

Second half of Summer Term 2019

Another lovely Leaver's Service today...

A few tears - some from one of the children (who admitted to being teary a couple of times over the last week), but I think the most from a couple of the teaching staff - which I think is really, really nice!

One of the children put it well. He said 'the school is like a family - everyone helps each other'

Amen! And Something to be really proud of!

In other news, musically we have had Adele, and Ed Sheehan years but this is obviously George Ezra's time (Well done George!)

And from the Leaver's Speeches, forget expensive, supposedly exciting school trips when picking strawberries at Bellis (obviously!) and going 'to Tesco's' seem just as popular!

And it seems that the most memorable achievement is when you reach Year 4 and are allowed to play beyond the goal posts at playtime.

Somehow in this crazy world it's the little things that make the most sense!

First half of Summer Term 2019

Well for the first time in a long while we finished our Governor's Meeting on Monday at a decent hour.

This was probably no bad thing as with Helen at one day short of full term, no one was entirely sure how long we might have!

That it was quick was positive and a sign of some real progress.

The verbal feedback from the School Review follow up visit on Friday was really positive and Mrs Sturt and the whole Staff team deserve a real pat on the back for this. We will share the detail when we get the written report, but broadly speaking the School is progressing well in teaching according to the style of the new curriculum. This involves encouraging children to become independent, reflective learners, and places "pupil voice" at the centre of all learning. It suggests really good support for all our children that enables them to fulfil their potential.

We also talked about Finances, and the latest position although far short of positive, was not quite as negative as it has been recently. Again, real credit to Mrs Sturt and the team, who have found ways to save money and still deliver outcomes as good as those on Friday. Still a long way to go, but after so much doom, "not so bad" news, feels good!

And we had an update from our working group on how to improve the website. They have identified an excellent and decently priced platform that would be relatively easy to migrate to, easier to update, and with functions that could allow things like booking slots for Parents Evenings on line. It should also be able to integrate or link content to/from other sites such as the Council website and Holt School Community Facebook Group.

We have enough money within the School fund to pay for this - and as the School fund is the School's money rather than the Local Authority's we can choose how we spend it. We think with time for set and testing, we could have something in place for the new school year. So that is where we are heading, and will keep you posted on progress.

Finally, one of our Parent Governors (Gwyn Jones) stood down at our last meeting. Gwyn has made a great contribution to the School as a Parent, a Governor and (some years ago) as a pupil. We will miss him and thank him for giving up his time to help the school. This means that we have a vacancy for a Parent Governor and I will let you know more about the role and how to apply later this week for anyone that might be interested.

Second half of Spring Term 2019

More about the rest of Monday's Governor's Meeting later but let's start with news from the School Council.

Thanks to Crystal and Jack for coming in and telling us about what you have been doing. And you have been busy! Great to see you tackling the stuff that matters to the school community such as the speed of vehicles passing the school...

First half of Spring Term 2019

So with "Blue Monday" in full swing for around eighteen hours or so we began our January 2019 Governors Meeting.

We started with an update and question/answer session from Jane Borthwick and Ruth Price Roberts. Both are from GwE, the consortium that works on behalf of Local Authorities across North Wales to help schools improve. Ruth is our School Improvement Adviser and visits the school termly. Jane coordinates School Improvement Adviser activity across Wrexham.

Both were here to talk about the School Review process that I told you about in our last blog. In November a team of staff from GwE, the Local Authority, and a Head Teacher from another school spent a day in school talking to children and examining how they are learning.

The way that schools encourage children to learn will change with the new Curriculum that is being introduced from September 2019. Estyn will reflect these changes in their approach this year with School's inspected not on how they are delivering the old curriculum, but on their readiness to deliver the new one. The findings of the review (on the screenshot below) are very positive, and the learning for the school is not onerous (described as "tweaking" by GwE). But with the new curriculum, (and Estyn) due relatively soon, the Local Authority via GwE are pushing the school to make these "tweaks" quickly.

Whilst this puts staff under more pressure, reading between the lines one suspects that there have been a couple of school's inspected recently using the new focus, that have not come out as quite well as expected in terms of their final grading. The pressure from the Local Authority seems to be around ensuring that everything possible will have been done prior to Inspection. And to be fair it would be a shame to let the hard work of the last five years and the grade that the school deserves, to be compromised for lack of a bit of last minute "tweaking". None the less, staff have been (and will be) putting in the hours over the next few weeks.

The website was another subject of discussion, and I know has been a recent topic of discussion on the Holt School Community Facebook Group this week. There is consensus that the site needs improvement, but less as to what that should be, how it should be done or who should do it. We seem to have one or both of two problems: "Content" and or "Capability". By content I mean that over the years the site has been loaded with so much information that much of it has become out of date or irrelevant. Although Hannah Jones has done a great job of thinning this out, there are still some gaps, and it may be that the site is not providing the content that parents and other potential users need. By capability I mean that the site is nine years old, relatively basic, and may not be capable of providing the functions that parents and other potential users want.

The funding that the school receives from the Local Authority does not include anything for a website, and despite "Digital Competency" being a core element of both the existing and new curriculum, the school has had to rely on donations from our ever generous local benefactors to fund the resources (iPads, Chromebook's etc) necessary to achieve this competency. In such circumstances it is hard to imagine the school being in a position to justify any significant spend on a state of the art website. But this does not have to be as negative as it sounds. There is a difference between what parents and others users "want" and what they "need". In a digital world, there will be people in our school or nearby community with the skills that could allow us to get the

best out of our existing capability and (if needed) identify the most cost effective way to add a little bit more. It may be that if we can clearly identify what we “need” the website to provide, and can find a skilled resource willing to help, that we can get enough out of our present capability to deliver it, or at least come within a small cost of delivering it.

