To: Parents at St Nicholas School

Thursday 20th July 2017

It is mid July, and we have almost reached the end of the School year. I hope you have enjoyed some of the many end-of-year events. This year I was particularly impressed by the year 6 leaver’s show. Year 6 drew their own comparison with their early years performances – much to everyone’s amusement – but it was great to think back and see just how far they have grown in confidence and presentation in their time at the school. I also hope you caught some of the performances during celebration evening, as well as the displays of all the great work our children have done. Thanks to everyone involved in the events; they are hard work for all the children and staff involved, but the results are really impressive to see.

This term’s closing Governing body meeting brought us up to date with the work of our four subcommittees, the latest information on our SATS results, and the various links we have with other schools. Our Standards committee looks after the school curriculum and helps to make sure that our progress tracking is robust and up to date, and to make sure the school does everything it can to help children progress well. We were pleased to see that all the year groups are progressing well; it is also particularly good to see that the new maths curriculum seems to be improving progress in maths, as that has been one of our main focus areas over the last two years. This year our Standards committee also looked at Science teaching, PE, Religious Education and worship. Science in particular has been refreshed this year, with teachers working to use elements of the new outdoor learning approaches the school has been using this year.

Our Admissions committee advises on our admissions criteria, and monitors the number of children on the school roll. As ever, the school remains popular and fully subscribed; this year, too, the occasional vacancies that arise further up the school (for example as families leave the neighbourhood) have filled quickly. We were also pleased that the County has finally approved our amended admissions criteria; this will make sure that siblings of children at the school have high priority even when ‘out of parish’.

Our Resources and Staffing committees monitor the school budget, buildings and staff – the assets the school depends on for good education. The school has yet again managed to keep the books balanced even though budgets have been tight. As I said in my March update, the changes in national funding formula that have affected many inner-city and secondary schools so badly have not yet had such severe impact at St Nicholas. Nonetheless, although the Government may be putting more cash into education, the number of children in schools is growing slightly faster and the school will still need to keep looking for new savings or income over the next few years.
We were pleased to hear that Staffing is looking strong for next year. Recruitment of teachers just outside London is never easy, so Mrs Felsing and her senior staff always spend a lot of time each year finding creative ways of providing full cover with good teachers. The school is also very good at moving staff up to leadership roles, and it is good to see that we have new curriculum and year group leaders moving up to take on those key roles.

We also heard the latest news on our SATS and Early Years assessment results for this year, since the provisional results had just become available. (Results are ‘provisional’ at this time because some SATS papers are still subject to appeals for marking). It looks as if the National figures have started to catch up with the large changes in SATS last year, which St Nicholas anticipated well, so we are not quite as far ahead of the pack as last year. Nonetheless, there is plenty of good news; early years have done very well this year with more children than ever passing the Phonics tests; Attainment is broadly similar to last year’s strong year 6, and significantly above National performance for reading, spelling and grammar; and the number of children exceeding the ‘expected’ attainment was higher than last year.

In other news, we were very pleased to hear that the school has gained recognition as a ‘National Leader in Education’. This represents great recognition for our staff, who have already been helping other local schools develop. Cross-school support of this kind has important advantages for St Nicholas; for example, our leaders gather good practice from other schools and we gain some additional income. In addition, the recognition makes the school a more attractive employer.

No end-of-school-year update would be complete without some much deserved thanks. All of the staff have worked hard this year, providing new outdoor learning opportunities, implementing new mathematics teaching methods across the school, and supporting all the great out-of-school trips and spectacular events the children have presented. Our parents have provided great support all year, acting as parent helpers, attending school events, supporting the PTA, helping your children learn at home, and contributing to the building maintenance fund that helps us keep the building in good shape. And of course, all of the children at St Nicholas have worked really hard all year – as you’ll have seen at celebration evening – and their behaviour is a credit to the school. Thank you all for all of your support and hard work during the year.

I wish all of you a good summer break, and look forward to seeing you again next year.

Yours sincerely,

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