

Bernards Heath Junior School

Seeking Parental Views 2013/14: Feedback Summary

1. **Process**

Following the disappointingly low response from parents to the formal questionnaire last year and the subsequent analysis of why this might be, a few changes were made to our approach this year. However, the Spring Term (i.e. halfway through the academic year) was still considered to be the most effective time to formally consult with parents and seek their views. It was also still felt invaluable to send out an “open questionnaire” to parents, giving them the opportunity to comment on issues they might not feel warranted raising specifically with the school.

Parent View: Now that the Government’s online “tick box” questionnaire ParentView is now an established part of the system (into its 3rd year), it was decided to start off the consultation process with parents by reminding them to register their views on ParentView in a specific letter from the Headteacher at the start of the Spring Term. Parents were informed in this letter that the governors would be sending out their own questionnaire later on in the term in which parents would “have the opportunity to give more specific and individual comment both on aspects of the school that they are particularly happy with, as well as those about which they may have concerns or uncertainties”.

Annual Parental Questionnaire: This was sent out to parents in a letter from the Chair of Governors immediately after half term. Parents were given just over 3 weeks to respond during which time a reminder was “tweeted” and parents were reminded at both of the parent/teacher consultation evenings. Greater flexibility was given on how to respond, i.e. paper copy or electronically, completing the form or just sending a clearly headed email.

Within the text of both these letters to parents, they were reminded that questionnaires were in addition to, and categorically did not replace, direct contact with the school when specific issues or concerns arose.

2. **Parent View Feedback**

5 registered responses in 2011/12
33 “ “ in 2012/13
44 “ “ already for 2013/14

The responses are very favourable, with parents overwhelmingly “agreeing” or “strongly agreeing” with the 12 statements.

3. **Annual Parental Questionnaire Feedback**

3a **Response rate**

There were, very pleasingly, six times as many responses from parents this year compared to the process in Spring 2013, i.e. 48 compared to just 8 last year. Whilst this could still be considered quite low at a school with 321 children currently on roll, this year’s responses are from parents of children across all year groups and are therefore a more valid representation of the views of the parent body as a whole. Breakdown of responses is as follows:

Parent of child in Year 3:	18 responses
Parent of child in Year 4:	4 responses
Parent of child in Year 5:	14 responses
Parent of child in Year 6:	2 responses
Parent of children in two different year groups:	9 responses
Anonymous:	1 response
TOTAL:	48 responses

When broken down further to show the different year groups where parents had more than one

child at the school, this gives an even broader representation of views of parents from all year groups, although the greatest number of responses still comes from parents newest to the school with children in year 3:

Parent of child in Year 3:	24 responses
Parent of child in Year 4:	7 responses
Parent of child in Year 5:	19 responses
Parent of child in Year 6:	6 responses
Anonymous:	1 response
TOTAL:	57 responses

With regard to gender, there were slightly more responses from parents of boys to girls, but the difference in numbers was negligible.

3b **Areas parents were happy with**

Comments were wide ranging, but the areas mentioned most often were:

- Quality of teaching
- Professionalism of staff; staff described as: polite, enthusiastic, warm, welcoming, friendly
- Good leadership
- High standards of work and behaviour
- Range of opportunities for children, both within school day and after school clubs, e.g. music, sporting activities, French, school trips, school plays, external visitors, reading challenge
- School approachable and responsive
- Concerns dealt with quickly
- Children are happy
- Children feel safe and secure
- A positive ethos
- School facilities, e.g. IT suite, library
- Ways in which children are encouraged to be independent
- Individual child's needs are known and addressed
- Honesty of discussions at Parents' Evening
- Transition from Infant to Junior School
- Celebration Assemblies
- Encouragement and motivation with the reward system
- Homework (just right, system clear and effective)
- Communication (class blogs, twitter)
- Maths Information evening for parents

A selection of quotes:

From the parent of two boys in years 3 and 4: "At Bernards Heath, I am happy with:

- *The education and wellbeing of my children; they are happy and look forward to coming to school.*
- *The learning at the school is varied and interesting. My children often talk about the exciting things they are doing. They both loved the skipping workshop and are still skipping at home!*
- *The information about my children's progress is informative and keeps me up to date.*
- *The school is extremely supportive and has helped with issues that have arisen.*
- *I feel staff are very approachable and willing to help, listen and support"*

From the parent of a girl in year 3: "At Bernards Heath, I am happy with:

- *The children having experience of different teachers and/or class groups in certain subjects, either by setting (maths) or by subject (music). I feel that this is handled well so is good preparation for secondary school.*
- *My Y3 child really enjoyed the Romans and Celts theme. She thought the visit from Legion*

XIII was fantastic and was enthusiastic about this subject in general. She also really enjoyed the visitor with small animals/insects.

