

PARENT FORUM MEETING MINUTES

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 10th MAY 2017 AT 18.00 IN THE LECTURE THEATRE

PRIORY GOVERNORS PRESENT: Peter Colebourn, Sarah Roberts, John Griffiths, Graham Arr-Jones, Suzy Carpenter and Pauline Quinton

APOLOGIES FROM GOVERNORS: Sarah Hinks, Penny Leach and Audrey Whyte

Headteacher: Tony Smith

PARENTS: 10

ALSO PRESENT: Emma Brinkhurst (Clerk)

John Griffiths (Chair of Governors) welcomed parents and thanked them for joining the Governors at Parent Forum.

John Griffiths asked if we could go around the room and if parents/Governors could say their name and what year(s) their child(ren) are in at Priory and if they could mention if they have an item they would like to discuss today.

One Parent has a child in year 9 and wanted to ask a query about as her child would soon be following the GCSE syllabus will each department be talking to each other about homework as sometimes there is none and sometimes a lot on one day.

One Parent had a child in year 9 and wanted to know more about the longer lunch trial and criteria the school have for selection for school based trips. Also could there be more pessimism from teachers to the students about the changes to the curriculum and ladder system the students feel they are guinea pigs. And the parent had a reservation about teaching in some subjects.

Sarah Roberts (Parent Governor) said she has a child in Year 10 and thinking about pessimism wanted to have some positive thoughts about the funding challenge schools face what could we all do extra and what could we all do without.

Peter Colebourn (Co-opted Governor)

One Parent had a child in year 7 and year 8 and it was their first time to the forum.

One Parent had a child in year 7 and 8 and wanted to see what the forum is about.

One Parent had a child in year 10 and agreed with the comments about pessimism.

One Parent had a child in Year 7 and wanted to attend to be nosy to see what the forum was about.

One Parent had two children in Year 9 and one in Year 11 and wanted to speak about faith in school.

One parent had a child in Year 7 and it was their first time to the forum.



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One Parent had two children one in Year 7 and one in Year 10 and it was their second time attending the forum and they felt it was important they attended.

Suzy Carpenter (Co-opted Governor) - Staff member at the school.

Pauline Quinton (Co-opted Governor) has six grandchildren working their way through their education - two grandchildren currently at the school one in Year 8 and one in Year 10.

Chair of Governors John Griffiths – no children at the school.

Tony Smith thanked the parents for attending saying it is important for the school to work with parents via parental engagement and participation.

One parent had children in Year 7 and 9 and agreed with Tony that the more parents that can get involved via things like the forum the better.

Graham (Foundation Governor) also Chair of the Co-op Trust and had two sons that went through the school a long time ago now.

One item John Griffiths wanted to raise with parents was the biggest challenge for schools - the funding challenges. John Griffiths said he hoped everyone had seen a copy of Tony's letter #FlatCashEd - School Funding. John Griffiths said he wrote to the local MP and had received a supportive response, but as yet nothing had changed. John Griffiths said at a recent Governors' meeting the 2017/18 budget was signed off, but it had been a very challenging process. Next year due to prudence in the past, Priory will be able to maintain the curriculum, class sizes and teacher numbers as is, but unless things change there will be some impacts in the future. In 2017/18 Priory will be spending more than 50% of its ever to date surplus, which of course is not sustainable over the longer term so, over the next few months the governors will be looking at everything in order to best protect the educational provision for the students. John said these are tough times and given the current election John asked parents (whoever you are voting for) to raise educational funding and press for additional support. While the national total education spending may be higher than previously (mostly due to increased student numbers), the real picture is severely impacted by costs that have risen faster than revenues e.g. increased teacher pension and national insurance contributions, and the apprenticeship levy.

Pessimism

A parent raised the question of pessimism asking if school staff could work towards not transferring their worries to i.e. 12/13 year old children. The parent said that the general climate and exams are tough and the students feel like guinea pigs. Another parent said their daughter was positive and happy then when she started Year 10 but it was now all doom and gloom. A parent said her child was worried by over testing and are not told what revision to do. Tony Smith said the school is working to be as positive as possible; he feels the children are well taught by specialist teachers. Tony Smith explained he is aware it is hard for some staff to be positive with the challenges. It is difficult for staff to accurately predict grades as there are



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mixed messages from exam boards. Sometimes these frustrations spill over but he felt that by and large staff are positive and build students up.

