

Wrapping up the Academic Year 2017-18

September 2018

As life returns to normality (whatever that is!) in September after a long, hot summer, it's a good time to reflect what has been happening over the previous 12 months across the school as far as the Governing Body is concerned.

As someone who, prior to joining the Governing Body, had only ever been on the receiving end of education, it never ceases to impress me how fluently and confidently Valley Road School navigates the academic year. Challenges, both internal and external, are an inevitable part of running any business (which is what schools have become), but the challenges within an education context are unique – how to create and maintain a rich, exciting and lasting learning experience for our children whilst balancing the pressures on staff and facilities with an ever-reducing budget (and dwindling assistance from the Authority), not to mention the multiplicity of events that have to be dealt with on a daily basis. Shielding the children – and hopefully the parents – from all this is a skill that demands judgment, sensitivity and a sense of humour. Valley Road School has all three in equal measure.

As governors, our role is to help set the school's vision, ethos and strategic direction, hold the headteacher to account for the school's educational performance, and oversee financial performance, making sure money is well spent. We fulfil this role through our three committees – Leadership and Management, School, and Environment. These committees provide a forum to ask specific questions, and the committee leads then report back to the Full Governing Body once every half-term.

The Leadership and Management Committee oversees staffing, finance and monitors pupil performance.

Prior to the first day of the school year, the Governing Body was invited to a morning with the staff to review the 2017 test data and the annual School Development Plan, and to discuss the priorities and targets for 2017-18. This is normally what the Governing Body then use to track and monitor the school's progress throughout the year.

The staffing changes announced in July came into effect with Mrs Lock moving to Year 6, Mrs Herbert and Mrs Fraser moving to Year 5, and Mr Shacklady ably assisted by Mr Mackriell who completed his teacher training this year. At Easter, Mr Shacklady took up a new position in a school closer to home, but we were lucky enough to welcome back Mrs Green on a part time basis to provide continuity in Year 4. At the end of the year, we said goodbye and thank you to Mrs Hemmings, Mrs Decardi-Nelson, Mr Mackriell and Mrs Barefield who all move on to pastures new with the school's best wishes.

Cuts to schools funding in real terms has been on the agenda at a national level and has been felt acutely at schools like Valley Road, however the school is fortunate to have some additional sources

of income, primarily from Cygnets in the form of rent, from the excellent PTA and through the continuing generosity of parents and the local community. The future as far funding is concerned is uncertain and the budget was tight this year, but once again the school adapted to provide a superb, stable learning environment for pupils.

Academic achievement is the yardstick against which all schools are measured, and the Governing Body continued to closely monitor progress throughout the year, with particular focus on Phonics in Key Stage 1 and Literacy in Key Stage 2. The aim of frequent monitoring is to ensure there are no surprises when the results of the 'SATS' become available over the summer.

The School Committee oversees the curriculum, teaching, provision for children with special needs and disabilities, communication with parents.

For the uninitiated, keeping up with changes in the curriculum can be challenging but the Link Governors have been well-informed by their corresponding Key Stage Leaders on developments and how the learning delivery needed to adapt accordingly.

We have received reports every term from Mr Coulson regarding the teaching observations and monitoring of teaching; observations have been shared with staff and between senior leaders, extending skills in both teaching and monitoring.

Our SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) governor has regularly met with our SENCO (Special Educational Needs Coordinator), Miss Gibson. These termly meetings will continue to monitor the provision and success of support given to these children.

The Environment Committee oversees the maintenance of buildings and grounds, and monitors Health and Safety, and Safeguarding and Behaviour Issues

The 'Happy Valley Room' at the top of the drive has proved to be an excellent resource and has been well utilised this year for music lessons and the Breakfast and After School clubs. The curse of the leaking flat roofs over Bishopswood and the Computer Room has been eradicated (for the foreseeable anyway) by a local builder and parent free of charge – our thanks to him and his team.

Despite the copious amounts of snow and ice this year, the school was only closed for a day and a half thanks mainly to Mr Trimmings, our Caretaker, but also to small band of parents armed with shovels. In general, the school physical environment continues to be maintained well, and the standard of Health and Safety remains good.

As for the **Governing Body** - we have said goodbye and thank you to Suzanna Reay and our Clerk Helen Batten, and welcomed Kate Wigfield to the Leadership and Management committee and Irene Fox to the School committee.

Many thanks to all our governors past and present who have given and give freely of their time and expertise. Fortunately, the work of this Governing Body is relatively simple and can go relatively unnoticed as Valley Road School is well managed by Mr Coulson and his staff, to whom we are once again grateful for their unfailing supporting of our children's development and education.

If you would like to know more about us and what we do, please visit the Governing Body section of the school website, come and talk with us or email the school office.