



Wednesday 6th May 2020

Dear Parents & Carers

We hope you and your families are all safe, well and managing through the lockdown.

We normally update you on the work of your Governing Body at the end of each term but this was not possible at the end of the spring term this year due to the school closures. As a result we are writing to you now.

Covid-19

Firstly, we would like to pay tribute to the response by our staff to the Covid-19 emergency. As we all know we are living through unprecedented times and each stage has required differing responses. While school was still open, the Governing Body were impressed and reassured by the regular and clear communications on the situation from the school and the actions implemented within school (regular hand-washing, no assemblies and so on) to keep the environment as safe as possible. Since school has been closed we have been impressed again by the dedication of the staff to the children in our school's care. This has been demonstrated in two ways. Firstly, through the rapid and well-supported introduction of distance learning for children now at home. Secondly, through the rota system for staff which has allowed our school to stay open as a safe and familiar environment for those vulnerable children and children of key workers who need to attend school still.

We would like to thank all the staff for their dedication, hard work and professionalism through all this.

Governance work

In terms of our governance work, the spring term is when we focus on the financial planning for the coming year. This happens alongside our usual work of monitoring the teaching and learning within school and also the admissions for the next academic year. While we are now holding meetings via Zoom, we were lucky enough to be able to hold our normal meeting in school on 2nd March where we spent time in class (learning walk), talked to a group of children (pupil voice) and also had a presentation from Miss Lawson on the work being done on the curriculum in line with the changes to the Ofsted framework. As always the Governors were impressed by the behaviour of the children, the variety of different lessons being taught (demonstrating our broad and balanced curriculum) and the work being done by staff to develop our school and keep it being the best it can be. The chair of our Admissions committee, Jaime Goumal, joined school staff

Nurture Encourage Challenge through Christ



to ensure that the criteria set out in our Admissions policy is being correctly followed. Led by Mrs Mitri, we have also been working on the new Relationships & Sex Education Policy which is an important piece of work for all schools at the moment as the new legislation comes into force in September this year. Later this term we will be sharing this with you all and we look forward to discussing it and hearing your feedback.

Financial Situation

As mentioned previously, our financial situation has been the main focus of our work recently. In preparing the budget for the financial year 2020/21 we spent a lot of time looking at our three-year plan as well. While we have managed to balance our budget for 2020/21 through careful financial planning, our financial situation continues to be a source of great concern. We have written before about the fact that the costs of running our school continue to rise while funding has been static for many years. The government recently announced small increases in funding which are naturally very welcome but unfortunately for our school the increase was minimal and not enough to offset the significant increases in employment costs. To provide some more context, primary schools are advised to aim for staffing costs at around 85-90% of their income. Ours are currently at 97%, expected to rise to 101% by 2022. This is due to the salary and pension costs of the structure of staff needed to run our school. The result is that we know our school cannot balance its budget in the financial years 2021/22 and 2022/23. We need to consider all options to move forward.

Partnership proposal

Prior to the school closure we held an extraordinary Governing Body meeting where we discussed our financial situation in considerable detail. As your Governing Body, our main aim is to ensure that we are working strategically to ensure St John's is a school with a sustainable future. This means doing everything we reasonably can to reduce costs and increase income. While some of the decisions we took at our extraordinary meeting are now on hold due to the Covid-19 crisis, one thing we agreed is that we would actively pursue options for joining in partnership with another school.

There are many models of partnership (from informal partnerships to soft and hard federations) and the main benefit is that two schools are able to share costs and resources while remaining as distinct entities with their own ethos. Most formal partnerships start with the sharing of school leaders (i.e., an executive headteacher role which works across both schools) and this is the model we are looking at. This also ties in with clear guidance from the London Diocese Board for Schools (LDBS) and from Barnet that in the current funding climate it's now unusual for single-form primary schools (and especially those with financial problems) to have both a full-time head and full-time deputy headteacher.

Nurture Encourage Challenge through Christ



The recent successful secondment of Mr Sweetingham and Mrs Mitri to St Mary's & St John's proved to us, the LDBS and Barnet's school improvement team that our school is capable of functioning to a high standard without a full-time head teacher and a full-time deputy. This is testimony to the work done to improve our school over the last four years and to each and every member of staff.

From a financial point of view, entering into a partnership with another school allows us to save on salary costs without losing the strong leadership team of Mr Sweetingham and Mrs Mitri. For example, if we entered a partnership with Mr Sweetingham as an executive head for two schools, we would only be paying his salary for half of his time but we would not lose his successful leadership of our school.

As we are an LDBS school any partnership we enter into would be with another Church of England primary school and as such the Governing Body communicated to the LDBS in March that we would like them to consider us for partnerships. It is with this context that we are now considering partnership with another suitable school, with the view to Mr Sweetingham becoming an Executive Head of both schools and Mrs Mitri becoming Head of School at St John's. **We will update you when we have more information to share.**

We appreciate that the idea of change within our school's leadership is not necessarily something we will all welcome, especially at the moment. Please be assured that the Governing Body will absolutely be focussed on how best to support our school and the community through the current crisis first and foremost. Nothing will be changing in terms of the leadership within school until we have reopened fully.

Feedback welcome

As always, please do not hesitate to get in touch with us via the governors email address (governors@stjohnsn20.barnetmail.net). If you have questions as we are only too happy to answer them. In the future we may organise a Zoom call in place of the regular parent drop-in too so please let us know if this would be of interest.

Please keep safe and well. We look forward to seeing you all again when school does reopen!

Imogen Hall,
On behalf of the Governing Body

Nurture Encourage Challenge through Christ