

Higham Primary School Annual Report – September 2023

The Annual Report is where I, as Chair of Governors, look at what the school has achieved in the past academic year so that we can review and make changes (if needed) and plan for the new school year.

I cannot believe that 12 months have elapsed since my last Annual Report and I am pleased to say that the post Pandemic normality has continued where normal school activities are evident with classroom learning, extra curricular activities like sports clubs, Breakfast and After School Club, a PGL trip taking place, face to face parents evenings and class trips to name but a few.

Whilst the Corona Virus Pandemic is history in terms of the severe impact in society, it will take a while for the impact on schools and learning to work through.

This Spring saw the Key Stage 1 and 2 tests for years 2 and 6. It is worth noting that the children that undertook KS1 testing started their Primary School life in September 2020 (6 months after the start of the Pandemic) and those that sat KS2 tests had disturbed learning during 3 of their 4 years within the Junior part of the school. The Senior Leadership Team will assess these results against their forecasts and review our strengths, weaknesses and opportunities.

The impact of the Pandemic on learning will always be a subjective discussing – with some saying that all of the children in this country had the same experience and so all were affected. However, whilst it is true that the children were all impacted during the Pandemic, the impact on an individual child differs across the country and even within a school due to location, resources available, methods of teaching through this disrupted time and individual family situations.

In pre pandemic times the results of one year would be compared to the results of the previous year in line with the particular cohort tested. This would be done in every school and then every school would look at how they compared locally amongst similar schools and also nationally.

The Local Authority guided by the Department of Education have stressed that this year and the next few years will not be judged against pre pandemic times. The children have had huge chunks of disrupted learning and different children have reacted in different ways. Some will have been significantly impacted, while others have adapted to the changes better.

The Governing Body will hear from the Senior Leadership Team how the Key Stage 1 and 2 results turn out and see how they compare to last year's results.

As always, the most important issue is to understand what the Senior Leadership Team have learnt from the results. What changes will be made to improve results, what areas have positively moved from last year and why? What areas have moved negatively from last year and why?

Assessing results is never an exact science, as every school year cohort differs. For example, the split between the number of boys and girls in a year group, the number of children receiving additional help due for special educational needs, teacher stability etc. That is why it is always important that the Senior Leadership Team and the individual Class teachers understand their children with the various challenges and strengths known. I am completely satisfied that this takes place at Higham Primary School.

In the last academic year a visit from Ofsted was anticipated, however it did not materialise. Ofsted last visited Higham in June 2018 where we were assessed as a Good School. I would be amazed if they did not visit again over the next 12 months. They will be looking at the same points that they have always reviewed, namely the teaching in the classroom, pupil behaviour, happiness of the children, attendance, that we follow the correct safeguarding procedures and our School Plan.

I have full confidence in Mrs Grattan and her Senior Leadership team to lead us through an Ofsted inspection. I believe that we are "Ofsted ready" and the School Improvement Advisor from the Local Authority is also of that view.

As I have done each year, I have been an advocate of avoiding complacency when reviewing the workings of the School, as that is when standards slip, so I have looked at what I believe will be the biggest challenges faced in the coming academic year.