Tony Smith said the Year 11 students are very focussed. Recently he asked some Year 11 students how they were feeling - are they anxious. They said they are over that and said they just want to get going.

Tony explained that the last INSET day was used for staff to compare work and improve consistency. By the end of June detailed descriptors for the Priory ladder 1-9 will be presented to Mr Ashworth. Tony mentioned around the Lecture Theatre you can see posters from Drama with the descriptors. Ofqual advice has been that schools should avoid trying to predict progress and grade boundaries. Professional teachers are frustrated as they use to know the grade boundary for a Grade A, B and C. Tony said he has shared sample GCSE papers with some Governors.

John Griffiths explained that some parents may have seen the new Maths style exam papers (a lot has been reported in the press). It used to be that papers were designed to get progressively harder so the 'easier' questions were at the start of the paper: now there is a mix of easier and harder questions throughout the paper. This makes it more difficult and students are struggling with exam technique. Different strategies need to be taught to students. In the past it was often possible to advise a student to secure the marks on, say, the first ten questions and then progress to the other questions. This is no longer as straight forward.

The school aims to build students confidence and change their mind set. For the first couple of years it is likely we might see national volatility with grades - as we move to the 9 -1 grades it may mean that pass marks for a '4' or '5' may be low one year e.g. 30% but higher another year as the mark depends on the national cohort performance. This might take a few years to stabilise.

Tony said having subject specialists is important e.g. Maths these teachers will need to understand the range of strategies available to students. It is now important for students to be able to de-construct a question for an exam. A parent said the Maths teachers are doing an amazing job as the parent has seen her daughter really motivated as she struggles with Maths.

Tony explained Priory is above average compared to all schools in the UK so we are confident if students work hard they should perform well. Tony said some teachers ask him what his feelings are about the changes he says he is intrigued, excited, quite confident but also nervous. A parent said if teachers remind their students this is a transition period and they have the right tools. And that they are approaching the transition in the right way this would help. Tony is encouraged that if students can de-construct a question i.e. in one lesson Tony visited the Vietnam war was being studied and the question related to what extent did the media affect negative views on the war – the teacher was working hard to help the students identify key words and focus on the 'the extent' rather than a general description.

A Parent said that their child is in Year 7 and his son's view is positive of the Priory ladder 1-9. Tony said that the school acknowledges there is still work to do but it does help with the five year progression for students from Year 7. We have robust action plans for each curriculum area. It is important that, from the



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start, key command words are taught and that students are supported to write extended pieces with a clear focus on improved literacy. Students arriving from Primary school are having more challenging SATs the base line is raised and students need a better understanding. Tony made members of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) sit some of a key stage 2 SATs paper. SLT were surprised how challenging aspects of it were and that we needed to ensure we build on the prior learning. Tony said children should find education rewarding and positive. All schools are going through this.

Homework

A parent mentioned about the amount of homework their child receives sometimes on the same night. The parent asked don't subject teachers talk to each other about when they are setting homework. The parent mentioned that in the school she works at that homework is set on specific days i.e. Geography on a Monday and Maths on a Tuesday. Tony said staff should be giving students sufficient time to complete homework. Tony explained that when homework comes in a batch the students don't have to do it that night and students should use the deadline days to plan their programmes. The school is aware that some students like to do homework straight away and 'get it out of the way'. Tony explained that planning when to do their homework using the deadlines is important. Tony said English, Maths and Science are set every week. Other subject homework is generally set for every three hours of teaching i.e. Classics.

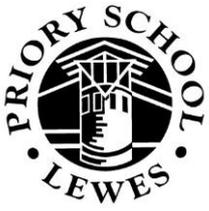
Q A parent asked is English homework set every week in Year 7?

Tony said yes it is but the school is addressing an issue with one member of English who has not been setting regular homework.

A parent mentioned their child had been kept behind for mandatory extra help but their child saw it as a detention. The child felt it was negative as they were sitting with everyone else who is having a detention for behavioural problems. Tony explained that in some curriculum areas there are a smaller number of teachers so the detention including the extra help session is held in the same place. The parent said this extra help was not coming across as a positive thing of helping the student with something they are struggling with i.e. Maths. The parent wondered if this could be articulated to students as this is to help you rather than a punishment. It was suggested perhaps this could be called an intervention after school class to improve/help with your work. A parent mentioned their child finds the Maths club very positive and will still go now if their child is struggling with Maths.

