

## **Comments from Parent's Forum**

**8<sup>th</sup> November 2017**

**These are the comments from the parent forum. A few parents mentioned how brave we were for doing this - I have to agree. A school opening itself up to things that might not be its strength could leave it feeling vulnerable, however, we know that in order to improve the school for our families, this needs to happen. We have posted the vast majority of comments, good and bad, with a response from the school.**

### **Parent Forum Comments 2017 – Best Bits About the School**

- It's a progressive school always looking forward and investing. The staff team are great and clearly invest in every child.
- My child is happy, confident and loves school. She is happy to come and we can see the progress she is making and the positive influence the school has on her.
- Caring about our children.
- Lots of playground equipment.
- Caring and warm environment. Even though it is one of the largest schools in Colchester, all the children seem to care about each other and know each other. Real community feel.
- Like the emphasis on good behaviour and manners. Also encouraged that capable children are pushed along and less able are supported.
- My children love coming to school. I feel happy with the school in general.
- Teachers are friendly.
- Hardworking staff and happy children.
- Facilities – investment in new resources. Forest School. Supportive atmosphere.
- My children are cared for.
- Lovely new outside area. Kids love it. Well done to the school.
- Most staff so kind and encouraging to the pupils. Great outdoor facilities.
- Teachers are fantastic. My kids are happy and really enjoy coming to school.
- Fantastic play equipment! Love forest school. Teachers are supportive and kind.
- Teachers' commitment for every child to flourish. Open communication with school. Availability of staff and Headteacher amazing.
- Year 6 helping with supporting various jobs. Pals in playground. Children's views really valued.

- Great position. Lovely space playground. Great teachers. Library. Nice rooms.
- I love that the school embraces all different nationalities of the children.
- I love the emphasis on reading and the love of reading.
- Forest Schools, outdoor play area, trip to the theatre, diverse, other cultures are celebrated.
- The general communication/updates from the school and the really strong parental feedback/participation so we feel a part of a child's education.
- Good PSED/Nurture available.
- 11+ results, encouragement for children to work/do as best as they can.
- Great school. Well run from the head all the way through all teachers and TAs.
- So far good teaching quality. Very pleased.
- Read Write Inc. has really benefited our daughter. Thank you.
- Rewards for good work. Children are really happy when they get a sticker or headteacher's award and excited to tell me about it at the end of the day.
- Teachers in school knowing so many children – not just their own classes.
- Dedicated headteacher and staff. I couldn't be happier how my son is progressing with his learning. Excellent choices at playtime for the children.
- Very well behaved children in and out of school. POLITE, WELL-MANNERED, EXEMPLARY!!!
- Great school, great playground, great staff/teachers. Good library – KS1. Need a few more eyes for playtimes.
- I love all the opportunities the children have, ie forest school, clubs etc. The new outdoor equipment with the emphasis on children being children.
- The teachers and headteacher all seem committed to doing their best for all children and making them rounded beings.

*These comments are fabulous to read. We work so hard to ensure all children get the best rounded education experience. We recognise as a school that young children today have a huge range of needs and that the talents one child might have could be vastly different from that of another child- we value every single one of them. Our SATs scores continue to be above national average and the reputation of the school in relation to the curriculum that it offers and the care continues to flourish.*

### **Reading comments:**

#### **How useful are reading diaries?**

Lots of information in them re key words/phonics etc.

Useful as a point of communication.

Good as teacher can see if a child is reading at home.

Important at KS1

Diaries give the children the incentive to be star reader.

More information should be included for reception children so we know what is being learnt

Diaries help to keep parents accountable....would like the effort at home to be acknowledged

Although child is reading at home do not always sign the diaries

Not useful in KS2 – should be class reading with 1-1 each half term to check progress

Don't think parent comments are read.

Teacher comments following group reading are useful.

Sometimes a week or more passes and I don't know if she's read

### **How often do you expect children to be heard to read?**

Not expected to be read to daily but once every 1-2 weeks.

Weekly

2x weekly by the teacher

1x weekly – daily reading impossible

Should be more praise for children who read daily.

Once every few weeks

Need more Mum helpers to come and hear readers.

Daily for 10 minutes!!!!

Once a week until they are a free reader then not as often

Don't do the rocket scheme as well as reading diaries.

Please stamp when they've read in a group so I know that they've been read with

### **KS1 specific responses**

Not daily but more often than at present

The more frequent the better

Sometimes children are on the same stage book for too long and are not challenged

Important at KS1 not so much KS2

### **Whole class reading comments**

Group Reading not as beneficial for less confident readers.

