

# GOVERNORS' NEWS

Updates from The Governing Body  
Higham Primary School | October 2021

## The biggest challenge of a year

At the Governors' Annual General Meeting (AGM) I provide a report of the last academic year and, in doing so, I look back 12 months to my last report to see how things have changed and developed.

Twelve months ago we were four months into the Coronavirus pandemic and there was a real nervousness about how things would pan out. We had only some Years in the school and offered key workers' children education, and we were worried about additional costs.

How would we catch up for lost learning? How would bubbles work? But primarily we worried about the risk assessments to keep staff, parents and pupils safe when entering Higham Primary School, particularly when the new school year commenced in September 2020.

No Headteacher or Governing Body at Higham has ever planned for a global pandemic and so it was all very new - and we were learning and adapting as we moved forward. The school reopened in September 2020 and the risk assessment plans put in place by the Senior

Leadership Team and ratified by the Governors was given its first thorough test of having the whole school back.

New morning drop off and afternoon collection procedures were put in place. Classrooms were socially-distanced; there no all school assemblies in the hall; different lunch time routines; and lots more cleaning became the new way of school life. I think we coped remarkably well.

Eleven Plus exams were sat, a new Reception class of children started their schooling at Higham Primary School and all Year groups returned to classroom learning. We even had the pleasure of a non-judgemental Ofsted Visit to check our procedures were robust in the face of the pandemic.

Interestingly, the attendance rates at Higham Primary School were higher in Term 1 and early Term 2 than in previous years.

### Second wave

As we know, the whole country hit the second wave



*Chair of Governors Brian Maynard*

in November and December and, like many other schools, the absences of staff and pupils started to climb until we had no option but to close the school slightly early in December before Christmas.

January saw nationwide infection rates soar and as we know home learning was stepped up for all Years with all but some key workers children learning from home.

The provision was there. Some children coped better than others from the feedback received but, from an educational point of view, lessons were being taught remotely and learning continued.

For more information about The Governing Body visit [higham.kent.sch.uk/governors](https://higham.kent.sch.uk/governors)

I would like to say that the generosity of some members in the Higham Community and local businesses meant we had donated technology equipment so that more children could continue learning.

Children with limited availability to technological devices received priority. Thank you to all who kindly donated laptops, tablets etc.

Eventually, when national guidelines were lifted, the school returned and it has

been as normal as possible.

We have seen that some pupils have learnt better than others, some have coped better from a behaviour angle than others and some have really struggled in multiple aspects.

## From a Governing Body point of view how have we done?

1) We have completed all of our statutory duties.

2) We have continued to meet with a blend of virtual and socially-distanced meetings. Not one meeting has been postponed through the pandemic.

3) There have been, when permitted, school visits by the Chair of Governors, Health and Safety Governor, Safeguarding Governor and Special Educational Needs (SEN) Governor. All were completed in a socially-distanced compliant manner.

4) We have reviewed policies to remain current,

and amended where necessary.

5) We have agreed enhancements to the school premises to enhance the pupils' enjoyment with the new climbing/outdoor play area.

6) We have discussed and reviewed the pandemic's impact on the school at every committee and Full Governing Body meeting.

7) We have taken a real interest in the well-being of all staff, not just paying lip service to their well-being.

8) We have overseen the school budget for the last year and put in place a new budget

for the coming year, which has been just as much of a challenge as previous years with additional costs caused by the pandemic impact – for example extra cleaning costs and reduced income in certain areas including After School Provision, Breakfast Club and school dinners.

My overall view is that as a Governing Body we have been effective in continuing governance of the school.

But that does not mean that we have been perfect and does not mean that we can become complacent.

## Four important areas will we need to monitor in 2021/22

1) We must look to make up the **lost learning** of all children in the last 18 months. This will not be fixed overnight but we as a school must help the pupils to catch up to where they are expected to be. Catch up funding has been made available by Government but this must be used correctly to all pupils, even those who have seemed to cope well with the trials and tribulations of the last school year. As a Governing Body we must continue to challenge the Headteacher to

demonstrate how this catch up funding has been used and the results it is achieving.

2) Communication is a key to all successful organisations and Higham Primary School is no different. The new style weekly newsletter and the Facebook site are welcome alterations to the way we **communicate**, however it has become apparent to me from some correspondence that was received in Terms Five and Six that whilst important documents like policies, safeguarding information and

pupil premium information is on our school website not all parents know this.

3) **Staff and pupil well-being** is always an important feature of school life. No-one really knows the impact that the pandemic will have in the long term. There has been a third wave in July 2021. Will there be a fourth? Or fifth? Will we lockdown again? Will we have home schooling again? I am afraid I do not have the answers to these questions but it is vital that we continue to place the well-



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-being of staff and pupils at the top of our priorities and react whenever needed. Therefore, I would like a continuation of the Headteacher updates at all committee meetings and Full Governing Body meetings.

4) Behaviour has been a challenge in the last school year and that is understandable. Some children have been more affected than others with home schooling, home situation, lockdown measures. Whilst a certain amount of disruption was

expected when the pupils returned to schooling there have been some examples of **extremely poor behaviour** that have been referred to the Headteacher and in some cases to the Chair of Governors by concerned parents. Some of this behaviour is totally unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

The Behaviour Policy has various sanctions available to the Headteacher and these will be used when appropriate. Higham Primary

School has always had a high standard of good behaviour and a minority will not undermine the efforts of the majority. Exclusions have increased over the last two terms since the return to school and the Headteacher has the Governing Body's full backing to administer this sanction if the circumstances leave no other

option. We have liaised with the Local Authority where necessary and will take every possible step to keep every pupil safe at school.

I would like to thank all of the Governing Body for their time and efforts over the last academic year in what has been a testing time for all.

I would like to particularly thank Les Pearton who after some 18 years as a Governor has stepped down from the Governing Body. That was a terrific commitment to the School long after his children stopped attending Higham Primary School. In particular, the years of School Visits to check Health and Safety issues – how many accidents has he helped to prevent in all those years? That is immeasurable.

I would also like to single out two Governors who have really stepped up in the last School Year. Justine Brown and Keith Fairbank are both parent Governors who, like many parents, have been living the dream of home schooling to their respective children, but also at the last AGM they took on the roles of Health of Safety Governor,

Safeguarding Governor and SEN Governor. They have taken their roles seriously and visited the school when safe to do so, to learn the roles and to become more knowledgeable in the specific areas. They do not have to be “experts” in those fields as that is the role of the professional teaching staff, but they do need to understand the roles and report to the Full Governing Body as a statutory requirement. This they have done throughout this difficult year.

I am indebted to our clerk, Emily Wright, who volunteered in September 2020 to step into the breach to take over the role. She has juggled her office manager role and clerk role so that she has learnt new skills and guided us through the last year in a calm and quiet manner. Another big thank you is to our site manager, Shaun Walton. What a difference in the school premises since pre-

pandemic times not only with classroom layouts but also the new look area where the bomb shelter once stood and the pond area. It has been a lot of work and I know there has been assistance from others but a safe and appealing school grounds is so important for safety and the outside appearance.

My final thank you is to the Senior Leadership Team. Mrs Grattan, Mrs Levy, and Mrs Driscoll have lead the School in the most challenging of times over the last 18 months.

They have taken every challenge and faced it full on to keep the school operating to the best of its ability. They have instilled a great team spirit across all teachers, teaching assistants, catering staff, premises staff and office staff with a strong work ethic but also a caring aspect to ensure that well-being has been monitored across the whole team and support required where needed.

