

Thorndown Primary School
Parent Forum Minutes
Thursday 07 May 2015

Present:

Heather Wood (Chair), Louise Lawson (Secretary), Rob Jagger (Governor) Vicci Godbold (Head teacher), Natalie Browne, Sharon Outlaw, Rachael Mortimer, Cathy Sweet, Russell Burgess, Nicola Batty, Yasmin Finch, Amanda Mumford, Dan Ainscow, Kirsty Williford

Apologies: Clare Lorman-Hall

1. Introductions and welcome by Heather Wood. The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

2. Home School Diaries

- Mrs Browne explained the purpose of Home School Diaries (HSD) – to be used as a record for reading and for parents to write in comments/queries/messages and for teachers to respond. Next year's diaries will be dated at the request of teachers and some other useful information like term dates will be included. There are separate designs for KS1 and KS2. Teachers should be keeping a record in the HSD of any reading done with children each week. There is an expectation that KS2 should be telling teachers if there is a message in the HSD from parent to teacher. In KS1 teachers or TAs should be checking HSD daily for messages from parents.
- *Parents* – HSD should be a useful tool – they are a single point of communication that allows parents to get involved. However HSD are not being used to their full potential, are not being used consistently and sometimes are not being used at all. Some parents feel more teacher acknowledgement of reading in HSD would be a useful motivational tool, in particular consistent use of smileys. There is a balance to be struck – parents want teachers to be teaching not spending too much time checking and writing in HSD.
- *Agreed* – Use of HSD will be discussed at a staff meeting. A letter will be sent to parents setting out guidelines for the use of HSD by both parents and teachers. HSD should be checked daily by teachers/TAs in KS1. HSD should be checked and stamped weekly by teachers for KS2. Children in KS2 are expected to make their teacher aware if there is a message/query in the HSD from parents.
- Mrs Browne and Miss Godbold clarified that children can change their reading book every day if they want to but they must be changed before/after school or during playtime.

3. Homework

- Miss Godbold shared the results of the parent survey regarding homework. 9% of parents said it was too little, 15% too much, 75% just enough. It is very difficult to reach a consensus on homework.
- *Parents* – Some parents felt too much homework led to tension and arguments during limited family time. Some parents had issues with the type of homework e.g. math's games which were boring or ineffective/not fit for purpose and creative projects that require significant time and resources. 'Mathletics' was a popular homework tool. Some parents were unclear about the purpose of homework – is it for fun or to improve learning. Some parents felt teachers did not appropriately acknowledge homework e.g. a tick with no comments or no acknowledgement at all. Parents felt it would be helpful to know approximately how much time should be spent on homework tasks.
- *Miss Godbold* - The homework policy needs to be reviewed and this will be done in the near future. The purpose of homework is to revise and embed learning. The school is trying to move away from math's games. The school is introducing a new tool called 'Skoolbo' which is an online resource that can be used at school and at home – letters will be sent to parents about Skoolbo imminently.
- *Agreed* – It would be preferable to have less homework but more meaningful feedback. The homework policy will be revised. For KS1 the school will trial a new homework format– a choice of several projects will be given to children every half term and they will have 5-6 weeks to complete it. It is important that homework in year 6 is stepped up to prepare children for secondary school. The forum will invite Mrs Gerard to come to a meeting in 6 months to report back on 'Skoolbo'
- Mrs Browne reminded the forum there are reading and writing workshops for parents taking place next half term.

4. AOB

Catering

- Miss Godbold provided an update on the catering contract. Five companies put in a tender and were interviewed. Two companies were shortlisted. They will be interviewed again next week. Heather Wood and Cathy Sweet volunteered to sit on the interview panel. Cathy Sweet and Georgina Pope will be part of the tasting team that will sample lunch.

Absence Letters

- Parents were concerned about the content and tone of absence letters and the lack of explanation/information regarding why they were sent out. Miss Godbold explained that each school has a statutory obligation to monitor absence and send out letters to the parents of children whose absence dropped below 95%. Letters were sent out on a half termly basis. The school has an Educational Welfare Officer who

monitors the school's compliance with this obligation. Different letters are sent depending on the level/persistence of absence.

- *Agreed* – Miss Godbold is reviewing the tone and content of letters. An explanation of the schools obligations regarding absence monitoring will be included in the prospectus.
5. **Next meeting:** Monday, 6th July at 7.30pm in the downstairs classroom next to year 5/6 stairs. The main agenda items will be Uniforms and OfSTED (if the report is available).

All parents are members of the parent forum and are welcome to attend the meetings. If you cannot attend but wish to raise an issue you can email parentforum@thorndown.cambs.sch.uk, post a note in the suggestion box in the lobby or raise it with your class representative.