Governor update – Spring 2017

It’s Easter, and when I visited the school this afternoon I was very impressed by the rapidly increasing collection of Easter gardens and eggs that the children have brought in for display. A lot of imagination has gone into these, and it’s good to see children – and, I’m sure, parents – so engaged in creative activity. Thanks to all who have helped the children with those.

Turning to Governor activities, we were pleased to welcome a new Foundation Governor this term; Robin Campbell, appointed by St Nicholas PCC. Robin is a Shepperton resident with two sons, one currently in Early years at St Nicholas. He brings a background in IT management and a strong interest in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths, which are welcome additions to the Governors’ skills and experience. It’s also always nice when a Foundation Governor brings an additional parent perspective.

We do still have vacancies for two additional Foundation governors, though, so if you have links with the Church in either Shepperton or Littleton parishes, 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.

The big item for Governors this term was the recent OFSTED inspection. This was a one-day ‘Section 8’ inspection, which is essentially a rapid check to make sure a school continues to do well and that it is capable of quickly addressing any weaknesses that may arise. In a way, that was something of a disappointment, especially for the staff who have put so much into improving the school over the last few years. We have had very good feedback from our external consultancy visits and strong improvement in progress over the last three years: our childrens’ progress in reading and writing at Key Stage 2 is now in the upper 20% of all schools, and our Early Years attainment is consistently well above national figures. So we would have welcomed a full inspection with the chance of a higher rating. Nonetheless, we were pleased to see that we have easily retained our ‘Good’ rating and the inspection summary (available on the school website) includes a whole catalogue of positive feedback. I was also especially pleased to see that your feedback to OFSTED via the Parent View website was so positive; that’s a great compliment to all our staff, so thank for your support for our school.

Spring is the end of the school’s financial year so another substantial item this term was our review of next year’s budget for submission to County. There has been a lot of recent press coverage about the increasing squeeze school budgets, so we know budgeting is getting increasingly challenging. As
ever, though, the school’s budgeting process is very detailed and tightly managed; our business manager and the school senior leadership team spend days each year to plan a balanced budget. The changes in national funding formula that seem to have affected many inner-city and secondary schools so badly have not yet had such severe impact at St Nicholas, and we were again helped by a modest surplus to carry forward. However, as we look towards 2018 and beyond, we expect budgets to tighten still further, so we will increasingly have to look for new savings or income. Even so, we do not currently see cause for concern; just a continuing need to keep a very close eye on future spend.

We have also kept an eye on Curriculum changes. As you may know, the school is working particularly hard on Maths this year, using some of the ‘mastery’ teaching approaches that have helped some Asian countries to top the international league tables. Some of our Standards subcommittee – which looks after Curriculum and progress issues – visited the school to find out what this looks like in the classrooms, and were impressed by the enthusiasm of both staff and children for the new approach. This term we also looked at changes in Science; it was good to see that our new science lead is actively working to improve science teaching and resources, including elements of outdoor learning.

Finally, I can’t leave without saying how impressed I have been with the sheer range of events and activities organised this term. A look through the weekly newsletters shows something like fifty different special events and activities across the school, including visits, camps, Easter egg hunts, the book week and many others – just this term. And that is on top of all the regular clubs and activities that our office team help to coordinate. That’s an enormous effort from all of you, helping your children, from the children participating, and from the administrative and teaching staff who make it all possible. Thanks to everybody who has helped to make the term so much fun for all our children.

I wish you all a happy Easter break,

Yours sincerely,

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