

Parent Focus Group – 24th March 2016

Minutes

Present: *Mrs Gray, Mr Jones, Mrs Shepherd, Mrs Adam, Mrs Ingram,
Mrs Carridge, Mrs Halliwell, Mrs Walbank*

How can we help you to support your child in their learning at home?

- Mixed opinions about whether homework should be sent home or not;
- Mixed opinions about the type of homework to be sent home;
- Some parents suggested workshops would be appreciated, e.g. for the correct maths methods children use in school. Mrs Gray also reminded parents about the Calculation Policy which can be found on the website.
- Some parents liked the format and consistency which the CGP books provided whereas others questioned whether the expense of these could have had greater impact on the children if spent in a different way;
- Suggestions for how homework could be set included:
 - Optional homework;
 - Children deciding what they think they need to work on;
 - Topic-based homework only;
 - A list of suggested homework tasks/projects each topic/week which children choose from;
 - Online homework, e.g. Mathletics;
 - A weekly text message or section in the bulletin summarising what each class would be covering so that parents could support in a purposeful/real-life context, rather than with a worksheet. It was noted that a half-termly overview is present on the class pages of the website however some said that these were too vague. Mrs Gray explained that they couldn't be too prescriptive as things are subject to change.
- Clearly, there are mixed views on the value of homework and Mrs Gray would like to follow up with a questionnaire sent out to all parents. We would also like to seek the children's perspective on homework and what they think is useful for them.

- Obviously we need to agree on a model that will be ‘best-fit’ for all families; that will impact on children positively; and that will result in a realistic workload for staff members.

How would you like to see the school grounds improved?

- All parents present would like to see their children spending greater time outdoors. They expressed their concern about children being inside all day during bad weather and noted the effect it had on their mood/behaviour. Staff agreed on the benefits of more time outdoors;
- All agreed that it would be a good idea to build up a bank of wellies/raincoats that children could wear so they could still go outside when it was light rain. Mrs Gray pointed out that not all parents shared this view and that in the past, some have worried about their child becoming ill from the cold/damp and their clothes getting too muddy – we would need to make sure that children are dry and warm enough. There are cost implications – this could form part of the project’s budget in order for all to access the outdoors. We could also ask for donations of second-hand clothing. Storage of these items would also need to be incorporated into the costing considerations, e.g. a shed.
- Some parents would like to see the grounds being developed so that children can have better access to sports and exercise, e.g. all-weather pitch;
- Some parents did not like the idea of ‘playpark’ type structures although others pointed out that for some children, this would provide an opportunity that otherwise they would have little experience of;
- However, there appeared to be a stronger desire for the grounds being used to create outdoor learning spaces which could be incorporated into delivering the curriculum and bringing lessons outside;
- Wonderful outdoor activities/projects were suggested, such as a plastic bottle greenhouse. Mrs Gray explained that any outdoor spaces created would need to be self-maintained/easy maintenance as existing staff are working at full-capacity and already going above and beyond;
- It was suggested that children could help to maintain the grounds. Mrs Gray explained that time is limited and the increased demands of the new, much-more formal curriculum sadly on the whole doesn’t lend itself to creative teaching and learning - but at Lancaster Lane, we

work hard to ensure a broad and balanced experience for the pupils. Teachers would embrace the opportunity to make greater use of the outdoors.

- Many parents favoured more open-ended outdoor equipment/opportunities in opposition to conventional, ready-made constructions (which are also costly) which feature in educational magazines. Suggestions included tyres to push around; raw resources such as twigs to construct and role play with, etc. Mrs Gray pointed out serious consideration would need to be given to the practical, day-to-day implications of this, e.g. how it is overseen during lunch times, etc; These type of activities would be low-cost but great for the children – we would like to see real-life examples of this sort of thing;
- The drainage of the school field was questioned – Rick Jones kindly offered to investigate this further. If the field wasn't as wet, much better use could be made of it;
- As always, we would like to get as much parental support – newsletters and bulletins will call on the need for particular expertise as they arise. For example, Mr Smith, a previous parent, installed school gates for us and Mr Fulcher has been helping us maintain the gardens.
- *Forest Schools* is an avenue which we would like to explore further;
- Mrs Gray invited parents to visit other schools alongside her, to gather ideas on how they have developed their grounds. We would also like to invite the school council to join us. Mrs Gray will get in touch with other schools to make arrangements.
- Mrs Adam and Mrs Shepherd are going to send photographs from their own settings, showing excellent example of outdoor learning/provision. We look forward to seeing these.
- It was recognised that the ground development would need to be a long-term project although we appear to have a shared vision – greater outdoor learning opportunities which will positively impact on pupil learning, health and behaviour.