- 1) Without doubt the recent budget setting exercise was the toughest that I have seen in 11 years of being Chair of Governors. The Finance Officer and Headteacher spent days and weeks working on the budget allocation for the coming year. Tough decisions had to be made and a robust plan put in place. I am pleased to say that so far the out turn has improved compared to the initial figures BUT we must continue to keep our finger on the pulse to ensure that we get the best value in everything we do.
- 2) Wellbeing of pupils and staff must still be high on our priority list. Wellbeing wasn't just important during the pandemic. It is always important and so it's everyone's duty to keep an eye on their peers and colleagues, whether children or staff. A worrying trend is that some parents feel the need to email the Headteacher or staff at all hours regarding matters. Whilst some maybe urgent/serious matters some are relatively minor and could easily be addressed face to face either at the school gate or in the school by appointment. I do not want teaching staff teaching all day and spending the evenings replying to emails. What can we as a Governing Body do to ensure Staff Wellbeing is being monitored?
- 3) Since Mrs Grattan was appointed Headteacher I feel that big strides have been made with pupil behaviour following the rewrite of the Behaviour Policy in Term 1 2018/19. However, in Terms 5 and 6 the number of behaviour related complaints, that were escalated to me, increased. Some of the individual instances were severe and merited suspension of pupils. Therefore, the Behaviour Policy is to be reviewed in Term 1 and brought to the Governing Body in December for ratification after being reviewed at each committee beforehand. Views will be sought from all stakeholders (Staff, Pupils and Parents) and reviewed into the revised Behaviour Policy. The School will have a zero tolerance on bullying, threatening, rude and persistent poor behaviour (both towards other children and towards Adults in the School). The full powers and sanctions of the Behaviour Policy will be used when is necessary.
- 4) As mentioned in point 1, the School Budget is critical to the success of the School. The Governors and Senior Leadership Team have discussed at length and parental support has been excellent with attendance at the Colour Run, Amazon Wish Lists for each class and kind donations towards events with the new voluntary fund that has been set up. HOWEVER. I am acutely aware that there are some parents who are feeling the pressure with the Cost of Living increases over the last 12 months and expectations moving forward with mortgage rates, inflation etc. Therefore:

- A) The School needs to continue to support families who are struggling by advertising financial support available (eg free school meals)
- B) The PTA have become even more important than ever before. It is vital that the PTA are supported by as many parents, as possible and that staff also support the events (eg School discos, the Christmas Fayre and Colour Run). It is not fair to rely on just the same parents and staff every time.
- C) Whilst some families may be struggling financially, time is also a precious commodity, so running a stall at a Christmas Fayre or selling paint at the Colour Run or helping with refreshments at an event is just as important.
- D) The School needs to be wary of "going to the well too many times" in that the odd donation here and there for Children in Need or Comic Relief or "own clothes day" or a trip needs to be monitored. I do not want any parent or child being made to feel uncomfortable due to their individual family financial position.
- E) Find ways to engage with the wider Higham Community, as there are people in the village who will support the School but maybe never hear about the events.

By keeping constant review of the progress of the learning in all year groups as well as the overall management of the School, Behaviour of pupils and the Budget position of the School, the Governors will work with Mrs Grattan and her team to continue to provide the best possible learning and school life experience for every pupil at Higham Primary School from the first day of Term 1 to the last day of term 6.

I would like to finish with two significant successes from the last Academic Year.

- 1) I highlighted the importance of Communication between the School and parents. Parent Representative meetings started in January 2023 with a parent from each class attending a meeting every 6 weeks or so to raise issues flagged up by their class parents. I have attended each of these meetings and some of the changes in 2023 have happened, directly as a result of this forum. For example, staff pictures on the website so that children and parents can know the staff at the School rather than just their own Teachers and Teaching Assistants. Also, the Amazon Wish Lists were a suggestion from this forum and I understand these have been very successful already.
- 2) The Colour Run. I had not attended any of the previous Colour Runs and I so did not know what the point of a Colour Run was. I was being too analytical because the main reason for the Colour Run was FUN. Children, parents and teachers all took part or were spectators and it was good to see such a large turn out and lots of smiles. The event was compered extremely well and added to the humour. The monies raised for the School was, of course, a real positive and just shows what can be done when we all pull together for the good of the School. The PTA worked tirelessly to ensure the success of that event. Thank you.

I would like to end with a few other thank you's.

Firstly, to every single member of the teaching staff and non teaching staff, without you we have no structure. The fact that you all chose NOT to take strike action in the last few months was very much

appreciated in ensuring that the children were taught properly the planned curriculum by professional teaching staff and non teaching staff ensured School operation was not impacted.

Also, to the parents who have given up their time in continuing to support the School positively, with the PTA events, donations and their time with the Parent Representative meetings.

Thank you to everyone who has been involved on the Governing Body over this Academic year. We are all volunteers and so really do undertake the role for no personal reward, other than knowing that we are contributing to make this school the best it can be for every pupil every day.

Finally, the biggest thank you, as it is every year, is to every pupil who is at Higham Primary School for their enthusiasm and adaptability to change. As a School we will strive to deliver the best education experience to all children . There will be challenges along the way, but I have no doubts that we will succeed in educating the children of Higham.

Brian Maynard

Chair of Governors

September 2023