### **School actions and response:**

*We all agree that children have to be able to read fluently and confidently if they are going to achieve well in school and life. We know that our phonic scores for the end of Year 1 and Year 2 put us in the top 7% in the country so the Read Write Inc. scheme and the reading strategy works very well, although we have looked to tweak the programme for children to improve the understanding of vocabulary even further and develop comprehension skills. Teachers stamping or signing the diaries to prove that children are reading in school is not beneficial or an effective use of their time - specific comments, when needed, are more useful. Our children read daily in school - we know this as the SLT (Senior Leadership Team) and the literacy coordinator monitor this programme carefully - this includes observing sessions of reading, discussions with children and monitoring planning. We would also not be able to achieve the reading SATs results we do if we did not read daily. The school is conscious to promote the fact that if a diary is not signed by the teacher, then this does not mean the child has not read. The diary supports the school in seeing what children are reading at home and how often they read. It supports the school in identifying where gaps are in learning and which children either need further support or moving on to different books. It also gives the parent a chance to explain if a book might be too hard or easy, or if the child does not enjoy the book (or in fact loves it).*

*Moving forward, the school has embraced more whole class reading sessions. Although it is early days, the feedback from children is very positive and the improvement in reading can already been seen in class. School Governors have already been in to observe with the Headteacher and Literacy coordinator to see evidence of this.*

*We feel that the next step is to consider how we communicate this more effectively with parents so they are informed clearly about what we are reading in class, what the focus might be for the learning and how parents can support their children. The biggest change we are seeing is that children are enjoying reading more and are discussing books, authors and language. If children are to make real, long term progress, they need to want to read because they enjoy it, not because their teacher or parent is making them - this will take time for some children but it will be worthwhile.*

## **Parent Forum Comments – Homework**

- Go back to spelling lists then weekly tests.
- Too much the same – both children of mine are bored stiff with the same homework every week – spellings plus one other thing. Need to use a bit of imagination (write a story using these words...)
- Need more communication about what is expected.
- Maybe fit this into the school day if possible? Family time is precious and child is so hard to get to concentrate in the evening as so tired.
- Weekly spellings KS1 – maybe a full week to complete it. Love homework, it's important.
- More focus on maths homework, not just tables every week.
- Year 6 should have more to prepare them for Year 7.
- Please use tablet friendly websites. Most children and families use tablets now.
- Should be more suited to individual child's abilities. Definitely needs to be more varied.
- Ban homework please (apart from daily reading).
- Homework – less generic. Targeted to pupil's attainment. Less boring.
- Homework. More maths homework. The focus is on Literacy. Should be spread out through the week. A few words to explain to the parent where the child is in maths.
- Homework could be more varied. Always the same thing each week.
- Homework should come out on time. I think 2 folders so that for example they all get homework on a Monday and hand in on a Monday and a new folder sent out.
- Homework to be given out on a Monday and to be returned on a Friday. Weekends are for family time.
- Needs completely changing. Too tedious.
- Follow up spelling tests.
- Homework causes too much stress for parents. It is hard to fit in when juggling work and siblings. I agree with reading, we don't see that as homework. Year 6 small amounts ready for secondary school.
- Differentiate as needed. Extra spellings shouldn't be added to existing spellings – it becomes too much.

- Should get more time.
- Agree to homework but perhaps alternate on a weekly basis between spelling and maths.
- Too much in KS2. If research, then no spelling sentences?
- A lot of focus on reading and spelling. I feel this should continue with the same amount. More focus on maths. Only this year (Year 2) my daughter started having maths homework. Research has shown small but "positive" relationship between homework and maths (and science) achievement.
- More creativity in homework tasks in KS1 might help to motivate resistant children to do it.
- Less homework or more time to finish it.
- I feel it should be more ability based rather than generic to the year.
- Writing the sentences can take a long time so if they then have research etc it can be too much. Some of the words are difficult for them to access without help.
- I find that there is a lot of homework for a Year 2 child. It would be good to have a quick maths game and spellings but no more. It has caused a lot of tension at home for us with after school care, extra-curricular activities. It always ends up being done at the weekend when I think a six-year-old should have time to switch off and play. Especially as I've been surprised to read recent evidence showing homework has little impact on attainment.
- Minimal evidence that homework helps. Takes fun out of learning. A real chore most of the time.