- *Staff responded quickly to my telephone query.*
- *The Maths Calculation Evening was very useful.*
- *Having homework, spellings etc. set out in the class blogs in helpful.*
- *The range of lunchtime and after school clubs, including a Young Carers lunchtime group.”*

From the parent of a girl in year 3: *“At Bernards Heath, I am happy with:*

- *The standard of teaching and facilities.*
- *The commitment by the school to seek ways of improving the whole experience of school life for the children.*
- *The commitment by the PTA to organise functions for the children with proceeds being given to the school for agreed items.”*

From the parent of a boy in year 3: *“At Bernards Heath, I am happy with:*

- *The responsiveness of my son’s teacher; any queries I have are dealt with quickly and sensitively.*
- *My son feels very happy and settled at Bernards Heath Juniors and I feel this is a positive sign.*
- *The manner in which good and bad behaviour is dealt with is simple but very effective; they all seem to know what will get them House Points or a trip to the Headmistress. It’s a clever way to build a contented school.*
- *After school activities are varied and interesting; there is always something different to offer the children.”*

From the parent of a boy in year 3: *“At Bernards Heath, I am happy with:*

- *The care and safety of the children*
- *The high standards of work and behaviour*
- *The way in which the children are encouraged to be independent learners*
- *The variety of musical instruments and extra curricular activities that are offered*
- *The way that any concerns are dealt with quickly*
- *The fact that my child feels very happy and supported at school.”*

From the parent of two boys in years 5 and 6:

- *“The general standard of teaching is high*
- *The engagement of a full-time sports resource is a great commitment to physical health for all*
- *Most teachers we met at parents evenings have known our children well*
- *The opportunities to attend events at the secondary schools, the maths course at Sandringham for year 6 was outstanding*
- *The abandoning of Golden Time is good – it has never seemed much of a treat*
- *Behavioural issues seem to be rare across the school*
- *Staff are approachable and responsive.”*

3c **Areas parents are unclear, or not so happy, about**

- Communication (described as a bit haphazard/inconsistent; often compared to systems used at the Infant School)
- Level of interaction between parents and teachers
- Timing of parent consultation evenings; need for later slots
- Year 3 children are encouraged to be independent but are not ready for it yet
- Number of voluntary donations asked for throughout the term (e.g. expectation of sponsorship for mini marathon; expectation of special costume for Where’s Wally day, Arts week, to support external visits)
- Site security
- Road safety issues

- Variety of schools clubs (compared to Infant school)
- Transparency of work by school governors; need to raise the school governors' profile
- Homework (more needed to help children adjust to secondary school requirements; frequently too easy)
- Replacement of 'Golden Time' with new system
- More competitive sports earlier on for girls
- Quality of the school lunches

A selection of quotes:

From the parent of a boy in year 3:

- *"I'd like more information about the timetable – especially when there are changes. I know at Junior School there is more emphasis on independence of the children but it's still a big adjustment for year 3s. I think it is important for parents to know what is going on and I often feel in the dark as to what is happening – the blog is limited.*
- *Not happy with the fact parents are asked to make various 'voluntary contributions' – fell guilty into making these.*
- *Really annoyed with the whole Where's Wally book day dress up. It should be for the child to decide who to dress up as, not the school – again that's a cost for the parents to purchase something suitable as no one wants to feel that their child will be left out.*
- *I think there should be more after school clubs/activities, and more trips."*

From the parent of a girl in year 5:

"As the school has expanded, it doesn't always feel as welcoming as it used to. Whilst it is difficult to accommodate large numbers, the tone of some letters can make it feel like the parents are to blame. Maybe more lower/upper school divisions or more performances to solve some of these issues?"

From the parent of a girl and a boy in years 5 and 3:

"I am very unhappy about the state of road safety and parking around the school. I believe it is only a matter of time before an accident takes place. There is nowhere safe for the children to cross on Seymour Road, and the attitude of some of the parents who drive down Watson Avenue makes it very dangerous. I have a daughter in year 5 who I would like to begin walking to school by herself, but it is just not safe enough."

3d It is worth noting that for seven of the responses, parents made comments about areas they were happy with, but could think of nothing to comment on in the second section. There were no instances where parents only commented on areas they were unhappy or unclear about.

4. Actions taken

4a One to one early communication

There were several very specific issues raised by parents, or comments given on incorrect understanding of certain procedures or activities at the school. Wherever possible (i.e. where a parent had put a name to the comments given), the Headteacher had taken an early opportunity to contact the parent to talk through concerns or clarify issues either by telephone or with a face to face meeting, and/or sought further information from the class teacher as necessary.

