

13th January 2017

Dear Parents

Welcome back! 2016 ushered in much change in the world, but also at Harpenden Academy.

The Board

We welcomed Mike Stevens to the Board in September as the Trust Governor, and he brings a wealth of Governor experience including most recently from his role on Sir John Lawes Academies Trust Board. We also welcomed Geoff Newman, Director of Lyndhurst Financial Management based on the high street and President of Harpenden Cricket Club. I am delighted that he has also been elected as our Vice-Chair, as well as Chair of the Resources sub-Committee. Mrs Laura Gilham was also elected by the staff as their representative, with Mrs Kate Watson standing down from the Board after several years of passionate and brilliant contribution. You will find details of the full Board on our website (which will soon be given an exciting makeover).

Partnership with the Trust

I imagine the incredible impact of being part of a family of successful schools has been much more evident to Governors and staff than it has to you. Our children have benefited hugely from the expertise and support the Trust provide every day, from training our Assistant Teachers so they can be more confident in their interventions through to sharing a curriculum which helps our teachers plan for individual child progression better. But perhaps the most significant contribution has been the secondment of the remarkable Mrs Davies from her home at Samuel Ryder Academy. Her drive and determination to do the best for each child; her courage to make changes which are not always popular but which her experience tells her will make a pivotal difference; her belief in and support for our teaching team, championing them and their professionalism: she is an inspiring leader who has made an impressive impact in such a short time, stabilising our school so all our children can thrive. Thank you.

Recruitment for our permanent new Head

Now Mrs Davies has laid the foundations for school success in partnership with our teachers and the Trust, we need to recruit the leader who will develop and deliver our vision and ethos, taking us to Outstanding and growing the school to its maturity. All schools are required to make such appointments through open competition. We will therefore be advertising next week in the national press and would like to enlist you all in attracting the strongest field possible. This is when schools typically advertise for a start in the coming Academic Year so we are confident we will get lots of interest. Mrs Davies has also made clear to anyone who asks that she will not move on or handover until there is a truly outstanding head to take on her mantle, so we can be assured of continuity and momentum. It also sets the Trust and Governors a very high bar, the appointment of a truly outstanding permanent leader, and one our school undoubtedly deserves!

Board's focus last term

Our role is to provide strategic leadership and accountability, working within the Trust and with school leadership. Amongst our many decisions and considerations at our two meetings, we focused on:

The school development plan

In September, we endorsed Mrs Davies' priorities for improvement in teaching, community relations and leadership and in December were able to congratulate her and the whole teaching team on the progress already made, as evidenced in the data now systematically collected and analysed on each child and each class; in the feedback from the broader community; and the observations from experts visiting the school.

Finances

Our funding is directly related to pupil numbers so as these have fluctuated, so has our income and yet our costs are harder to flex. We therefore endorsed the school strategy to generate additional income through letting the school hall in non-school time; to secure the economies of scale from using Trust-wide resources and services; and to make changes to teaching and class structures which work better for the children and the teachers, such as bringing together the two year 3 classes. Marketing the school remains a big priority if we are to be able to make good investments for the future, and one on which we need your help: "word of mouth" as well as positive social media will make all the difference, and we need to grow to succeed.

The building

With thanks to the colossal efforts of Governors Rich and Ruth, and of Jo and Andy within school, we have reduced our "snags" from an eye watering 342 to just a handful, so our beautiful building is now fully equipped to enhance the education of our children. The mound however remains a challenge, and until it has been flattened off for safety this summer, we all remain frustrated by not being able to turn our playground more permanently into an exciting den of activity and stimulus. Thank you to the parents who have nonetheless helped enhanced all our play areas: creative outdoor learning is core for our school.

Pupil and staff well-being

This is integral to our ethos and a continual priority for the school. An external audit gave the Board assurance that we had robust safeguarding policies and procedures in place, and that continual improvements were being made to ensure every part of our community and building kept up with best practice.

School policies

Governors must systematically review and update these, and we are adopting those of the Trust, adapting where our school is unique. These are then published on our website so you can all understand how the school manages, say, pupil behaviour or charging for school trips.

I look forward to being able to update you at Easter on the further exciting progress we will make this coming term. As well as looking forward to what Mrs Davies has in store for us all the evening of Thursday, 19th January!

Emma Kissack
Chair of Governors