### **School actions and response**

*The school acknowledges that the impact of homework is varied across the school. We currently set less homework than most primary schools but we recognise that many of our children take part in lots of activities outside of school and these are incredibly beneficial to the development and well-being of the child- scouts, football, music, beavers, swimming, yoga etc. We also know that children need time to unwind and have fun, play with their toys and relax. The pace and intensity of the school day has increased so much in the last few years.*

*Standards have continued to rise and it is difficult to pinpoint how much of this is down to homework. As a school, we feel that reading and discussion around language is hugely beneficial to the overall development of the child - maybe the most important aspect of early development. We would not want to lose this. The projects that children*

*do for the topics are very popular and really help the children engage with the learning.*

*In January, we are going to review the homework policy, looking at which aspects work and which do not. We agree that homework can be viewed as 'boring' by children and it feels like a chore- this concerns us enormously and needs addressing. We also appreciate the running battles some parents are having with children in getting the homework finished - many of the teachers have the same battles with their own children at home!*

*The school also recognises that if the school day increases, even by ten minutes, then this would impact on homework. An extra 50 minutes a week of school would undoubtedly have an impact on the amount of homework the child would be able to complete.*

### **Should the school day be longer?**

School day should finish earlier- 2:00.

School day stays the same but more clubs after school for KS1 and Foundation stage.

Great idea to extend break and lunch. Will benefit children and staff.

Yes- great idea- extend to 3:15 and have a longer lunch. Homework club would be great.

Great idea to extend the day so parents have more time at home.

More clubs for KS1

A longer day would be great but would need to be less homework as children tired.

An afternoon break for children would be great if children have a longer day.

10 minutes extra would help the children.

Extra time sounds great but would need to be for longer break and lunch, not extra time in class.

School day should run to 4:00.

Mid-morning break could be for 30 minutes. Lunch needs to be 1hour 15 minutes. This would allow staff time to eat and look after themselves too.

3:15 finish- great for extended break and lunch.

3:10 finish- in line with other schools.

Start the day earlier but finish at the same time- children more productive then.

Staff need a good break too- they work so hard.

15 minutes extra sounds good, as long as it is for longer breaks/lunch.

15 minutes extra in the morning but finish at same time- have things to do in the evenings e.g. scouts, football

Great to encourage more outdoor play and support mental well-being

More time to help the school run smoothly- less stress and rush at lunch.

Would support a slightly longer school day.

Please not longer- my daughter is 6 and needs time to play!

Need to coordinate with nurseries (squirrels etc.) so parents are not collecting at same time.

Children are too tired at the end of the day to work for longer- needs to be to support play and allow more time to eat.

Will children make it to 3:20?

If the afternoon sessions allow more time to be even more productive, should there be any homework?

Foundations stage needs to stay the same- they are so tired!

If the school day is longer, then this needs to be in the morning.

Great for a longer break- extend up to 3:15/3:30

Not in favour- children need a rest and they have work to do at home.

Would support this- great idea to encourage play and learning at lunch, plus more time to eat!

### **School actions and response:**

*It is clear that if the school day increases, this change needs to support the children in relation to their well-being by increasing their breaks or lunchtime rather than more time learning in class. The maximum increase would appear to be 15-20 minutes per day.*

*Other points to note:*



- *A decision needs to be made about how this extra time effects the daily start and finish times. Should it be that the day starts earlier and finishes the same time or should five minutes be added to the start and end of the day? Alternatively should the time be added at the end of the day?*
- *Do we need the same starting times for KS1 and KS2? What about finishing times?*
- *Do we need to apply for permission to do this? As we are an academy, what are the procedures?*
- *How do we make sure we do not clash with nurseries and other local schools?*
- *The cost for extra midday staff cover will need to be factored in. Consideration needs to be given to the Gilberd, who share mid-day staff with us.*
- *Costs for the catering team- do their hours need increasing to accommodate a longer lunchtime?*

### **School lunches**

- A parent form to fill in to choose their option.
- Squash is too strong.
- Pizza and chips isn't balanced.
- Packed lunch should have a treat as school dinners have a pudding.
- Do children need a pudding if hot dinners?
- Making healthy food interesting- changing the way it is cooked.
- Playground buddies to support younger children in going from lunch hall to playground and finding their friends.
- Website- picture of food portion.
- Veggie option is often pastry. Jacket potatoes were good but not always available despite being on the menu.
- Picnics for packed lunches outside.
- Mix hot dinners and packed lunch so they can eat with their friends.
- Size of sandwiches is too large.
- A baguette is not a hot dinner. Soup and roll?
- Extend lunch times- more time to relax.
- Too rushed on some days eg. Roast, children worry they'll be late back.
- Packed lunch option for all years.
- Children should help prepare and clean up lunch.
- Parents to have a choice on deciding the meals offered.

- Floor cleaner for PE after dinners.
- Choices not available for years 5 and 6 by the time they go in.
- Buffet style for KS2.
- High noise levels and exhausting atmosphere.
- Stagger lunch times.