Parents are regularly reminded/encouraged to contact the school if they have any concerns or uncertainties, so that these can be resolved at any early stage before they become more serious. Parents are also clearly reminded of the most appropriate ways to contact the school, i.e. who to speak to and how.

4b Conflicting messages

As is often the case with parental consultations, there are some areas that receive quite conflicting views, for example:

- one parent reported very favourably on the school meals, whilst another was unhappy about the standard of the meals
- some parents think the quantity and system for homework is just right, others consider there

is too much, or too little, that it is too easy, or too difficult

- there were many comments on after school clubs and extra curricular activities – most were very positive but some felt there wasn't enough variety or clarity in what was available to whom and when
- some parents commented on communications being good, especially via the class blogs and twitter, whilst others felt it was inconsistent and haphazard.
- One parent was very sorry to see the "Golden Time" system changed, whilst another commented that this was a good development.

In instances such as these, the Headteacher has already contacted certain parents directly if this has been possible and relevant to discuss specific concerns and clarify issues. However, there are always going to be differences in parental opinions and experiences and it is never possible to 'keep everyone happy all of the time'. The school's prime responsibility to parents, therefore, should be to ensure that all relevant information is easily accessible, clear and kept as up-to-date as possible, so that parents know what is going on and why, what is expected of them and who to contact if and when issues need clarifying.

4c **Ongoing issues, brought up again this year by**

Road safety (3 comments):

The school has always treated this issue very seriously and has always been pro-active in trying to ensure that children can get to school in the mornings and go home in the afternoons as safely as possible – indeed, the school was commended on its Travel Plan well before the expansion proposals came about, and has continued to work with all relevant outside agencies (County's Safe and Sustainable Journeys Team, the Police, Herts Highways, District Council, etc.) and in conjunction with the Infants School to try to address the traffic and road safety issues around the school and between the two schools, particularly as numbers of children at the two schools have progressively increased over recent years.

There are, however, limitations to what the school can realistically do. Road safety issues, and the inconsiderate (and sometimes even abusive and aggressive) behaviour of a small minority of parents create problems not just for our school but for the vast majority of schools. It is important that the school continues to make parents aware on a regular basis of the measures the school is taking to monitor and address the issues of road safety, but also continues to remind them that it is only with everyone's cooperation and acceptance of responsibility that any real progress can be made.

5. **Infants vs. juniors; first time theme**

It is noticeable from this year's responses, particularly from a minority of the newest parents to the school in year 3, that a new theme is emerging: that of directly comparing the approaches of the Infant and Junior school, with several comments being raised on issues such as:

- ways in which the school communicates with parents
- level of interaction between parents and staff
- the level of site security
- the variety of after school clubs and how these are organised
- the level of responsibility/independence expected of the children.

There almost seems to be an expectation from a few parents that the approaches and systems adopted by the Infant School, and which they are used to, will just be carried on at the Junior School. There seems to be an unwillingness to accept that, although closely linked, these are two quite separate schools, with different leadership teams, different governing bodies and catering for two different age ranges of children.

Actions already taken by the school during 2103/14:

- For the first time in June 2013, the initial transition meeting for year 2 parents was held as an evening event to better meet the needs of the larger cohort of parents. This was very well attended with comprehensive and practical information about all aspects of life at the Junior school.
- In addition to this introductory session, a further official school evening event was held for

the new year 3 parents early in the autumn term, i.e. once the children had already started at the junior school and the theory and become reality. This replaced the former informal 'meet the teacher' after school event.

It should also be noted that, although an emerging theme, these comments were from a minority of the year 3 parents, and they were countered by many very positive comments, with parents saying they were happy with:

- *A happy and safe environment*
 - *The care, safety and wellbeing of the children*
 - *Good transition from infant to junior school*
 - *Children happy, supported, settled*
 - *Concerns dealt with quickly*
 - *Social and emotional development*
 - *The way the children are encouraged; the reward system*
 - *The range of after school clubs/activities*
 - *Good sports options*
- + many more

Suggested actions:

- Maybe there is a need to explain more explicitly to the year 2 parents that the two schools are different schools despite the close links, and stress the many advantages for the children to become accustomed to change at this stage, e.g. building resilience, having new opportunities and experiences, etc?
- Maybe one further information evening could be held in the Spring or Summer term?

6. **Next steps**

All members of the school leadership team and the governing body:

- to consider the findings of this year's consultation process with parents
- to identify and agree priority issues to address
- to agree a time scale for action, and monitor progress and impact.
- Parents to be informed of the results of the consultation process and of proposed actions to be put in place as a result via Governor and Headteacher newsletters.

*Mary Liming
April 2014*