Faith in schools

The parent wanted to talk about faith which is close to the parent's heart who is a Christian. The parent has four children at the school one in Year 11 and two in Year 7 and one in Year 9. The children are exploring their own faith and what it means. The children sometimes feel Priory is a hostile environment for a student with faith. The parent mentioned a debate in Religious Studies that her child in Year 9 spoke to her about which was about belief in god and atheists. The parent's children felt intimidated by this stating their personal views on faith in front of other students. The parent said the majority of students



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seem atheist. The parent said that she had complained about one member of staff but the parent said Tony Smith dealt with this quickly and apologised. The parent felt that Priory is a really good school and felt much was positive. The parent had a couple of suggestions she would like to pass onto the school about faith in school:

- One suggestion was for the school to set up a prayer/reflective space for all faiths or a no faith area.
- The parent felt to improve students understanding of faiths a trip to a mosque, church or synagogue or a special workshop of local leaders from different faiths – to show the diversity of different faiths to the students. Tony said that he has been trying to set this up but some religious leaders he has spoken to require a lot of money for doing it.
- A Grill a vicar/atheist session – for students to ask questions.

A parent who worked at an Inner City Muslim School – mentioned issues faced with views on Jews when there was little real understanding of the Jewish community and faith. The parent contacted the Jewish museum in Camden Town and the museum sent representatives to the school to do a talk for the students. The students found it interesting and it dis-missed the myths.

Tony Smith said that the school are working with the trustees of the school's Chapel as an educational tool – further information can be found on the school's website:

<http://www.lewesprioryschoolmemorialchapeltrust.org/index.html>

Tony Smith explained that the Trustees of the Chapel held a Chapel assembly some of the former students that were involved in the building of the Chapel came to the Chapel assembly and they explained to the students about the significance of the building as a war memorial.

Tony Smith also explained that we have two practising Muslims at the school and we do not have a designated room for them and are looking into a multi faith space so they can pray at lunchtime it is not ideal but they use the servery at present.

Q Why couldn't the Chapel be used?

The space would need to be a neutral space.

It was mentioned that some students need a space/somewhere to go when they feel vulnerable/upset and some students would go to the student toilets but now the outer doors are off the students don't feel they can go there. The parent said they were aware students could go to Pastoral. So it was felt a reflective space for all students would be welcomed.

Parents also spoke about the outside of school challenges of faith and that if something is not right this should be reported to the Student's House Tutor. Tony Smith spoke of the school's values including 'respect' – students' should challenge and appreciate diversity.



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Whole school trial extended lunch next term

A parent asked why the school were having a whole school extended trial lunch. Tony Smith said this was due to increasing numbers of parental and student requests. Some parents raised they felt their children did not have enough time to run around and eat lunch particular Year 7s. Tony Smith explained the school has identified a range of issues and would make an announcement regarding the trial next week.

Student toilets outer door removal

Tony Smith explained the toilets have been designed to a high specification there are recesses and a large wooden outer door that has been taken off. The individual cubicle doors have not been removed – all toilets have individual cubicles. The school have had problems with vandalism, bullying, students hiding in the toilets, and anti-social behaviour. Tony Smith said this will be reviewed at the end of the summer term. Tony Smith gave an example one student who was trying to hide in the toilets and said to him “ You would not have caught me if the doors were on.’ One parent said that they were pleased about the outer doors being removed as their child was intimidated by some older students in the toilets.

School Uniform

Tony Smith explained the changes to Priory’s uniform is so it is gender neutral as the school is having increasing numbers of transgender students attending. The uniform will be phased in. Parents felt the summer t. shirt was a good idea. Tony Smith felt this would be a cheaper uniform as i.e. any grey trousers would be accepted now not just mid grey as long as students are not in jeans or chinos and look smart. A parent commented they thought the second hand uniform shop was really good.

Q A parent asked in how many years, do you think all students will be in the new uniform?

Tony Smith felt the majority of students possibly in three years.

Selection for subject based school trips

Tony Smith explained that teachers/Head of Departments select some students. Sometimes it is the best students to compete against other schools. Sometimes the trip provides the criteria i.e. students that might not aspire in the subject. Tony Smith said there is a range of criteria but if you feel it is unfair please contact the teacher direct.

John Griffiths and Tony Smith thanked the parents for coming.

Meeting closed: 7.15pm

Next meeting: tbc