

NEWS FROM THE SCHOOL GOVERNORS: April 2017.

The governors of Little Gaddesden School are most grateful for the efforts made by pupils, staff and parents (particularly the Friends of Little Gaddesden School), to keep our school at the forefront of success, with stable finances and a fine educational record.

School governing bodies have a crucial role in ensuring that the school is run in the best interests of the children. There are three core functions:-

1. To ensure clarity of vision, ethos and strategic planning;
2. To hold the Headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils, and the performance management of staff;
3. To oversee the financial performance of the school and to ensure its money is well spent.

As Little Gaddesden is a Church of England school, six of our twelve governors are Foundation Governors – four nominated by the Parochial Church Council (PCC), and two nominated by the Diocese of St Albans. The Vicar is a governor *ex officio*. These Foundation Governors have responsibility for maintaining the school's Christian ethos. There are also two staff governors (one being the Headteacher), two elected parent governors and one governor appointed by Hertfordshire County Council.

In addition, we are particularly fortunate to have a strong and enthusiastic fund-raising body, namely the Friends of Little Gaddesden School, who raise significant amounts of money each year. We are most grateful to them for all that they do. These additional funds are used to the clear benefit of our children, providing equipment and other resources which would not otherwise be available.

The governing body has input in certain policy areas, and we have to find financial resources to supplement funds provided directly by the Department for Education and through Hertfordshire County Council and the Diocese of St Albans. Governors have one full meeting per term. We also have two key committees, which meet more frequently: Learning, which deals with teaching and the curriculum, and Resources, which deals with finance, premises and personnel.

School governance is one of the key elements in school inspections. In March 2014 Ofsted assessed us as follows:

Governance is outstanding. The members of the governing body bring useful experience to the school. They show a very clear understanding of pupils' attainment and progress. Governors receive accurate reports about teaching from the Headteacher and the improvement partner. They have a good understanding of the arrangements for managing staff performance and ensure the promotion and pay awards are based on pupils' progress. Governors check how pupil premium is spent and question the impact of this funding on the progress of eligible pupils. Governors have attended useful courses to improve their effectiveness. They make sure all safeguarding procedures meet national requirements.

These are challenging times for any governing body, as we consider the best way forward. We will have to deal with a reduction in the value of the school's funding, and we now have to pay for services once provided by Hertfordshire County Council. Many of these services are still available to us through *Herts for Learning* (HfL), a company set up by HCC to fulfil many of its roles, including that of financial oversight and the provision of a school improvement partner. HCC has provided strong advice and services in the past, and we expect to continue using many of these same services through HfL.

For some time now, the governing body has been considering whether the school should join an academy grouping, which would change the way in which the school is led, with a reduced role for our governors. An alternative might be to become part of a less formal grouping, sharing various essential services with other local schools.

Our status as a Church of England school requires us to report annually to the PCC, outlining the year's activities at the school. This report, which follows below, covers a calendar year rather than a school year.

LITTLE GADDESSEN CHURCH OF ENGLAND PRIMARY SCHOOL

Chairman's Annual Report to the PCC: April 2017

The school's current high standing is perhaps best expressed in this extract from a letter written by the schools' minister, Nick Gibb, MP, to Charis Geoghegan, our Headteacher:- *I would like to congratulate you, your staff and your pupils for the very high standards that pupils in your school have achieved in the 2016 key stage 2 assessments. Your school's results, as published on 15 December, show that 100 per cent of your pupils reached or exceeded the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2. This means that your school is in the top 1% of primary schools in England.*

The fifteen Year 6 children who achieved these results left us in July for a range of secondary schools:- Ashlyns (Berkhamsted), Tring, Chesham Grammar, Parmiter's (Watford), St George's (Harpenden) and Cottesloe (Wing). At the start of the new school year in September, we had 104 children on roll, including 16 newcomers in Reception.

School governors are very happy about the school's continuing success, but we remain somewhat concerned about possible changes to the school's status. We are keen to retain our autonomy as a Church of England village school, but some of that autonomy could be lost if we have to join an academy grouping. Governors have been looking closely at the available options, in the hope of retaining our individual character, while sharing some expenditure with other schools.

Charis Geoghegan is now a National Leader of Education, and she has been supporting several other schools in the area, by mentoring new Headteachers and by offering advice to other church schools. Our staffing remains very stable, with excellent teaching throughout, strongly supported by our teaching assistants. We have a full complement of 12 governors. Claire Owen is our new Parent Governor, succeeding Laura Gill, who is now an associate member of the governing body.

The PCC's generous grant of £800 helped fund a Harvest Workshop in St Albans. John Russell continues to take regular weekly assemblies and to lead our church services, and David Russell again visited from Northchurch Baptist Church. Three *Understanding Christianity* sessions were held in the school hall, for primary school teachers from within the Diocese. Children from Class 3 took part in the Sunnyside Carol Service in Berkhamsted. A school wreath was laid a wreath at the war memorial on Remembrance Sunday.

In January 2016, the canopy outside the Reception class was formally opened, complete with side panels. Children's outdoor learning is much improved, as wind and rain no longer impede activities. Hall heating has been upgraded, with a new boiler funded through the Diocese. New tarmac on paths through the playground has reduced the mud on the route into school.

Sporting activities during the year have included football, rugby, netball, cricket, hockey, rounders, swimming, running, multi-skills and dodgeball, with the usual matches against other schools. Four older children are specially trained Sports Ambassadors, and they have helped to run several special sports days.

In the autumn, Class 3 had cornet lessons and gave several concert performances. During the summer, Class 4 staged an outdoor production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, enthusiastically received by fellow pupils and by parents. The school Christmas show was *Lights, Camel, Action*, where the nativity story was set against a *Strictly Come Dancing* background.

During the R. E. Week in October, there were visits to St Peter & St Paul's Church, to Northchurch Baptist Church, and to St Albans Abbey. Class 4 walked to the Amaravati Buddhist Centre for a guided tour. We also had visits from a Hindu speaker, from Barnabas-in-Schools and from a team of Maasai dancers (for which we were joined by children from Great Gaddesden).

Other out-of-school highlights included regular visits to the Ashridge woods by Class 1, a mediaeval day for Class 2 at Mountfitchet Castle in Essex, a Class 3 visit to Kew Gardens, and, for Class 4, a day at Duxford airfield and three nights at a PGL activity centre in Wiltshire.

– Nick Crispin, Chairman of Governors