To: Parents at St Nicholas School

Governor Update – Spring 2018

Usually, Easter is associated with Bunnies. This year, it was Cats. Last week's performance of Cats was really impressive; effective costumes – I'm sure parents had a lot to do with that – lots of movement and dance, and plenty of outstanding vocal performances by the children. Stage shows make it look simple, but this was a very complex and challenging production, with intricate lyrics and a great deal of coordination. The children carried it off brilliantly, and it was great to see that so many of them enjoyed it so much.

Governors' business is not so colourful, but we have been busy. The school's financial year ends in the spring, so one of the most substantial items this term is the review of next year’s budget for submission to County. School budgets remain very tight, so our business manager and the school senior leadership team has a lot of juggling to do to make ends meet and still deliver the services and support we need to keep standards high. Fortunately, the recent changes in national funding formula, which affected many inner-city and secondary schools badly last year, have not had too much impact at St Nicholas, though we are again relying on a shrinking carry-forward to make ends meet. Looking towards 2019, however, there are indications that this might ease slightly. This year, there were some central funding reallocations to prevent schools running into serious deficit in the transition to the new funding formula; this meant that St Nicholas ended up a little short of the full funding formula allocation for 2018-19. Next year, with the transition passed, that should not be necessary, which we hope will mean a percent or so more income in 2019-20.

National School funding has also had some impact on our continuing consideration of possible Academy status. As you may know, the formation of Academies and Academy Trusts, with more autonomy and less reliance on local councils, remains Government policy. The recent squeeze on funding has, however, made it clear that Academies are very vulnerable to funding shortages. As a voluntary aided school, we already have a good balance of independence and support, and our current external advice is to retain that status while we can.

That will not stop us working with other schools nearby, of course. Mrs Felsing was recently appointed as a National Leader of Education and St Nicholas is accordingly a National Support School. This comes with an expectation that our senior staff help other schools. That in turn comes with some additional income, and – more importantly for standards at the school – means that our staff gain wider experience of teaching methods that can help improve our own school, even as we
help other schools improve. We'll also be exploring opportunities for other partnerships with nearby schools, to see if we usefully can share some costs or make better use of resources.

As in all terms, Governors keep an eye on progress, which is assessed regularly in all year groups. So far this year, progress is looking good, though the staff will be working particularly to make sure higher level writing comes up to our very challenging targets. We'll be reviewing maths provision next term as well, to stay aware of how well the recent ‘mastery’ teaching approaches are working. This term, too, we looked at some of the Forest School facilities and activities; this looks really exciting for the children, and it will be good to see that initiative extended through the school.

The Governing Body do still have some Governor vacancies, two Foundation and one Elected Parent, so if you have links with the Church in Littleton parish, or know of someone further afield who would be willing to serve as a Diocesan Board appointee, please put them in touch with the school, via the school office. We had also hoped to start the process for election of a new Elected Parent Governor this term, but we're now looking to early next term to start that off. If you feel you can contribute – whatever your background – to the school’s Governance, please watch out for the nomination request and get a nomination in.

To close, there's a big round of 'thank you's this term. The Cats production was a great effort by children, parents, scene painters, lighting crew and of course Mrs Wells’ production team; thanks to all for the hard work to make that such a success. More families have contributed to our Building Management fund this year, which is very welcome; although it relies on your voluntary contributions, the fund is essential for school maintenance and helps us with some of our school improvements. The PTA, this term, has found funds for a terrific new playground climber; thank you all for the support and donations that have made that possible. We have run a huge range of sports, visits, camps, dress-up days, a Book fair, Easter Egg hunts and Church activities; lots of these are coordinated by our office staff as well as involving lots of teaching staff and parent helpers. All these activities rely on hard work from all the staff, from the children, and from all of you, to make them possible. Thanks to everybody for making the term so much fun.

I hope you all have a happy Easter break,

Yours sincerely,

Dr S Ellison  
Chair of Governors  
St Nicholas Church of England School