



# Parent Governor Forum

Wednesday 25 November 2015

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Dear parents

The Governors hosted their first Parent Forum in November 2015, as an opportunity to hear parents' concerns and reflect on the results of the parent survey. Around 15 parents attended the Forum, the majority representing Key Stage 1 children. Tony Price, Myf Hopkins and Gayle Ball attended on behalf of the Governing Body, along with the Head Teacher, Miss Fenn.

The session opened with a presentation on the role of Governors and the Governing Body, before progressing to a discussion about the parent survey results. This note summarises the discussion that took place. Some of the comments made by parents have rightly caused us to reflect and consider carefully what you are telling us. I have used italics to indicate what was actually said by parents, to distinguish this from our interpretation and commentary. I hope you will see we have not tried to shy away from the issues you are raising.

I very much hope you will join us for the next Forum, on Wednesday 9 March. It will be an opportunity for you to hear more about what we do, what we're focusing on, and how you can help us ensure Abbey School continues to provide an excellent learning environment for your child.

## Parent survey findings

We all acknowledged that there were many many positive things to celebrate and nurture at the school. The survey results confirmed that the vast majority of parents consider the school to be an excellent environment for their children, and the calibre and quality of the curriculum and teaching was highly valued. On all indicators, the responses were overwhelmingly positive – strongly agree or agree.

These are very strong results for any school survey, and are a great foundation on which to continue building and strengthening the school's work.

We spent much of the forum discussing the handful of areas where parents indicated a degree of concern, focusing very much on trying to understand the results. 1% represents 1 parent as the overall response rate was just over 100 parents.

### *Do parents feel the staff are approachable, and are they confident to raise concerns with staff?*

There seemed to be potentially contradictory results. 96% of those responding, said they felt staff were approachable, but 16% did not feel confident to raise concerns with staff.

Not all those attending the parent forum agreed with this analysis of the survey results, and many endorsed the very strong view that teachers are approachable.

However, there appeared to be a sense that:

- The arrangements do not make it easy to contact teachers – having to make an appointment via the office, not being able to have ad hoc chats at the beginning or end of the school day

etc. The formality of doing so makes the process feel more formal for parents, particularly for those who are interested in 'checking in' rather than addressing specific concerns.

- The response from teachers can sometimes feel defensive to some parents; a few participants at the forum felt teachers were *too confrontational, not open to hearing criticism, and not accepting of feedback.*

**We'd like to use the next parent forum to consider how we might address this. How big a problem is it? What could teachers do to help parents? How do we balance parents' needs and teaching/classroom time for teachers?**

***Do parents know how the school deals with unacceptable behaviour? And do they believe the school deals with unacceptable behaviour effectively?***

7% of respondents to the survey don't feel the school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour, though many more (around 14%) don't know. In KS1, nearly 20% didn't know.

The Governors were concerned that there were parents who 'don't know' – as this may lead to perceptions that the school does not take unacceptable behavior seriously, or that parents are unaware of how to raise any concerns they may have.

Some parents noted that children themselves were not always clear about how unacceptable behavior is dealt with; others may know what the policy is, but be unclear about how it actually operates in practice. One parent noted – for example – that playground chat amongst children references a *naughty chair, a very naughty chair, behaviour books, and being sent to Miss Fenn* as ways in which unacceptable behavior is dealt with. Only some of these bear any resemblance to actual practice!

There were some concerns too about how effectively playground behavior is managed, as well as specific challenges in certain classes.

**We'd like to use the next parent forum to consider how we can make our behavior policy better understood for parents, so that both awareness and confidence increase. It would also be good to explore what more we could do to ensure playground behavior is managed consistently and effectively. Are there examples of what has worked well you could share with us?**

***Some parents do not feel the school does enough to help develop their child's confidence, or meet their child's particular needs.***

13% of survey respondents do not feel the school does enough to help develop their child's confidence

This survey finding was more strongly challenged by those attending the Forum. Some commented on their experience that the *school goes over and beyond* what could be expected to encourage confidence. Other parents felt, where a child had additional needs, the school could improve the support it offers. There was also concern that higher ability pupils were not being stretched to their full potential.

In terms of areas for improvement, participants challenged the school to find ways *to help introverts shine, particularly as most school activities (as with life) favoured extroverts.* Celebrating difference – individuals and cultures – as well as opportunities for creative and artistic expression were cited as possible ways to achieve this.

A few parents commented about *experiencing a defensive response* to these concerns; that teachers were good at 'handling' parents but not talking honestly about difficult issues.

**We'd like to understand what more we can help tackle this. How do we balance the needs of specific children with the needs of others?**

***Parents do not feel adequately informed about their child's progress. Many would like more help on how to support their child's learning.***

This theme generated the most commentary from parent forum participants. The parent teacher consultations were considered to be effective, but often left parents *feeling very rushed*. Parents would welcome more frequent feedback outside of the formal parent teacher consultations – perhaps *highlights from the week*, or a *written report at the end of each term*.

There was a general desire, echoed in the earlier theme, about the desire for less formal opportunities to discuss progress with teaching staff, and perhaps the *opportunity to see pupils' workbooks – these could be child-led*.

Some observed that teaching strategies had changed and evolved so much since they were at school, that it was difficult to support the child's learning without more information. Many welcomed and appreciated the efforts the school had made to share information on phonics, and there appeared to be a strong appetite for more of this type of engagement eg maths. But the recent parent information session on e-safety was attended by 2 parents, despite 15 tickets being sold, and at a cost of £300 to the school.

**We'd like to explore ways in which we can keep parents informed about their child's progress, and how they can support their child's learning. Do parents have a full picture of what support is available? How can we find ways to balance the need to keep parents informed, with the need to support children in their learning, within the resources we have available?**

The Parent Governor Forum is still in its early days. The parents' survey results are a good starting point for our discussions, but the real test is whether we find solutions and work together for the benefit of the whole school and its community. We have already made great progress in some areas – the support of the Friends' Association has transformed the outdoor play experience for all pupils, and the small working group of parents helping us develop an after-school solution is a good example of collaboration. As the environment in which we operate gets tougher, there'll be a greater need for us to work together.

I look forward to welcoming you to the next Forum on Wednesday 9 March. See you then.

Debbie Gupta  
Chair of Governors