We ended our evening with an “old chestnut”. Cool Cats was set up at the request of Governors some years ago to provide the quality child care before and after school that is so essential for families where both parents work. It offers child care at competitive rates and Julie Furber has always been determined to keep the cost to families as low as possible. The before school session comfortably breaks even – pupil numbers are higher and the overall staff costs lower than the longer after school session.

However depending on numbers the after school session can sometimes run at a loss. Whilst some loss can be offset by the morning session, we have to be careful to ensure that this is not too much or too often. School run “after school” clubs add to, or even cause this loss, The balance is delicate and Cool Cats are concerned that it might not be right at the moment. School numbers are lower this year and this may have an impact and there are possibly more clubs running at the moment than usual. These clubs only run for a set number of weeks, so the situation may rectify itself, but it is something that we will need to keep an eye on. And it is important for parents to know that this situation does arise every so often, and understand why. Over the years our annual parent survey has often asked for more after school clubs. Our response has always been consistent and is that the school will run as many as it can but that the number will be limited by the need to maintain the balance that allows Cool Cats to continue to operate.

Second half of Autumn Term 2018

Happy New Year!

It has been a busy few weeks for reasons that I will get to in a later post, but for now as is customary at the end of one year and the start of the next - a look back....

You may remember that in October we posted feedback from the Parental Questionnaire completed at the end of the last school year, some of which said that the school should do more within the community.

As Governors - all of whom are from the local community we were a little surprised by this as we felt that the school was very well engaged with the

community, and so we thought that we would share with you some (but by no means all) of the School's involvement with the community during this term.

In October School held a Harvest Celebration. Children contributed a range of food items that were distributed to the Wrexham Food Bank. The children entertained guests from the village with a selection of 'Harvest' items such as poems, stories and songs. All money from the event was given to Action Aid.

Foundation Phase pupils went pumpkin picking at Bellis' Garden Centre as part of their Wellie Wednesday activities. Some additional children were interviewed with Mrs. Sturt as part of a 'Harvest' podcast for BBC Radio Wales.

In November....Andy Birch worked with our Foundation Phase pupils to update the external walls into a woodland theme area using graffiti style artwork.

Lady Hanmer visited school to talk to the children about the 'Clean Up Clwyd' Eco competition that the school has been part of.

Pupils Attended Healthy School's presentation in Wrexham

In December children sang carols at Bellis' as part of the welcome for Father Christmas.

Parents and other members of the Community attended the school's annual Christmas Concerts.

Friends of Holt School hosted a Christmas Fayre

Father Tudor hosted the School at its annual Carol Service in St Chad's.

And through-out the term...

Father Tudor visited school on Tuesday mornings to lead worship.

PC Stuart led workshops with pupils in Years 1 and 6...

And there will be other things that I have not captured here. And of course there is all that we do to engage via this page. It does not seem too bad for one term does it?

Look forward to engaging with you more in 2019!

First half of Autumn Term 2018

At our first Governor's Meeting of the year last week we reviewed the feedback from the Parental Questionnaires completed at the end of last year.

You can see these results compared with the previous year on the screenshot below. Figures are PERCENTAGES and GREEN shading is where this year's response has improved, ORANGE is where it is broadly the same and RED...well the good news is that there are no reds.

Overall more parents have contributed this year and... well just look at the GREENS!

As well as the direct answers to the questions, parents had the opportunity to add any additional comments. The most popular comments in terms of both where parents thought that the school did well - and where parents thought that it could improve were:

Where we did well...

1. Transition letters for parents on the moving up day were very helpful with regard to expectations within the next year group/class
2. SeeSaw has been a great addition this year!
3. Children are very happy at Holt CP School. Fantastic staff!

Where we could improve

1. More trips / residentials for younger children
2. More male teachers
3. Spread the dates of the trips out rather than them all coming at once eg Year 6
4. Further transition support for Year 6 parents
5. More community involvement

And from Governors some feedback on those possible improvements:

1. More trips for younger children..... Sorry but probably not. Our residential trips are actually run by the Local Authority and only for older age groups. With the younger children (Nursery) school experience is that as a group they are not usually ready for a trip until the summer term. We know that families go on trips all the time, but a school class is quite a big family!!!! and the logistics and duty of care is on a different scale.

2. More male teachers..... Yes, yes yes! I don't think anyone would disagree. Unfortunately when we have advertised for new teachers there are very few male applicants, and (as a man the next bit really hurts!) - they have not been very good! And of course as parents you want (as the law requires) teachers to be selected on their merit and not on their gender. Oh well - someday our Prince will come!

3. Spread the dates of the trips out rather than them all coming at once eg Year 6..... Agreed, and with a small year six class the opportunity exists this year to take both year 5 and 6 on one of the two summer term residential trips, so that from next year the trip will be in year 5 permanently.

4. Further transition support for Year 6 parents..... You have said that we have done better this year, but we know that with Bishop Heber now likely to take less of our children whilst Darland take more that transition will change.

We will try and get Darland more involved and earlier, by inviting ex pupils in Year 7 to comeback and talk to children, by inviting Darland staff to Year 6 Parents evening and more. But you must understand that transition arrangements to any High School are under the control of that High School and not the primary schools that feed the High School.

5. More community involvement. We were a bit taken aback by this given the extent of Community involvement already. We are going to try to put together a list of all the Community involvement in an average year and think that parents will be surprised.

Overall though - as ever it is a big thank you from Governors and staff for all of your support which is so evident in these responses. Quite a bit of involvement there!