Diptford School – Minutes of School Committee meeting, 1 November 2019 (adopted 9 December 2019)

Present: Roger Knight (chair), Lizzie Lethbridge (Head), Rachel Botell, Jo Palmer, Rebecca Filtness, Lucy Carrol.

1. Apologies were received from Carole Partridge, Helen Price, Laura Bell, Janet Watts and David Sayle.

2. Roger opened the meeting by welcoming new members Rachel, Rebecca and Lucy and noted that Janet Watts, a governor for the Totnes group of schools within LINK, had offered to attend meetings but was unfortunately unable to join this meeting. He noted that the role of the Committee is to strengthen the links and enhance communications between the School and its parents and other interested parties, such as the Church and the wider Diptford community; it is not, as it had perhaps been in danger of becoming, a forum for raising or responding to individual issues on behalf of parents – such matters should be raised with the Executive Head or a member of the teaching staff in the first instance.

3. Roger congratulated Lizzie on her participation in the recent Plymouth 10k run, which had generated sponsorship for the FODS fundraising towards new playground equipment.

4. The draft minutes of the previous meeting of 15 June 2019 were reviewed and adopted. Further to discussions at earlier meetings, Roger reported that he had contacted the Exeter Diocesan Board of Finance in relation to the land known as Diptford Glebe and its possible use in addressing car parking problems. In reply, the Board’s agent noted that the Board had offered a tenancy to an interested party and are not therefore in a position to consider any further proposals for the land’s use.

Head of School Report

5. Lizzie’s Head of School report is attached at the end of these minutes. The report prompted discussion in a number of areas, including in particular:

a) Pupil numbers have stabilised, at around 60 or so, excluding Nursery. In the event, the intake into Reception in September was 10 rather than the 11 expected. Since the beginning of term three children had joined the School and, unfortunately, two had left. In terms of attracting new pupils, a focus on links to local nurseries and establishing stronger relationships with the Diptford toddler group are important.

b) A large number of events are planned for the term. In addition to those noted by Lizzie, there are also Bags2School on 20 November and the FODS quiz on 30 November. The date of the Christmas Service, 12 December, is Election Day when the Hall will be used as a polling station; it is not thought that this will cause difficulty for parents parking in the early evening. The younger children will not be visiting an Old People’s Home this year (an event that has been well received on both sides for the past two years). Instead this year, in order to be inclusive for all children, the younger ones will be attending the pantomime at Torquay’s Princess Theatre; it is possible that a visit to an Old People’s Home may take place later in the school year.

c) It was noted that parents will see less ‘green pen’ in children’s work books and that this does not mean less consideration by teachers of homework etc but a considered change in the way of providing feedback. The SATS results had yet to be finalised. Lizzie noted that in schools the size of those within LINK, SATS results are influenced significantly by the circumstances of particular year groups and can be expected to vary from year to year and to diverge, either way, from norms. For example, one of last year’s Year 6 pupils was not required to sit SATS, being a temporary pupil, but will nonetheless be included in the statistics. This will distort Diptford’s results far more that it would those of a much larger primary school.

d) Lizzie explained the School’s six key improvement priorities for the school year; some relate to LINK as a whole whilst others are specifc to Diptford. Priority 2, Science, reflects a dropping of standards (not specific to Diptford) measured by test SATS tests. Richard Charley at Harbertonford, supported at Diptford by Georgia, will be leading on priority 3, Computing. The necessary infrastructure is largely in place; the challenge now is to enhance the teaching across the curriculum. Priorities 5 and 6, Social Emotion, Spiritual and Mental Health and SIAMS, relate to the School’s Ethos programme (see later discussion). We spent some time discussing the SRE (Sex and Relationships) element of the curriculum, including when children might cover various topics and what parents can expect by way of briefing.

e) Lizzie explained that the Open Day (7 November) is intended for all parents, not only prospective new parents, to learn more about the School. There will be opportunities to participate in a family Forest school and to observe lessons.

