential cost savings across the school, and a parent with skills in this area offered to help with this process.

- **School Library**

A question had been submitted about the school library, which did not seem to be used to best effect. The school will look into this, and some changes have already been made to make better use of the library.

Way forward

The governors have taken on board the questions from parents and it seems there are three key areas that need to be examined:

- Composite classes
- Communication
- Marketing

It was agreed that the following actions would be taken:

- **The environment and teaching in the composite classes will continue to be reviewed to improve the experience of all children and ensure that the level of teaching is appropriate for all children. Regular feedback will be provided to parents on the actions taken.**
- **Communication is being discussed by governors and feedback will be provided for parents to ensure that the right information is provided through different communication channels. The governors will report back to parents before the end of the year on actions that have been taken.**
- **The website will be updated to ensure that the correct information is available. This review will continue to update information such as school policies, and regular updates will be provided on progress.**
- **The Reception area and school displays will be reviewed and updated by the end of the year.**
- **The Governing Body will produce a guide to school funding for parents and guardians to help to explain some of the issues and highlight the constraints that these issues place on schools by the end of the year.**