### **School actions and response:**

*The School lunch time is probably one of the most challenging times of the school day. There are many valid points raised but some misconceptions too. The school currently employs a qualified advisor who works alongside the Head Cook to ensure the weekly menus provide a balanced diet. At our busiest, we cater for over 350 dinners in one day, which means that it would be impossible for the cook to accommodate 350 of each option and there would be too much wasted food.*

*From observing other schools, our lunch times are relatively calm and well organised but the logistics of feeding 422 children in a limited space and time it is inevitable that on occasions it will be busy. We currently stagger lunch times to ensure the youngest eat first and then play, followed by KS1 and then KS2. We have recognised that sometimes our older children did not always get the food option they wanted - this is now a very rare occurrence.*

*Moving forward, Mrs Chester will be forming a working party next term with parents and the Head cook to look at improving lunchtimes further and discuss any questions raised, such as what can go in packed lunches. We will always be open to improving what we offer and these comments are useful.*

### **Parent Forum- School Website**

Is it useful?

- Website not up to date
- Information on calendar sometimes inaccurate, more information on calendar would be useful
- Difficult to navigate and find things
- Twitter, School Gateway, Tapestry more useful
- PDF's not available on tablets

What is it missing?

- Staff photos
- Map of school showing where different year groups will exit
- Virtual tour of school
- Tab to find menus
- Year group pages updated with current learning
- Communication- newsletters, homework

### **School response:**

*Our website is relatively new (1 year old) and we are really proud of it. We also use Twitter a great deal, with over 226 followers - some posts have over 4000 hits. Our website contains useful information about our school and does provide support for many of our families. We know that there have been some issues with PDFs not being recognised on i-pads and some issues with fonts changing on phones - we hope these have been rectified.*

*Mrs Chapman is now updating the calendar weekly and staff photos are being put on so faces can be put to names.*

### **Move Up Day – How can it be better?**

As much notice as possible please with a meet the teacher session before the end of the summer term.

Better to know earlier so less anxiety for parents and children.

Children to spend short bursts of time with the new teacher in the final half term (with or without the knowledge that it's with their new teacher.)

It would be nice if there weren't so much secrecy about the whole 'Moving Up' day.

Reception to carry out home and nursery visits – it's very beneficial to meet families in the home environment.

Be nice to have Move Up day spread over 2/3 days for just an hour a day.

Parents should know earlier.

Would be nice if kids stay together for all the years in school.

No need for secrecy.

Home visits for reception transition would be good for the children.

Parent with child meeting with the new teacher before the new term.

It would be better to inform the children who their new teacher is at the earliest possible opportunity. The new teacher could spend time in the current classroom with children so they become familiar before 'Move Up' day. This is especially beneficial for younger children who don't know other teachers so well in school.

Finding out in advance allows preparation for parents.

The day allows the teachers to be more informed about the new class and they can get to know quirky kids.

A letter home about which teachers are in which classes as soon as the school knows would be good – the children to know then too. The day could stay the same but the children would already know who are they having (whole or half day.)

Should be known a little earlier. Maybe the new teacher can sit in with the children a few times rather than having one whole day.

Would like to know the teachers name first like a few years ago so we can prepare our children.

Parents to meet new children before the end of the school year. Parents then aware and able to discuss with children at home about changes.

To stop anxiety why not release details as to what teachers will be teaching where in advance.

One morning or an hour session with the new teacher to settle in, then normal moving up day.

It would be good to have knowledge of who the children are having before moving up day but I do quite like the fact that the children meet their new children with no preconceived ideas –so if the child could touch base with their new teacher before the day they will know it is their teacher.

Good idea to find out straight away who their teacher is previous to the day. Maybe have a meet the teacher meeting with parents before September.

Finding out earlier would be useful and it might be nice to meet with the new teacher before September. The whole 'moving up day' has always worked fine for us.

### **School response and actions:**

*We agree with many of the comments raised. There is far too much 'secrecy' around move up day. It builds tension and causes unneeded anxiety. We are meeting in January to discuss the views of staff and will also talk to children throughout the school, especially KS2, where they have more experience of changing teachers to decide how best to change this process next year.*

*As a leadership team, we feel that shorter bursts of time but more frequently, will help the children settle and give them more opportunities to grow accustomed to their new teacher and the teacher to get to know the children. We also feel that as soon as we know which teachers will be with us for the following year, we will do our best to inform children who their next teacher will be. What we would hate to happen is that we announce the teachers for the following year too early, children get familiar with this and then a teacher leaves. All schools work to the same cut off dates in relation to teacher resignations and notice must be given by the 31<sup>st</sup> May to leave at the end of the summer term.*

*Currently, children spend one full day with their new teacher, towards the end of the year. The teachers then meet over several evenings to discuss each child and look at standards of work. These 'handover' meetings are crucial for ironing out any small issues and ensuring the teacher knows about the child's personal, social and emotional needs, as well as academic needs. These handover meetings will continue.*