Parental Feedback

6. No matters had been raised in advance. However, Rachel noted that a number of parents had been concerned by the guidance that bags should be let in the playground at drop-off, to be taken into the classrooms by the children themselves and that parents should not enter the classrooms, and had felt ‘unwanted’. Lizzie said that she was aware of such disquiet and noted that the guidance had been relaxed somewhat with the worsening weather. She explained a principal reason, as already explained to parents, has been a desire to develop the independence and responsibility of children, and that this appeared to be succeeding. However there had been a number of other considerations – safeguarding and GDPR/data protection, with unsupervised and possibly unknown adults wandering into and around the school, and the fact that teachers might need these few minutes prior to the start of school to prepare for the day ahead. It was agreed that these all seemed sensible and appropriate considerations but that it might have been helpful for parents to have been given a fuller explanation at the time the guidance was promulgated.

Governors’ Matters

Lizzie noted that no parent had volunteered to stand for election as a parent governor. She noted further that Anna Neville, who knows Diptford well, had recently stood down as Chair, but remained as a now (staff) governor. Cat Radford, Chair of the Harbertonford Ethos Committee is a governor and may take the chair. Lizzie is also a staff governor. With Janet as well, Diptford is not unrepresented but nonetheless it would be helpful to have a parent representative from Diptford. It was noted that the commitment is a couple of meetings per term with school visits as well. Lucy thought that she may be able to fit in the involvement and undertook to discuss this with Lizzie. [Subsequently Lucy put herself forward to become a parent governor.]

Ethos Programme

7. We spent some time considering how the Committee can support the School’s Ethos programme. Lizzie explained that she sees the Committee’s role as observing and satisfying themselves that the School’s vision is being met in practice, and suggested that individual members might start by attending a collective worship event (and alternative ‘values’ teaching – values pupils who do not attend collective worship attend sessions with the TAs and discuss values) to see what is involved (Lizzie outlined the ‘Windows, Mirrors and Doors’ approach) and observing lessons. Much can be gleaned from wandering around the school. Lizzie will make a record of Committee and parent involvement. She also encouraged Committee members to review the material on the new website.

8. Lizzie noted how the ethos is underpinned by the School’s Values, as developed with the help of parents and children over recent years. She explained that Sharon Lord, formerly of Landscove School within LINK, is leading across LINK on SIAMS and Ethos matters. We can expect to see more guidance, and revised terms of reference (dealing more explicitly with the Ethos programme) for the Committee.

FODS Update

9. In the absence of Laura, Roger outlined the FODS upcoming programme of events and noted the decision to focus on fund raising towards the replacement of the playground equipment. A good start had been made with Lizzie’s 10k run and the promise of a grant from an SHDC counsellor’s locality fund. A quiz and related raffle are scheduled for the end of October.

10. We discussed the difficulty of extending the number of parents involved in FODS, either directly in organising events and projects, or less directly as supporters, and of ensuring that everybody knows what FODS is doing. There are regular communications from the school, on Facebook and via WhatsApp groups but still some parents seen unaware of events and of how they might support fundraising efforts for the School. It was suggested that more use might be made of the notice board outside the door to the School Office where mang parents congregate at pick-up time.

11. Roger noted that the FODS committee is always looking for additional members and that the current Chair and Secretary have given notice of their intentions to stand down at the next AGM as their children move up the School.

Parish Hall Update

12. Helen Price had provided a note with an update following a recent Hall committee meeting, and Lizzie outlined her responses to the questions raised. There is evidently still some disquiet about the School’s use of the Hall, and in particular grumblings about cleanliness. It was noted that the School has reinforced messages to children about respecting the Hall and that, in any case, some responsibility lies with Devon Norse, the contractor which provides the lunch service. Some members of the Committee, with direct experience of using the Hall, noted the inadequacy of much of the cleaning equipment provided in the Hall. Helen will be asked to raise this.

13. The School has been given permission to populate the notice boards in the Hall.

Engaging the Community

14. Following an application to the Parish Council from FODS for a grant towards the fundraising for the playground equipment and initial feedback, Lizzie has been invited to the next Council meeting to discuss the School and LINK; this is potentially very positive in terms of re-establishing the School within the Diptford community.

15. The School will be participating in the Diptford Church Festival of Angels (as will FODS) and the Christmas tree festival at Harberton Church.

16. Roger explained that FODS is attempting to involve the community in its fundraising, eg dropping flyers concerning the Quiz around the village and delivering Bags2School bags to local homes.

17. Roger noted that Carole will most likely be leaving the village and will probably wish to stand down from the Committee. In discussion a potential replacement village representative was identified and Lizzie offered to make contact and explore the individual’s interest.

**School Committee Meeting – 30.10.19**

**Head’s report – Lizzie Lethbridge**

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| **Pupil Numbers per year group** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | Autumn 2019 | | Nursery | 7 | | Reception | 10 | | Year 1 | 8 | | Year 2 | 9 | | Year 3 | 13 | | Year 4 | 7 | | Year 5 | 3 | | Year 6 | 8 | | Total: | 65 | |
| **Open Day** | 7th November.  1.45-3pm in class or family forest school session  3.30-5.30 – open house |
| **School key priorities** | See poster below.  Also available on our website.  Vocabulary is also a huge priority that both schools are working on together. |
| **Events, trips, visits** | We have already taken part in several sporting activities, including Netball, cross country and tag rugby. Diptford are a strong sporting team!  Coming up:   * Spooky Disco this Friday * Tidy up day – Sunday 3rd Nov * Bring a Broom day – Monday 4th * School photos – 6th * Open Day – Thurs 7th * Anti-bullying week – 11-15th * Hawks solar farm visit * Children in Need – 15th * Climate day – 29th * Plymouth Albion Super Saturday * Fire Safety talk * Athletics, basketball and gymnastics * Donkey Sanctuary assembly * Fods Christmas dinner and crafts – 11th Dec * Christmas service – 12th Dec * Last day of term – 19th Dec |
| **Feedback and marking – policy development** | At Diptford, we have been investigating ways to give our pupils high quality feedback that will move learning forward in the most impactful and supportive way.  Research - including action research undertaken in other primary schools - has highlighted that written marking is one small part of a much wider picture of 'feedback', and not always the most effective or efficient method. So, we have been undertaking our own research and developing other ways, including increased discussion with individuals and/or small groups, deeper challenge setting and regular focused conferencing.  So far, this has had a positive effect on children's responses to learning and has significantly reduced the amount of written marking needed. It also means that teachers have had more time to plan and resource lessons which, I'm sure you will agree, is so important.  Our investigations continue!  In the meantime, you should expect to see the usual, great work building in books, but less 'green pen'. |
| **C of E school ethos**  **Christian distinctiveness**  **RE and World Views** | -Collective worship in action. Arrange time for SC to take part in CW.  -We are implementing the new, Devon and Torbay agreed multi faith syllabus. The balance has shifted to 50% Christianity, 50% other world religions and world views. ‘Understanding Christianity’ is still the resource we use regarding the teaching of Christianity.  Our values:  Respect. Joy. Kindness. Courage. Community. Thankfulness.  Half termly focus. ‘Hidden’ values also taught in between.  Diptford’s mission statement and vision:   At Diptford we strive for excellence and enjoyment in learning through aspiration and collaboration.  With kind hearts and a community focus, we grow together with a deep respect for each other and thankfulness for our beautiful surroundings.  Our small school offers big opportunities that support our pupils to flourish and stand out with courage and conviction, finding joy and fulfilment in the exciting and enriching wider curriculum we offer.  **Let your light shine!**  Underpinned by Biblical teaching:  *‘You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.’***Matthew 5:14-16** |

