



GOVERNORS' NEWS

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March 2017

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PART 1

How is the school performing in 2017, and how do we know?

In 2009 Ofsted declared that we were an “Outstanding School”. This achievement marked, quite rightly, a time for celebration, pride and great satisfaction. We realised immediately, however, that this was never going to be the end of the journey; it was going to take continued hard work and tenacity not only to maintain this level of performance, but also to improve yet further in order to meet the ever-changing and ever-more demanding Ofsted criteria, and also to meet our own exacting expectations for the education we can provide for our pupils.

In recent years, the education landscape has changed dramatically with a constant flow of new requirements from the Department for Education. The school has had to adapt, develop, implement and evaluate strategies and approaches accordingly. With the introduction of the new primary curriculum, and a completely new system for assessing pupil progress and attainment (which is still evolving), the bar has been raised considerably with far higher standards expected now and at a far earlier age.

So, are we still an “Outstanding School”? Even though the criteria are considerably more challenging to meet, the governing body would say “Yes”. But in the absence of a recent Ofsted inspection, how do we know?

School’s own self-evaluation

Throughout the academic year, the school carries out its own rigorous and comprehensive self-evaluation for all four categories in Ofsted’s Common Assessment Framework, i.e. for everything that goes on at school throughout the year. These refer specifically to:

- Effectiveness of leadership and management
- Quality of teaching, learning and assessment
- Personal development, behaviour and welfare
- Outcomes for children and learners.

Through discussions at full governing body meetings, our committee meetings (Resources Committee and Standards & Curriculum Development Committee), regular governor and teacher interaction on the school’s Curriculum Leadership Teams, termly governor learning walks and specific meetings to discuss, for example, the school’s compliance with financial and safeguarding procedures, the use of Government grants such as the Pupil Premium and Sports Premium,

governors are able to understand, challenge and support the school to ensure appropriate sustained development and improvement.

External validation

The school recognises the value of an external perspective and buys in the services of a HIP (Hertfordshire Improvement Partner) who offers expert advice, support and challenge through termly visits to the school. Since the 2009 Ofsted inspection, each HIP (and we have had four over this period) has been of the view that we continue to meet the criteria of an outstanding school. As you are aware, we requested that our current HIP, who was himself a practising Ofsted Inspector until summer 2016, carried out an “Ofsted-style inspection” for his Joint Annual Review Visit (JARV) earlier this term. Whilst this was not an official Ofsted visit, and therefore not an official judgement, his findings were very pleasing to hear.

Extracts from Spring 2017 JARV visit from our Herts for Learning School Improvement Partner:

“Throughout the school there is a relentless and uncompromising pursuit of excellence. The leadership across the school provides a strong sense of direction and is focussed clearly upon the learning and achievement of all pupils, with high and ambitious standards set for quality and performance. There is a clear moral purpose and a passionate, shared belief that the school can impact upon the lives and life chances of pupils....”

“....Since the last inspection report (Dec 2009) there have been significant, on-going improvements in attainment, progress, the quality of teaching, attendance and punctuality, standards of behaviour and in the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all pupils..... “

“.....Pupils receive a broad, balanced and in many respects, innovative curriculum, which meets both national requirements and the differing needs of individual pupils.....”

“..... This is a highly inclusive school and seeks to identify and support pupils with special educational needs, those with disabilities, or pupils with other significant disadvantages so that they improve their progress. The provision for the most vulnerable is a real strength of the school.....”.

“Overall effectiveness: This is an outstanding school.”

Looking to the future

Ofsted offers no clues for when they may choose to pay us a visit and, as an existing outstanding school, there is no suggested time span between inspections: they may arrive on our doorstep next week, or they may see no reason to visit for the foreseeable future. Whatever the scenario, we know that complacency plays no part in the way this school is run; we are never satisfied that we have done all there is to do. In a time when the “bar is continually being raised”, we are realistic in never taking our outstanding status for granted. We have no doubts, however, that we are “better than good”!

PART 2

Findings from the parental surveys, Spring 2017

We would like to thank all of you who took the opportunity to respond to both the Parent View survey and the school's own questionnaire earlier this term. We have now analysed what you told us and would like to share the key findings with you. Full analysis can be found on the school website under Information for Parents – Annual Parent Questionnaire.

Parent View – Ofsted's national on-line survey

We were delighted to see far more responses than in previous years (87 this year compared to 43 last year), and even more pleased that these continue to be overwhelmingly positive, with 87% (75% last year) overall agreeing with the statements, compared to 4% (8% last year) who disagreed. There was a 95% recommendation for the school (again up from last year).

Whilst Parent View gives an overall picture of how parents feel about the school, there is no opportunity for parents to illustrate why they have ticked each box the way they have. Hence, the simultaneous launch of the school's own parental questionnaire which has allowed us to understand parental views and perceptions in far greater depth.

The School's Annual Parental Questionnaire

Here too, we were pleased to receive a greater number of responses to previous years (24, up from 13 last year), and a more even spread of responses across all year groups. Although this is still a relatively low overall response rate considering the 360 children on roll, there were many and varied comments within the responses which were all carefully read and noted.

1. Amongst the aspects which you consider to be strengths at the school and would like to see continued, the most frequently mentioned were:

- the wider curriculum opportunities, whether this was the variety of subjects taught in the classrooms throughout the week, the enhanced learning opportunities from school trips out or visitors to the school, the themed weeks such as Arts Week, or the range of extra-curricular activities and clubs;
- the supportive, caring and nurturing environment. You commented that the school was welcoming, focussed on the child as an individual, and cared for the emotional needs of the children;
- the high standard of teaching, and high quality learning environment;
- the celebration of success, and an effective house points and awards system;
- the friendly, approachable manner of staff and the Headteacher;
- good communication; any initial worries dealt with effectively;
- encouraging greater independence and responsibility;
- the information evenings for parents,

plus several other individual comments praising, for example, the library, the Young Carers' Club, the Christmas Concert, etc.

2. **Amongst the aspects you would like the school to consider for the future, or which you think could be improved,** “Communication” was the most frequently mentioned, with comments such as:

- The school website could be improved, particularly the “Information for Parents” which is not user-friendly
- School blogs need improvement, lack of consistency with use and updating
- Suggestions for a weekly or fortnightly newsletter so parents regularly have up-to-date information in one place, e.g. key dates and deadlines; any staffing changes; events coming up, but also more celebratory of events and activities that have taken place that parents often do not get to hear about
- More information for parents on how to support their children’s learning more effectively

There were also a couple of specific requests for clarification on the “144” system for learning times tables and on monitoring children’s reading. All other individual comments were noted and, where appropriate and possible, talked through on an individual basis.

Actions planned in response to your comments – finding a healthy balance

It is always really useful and informative for us to hear the parental perspective; all of your comments are carefully read, noted and shared with the full governing body and with staff. Where appropriate and possible, recommendations for changes are made straight away, for example with a more consistent use of the school blogs. However, a realistic balance always needs to be found.

Parental perspectives need to be considered alongside all the factors that make up the very complex organisation of a school, which is ever more challenging in the current climate of widespread uncertainties, for example with the Government’s drive for all schools to convert to academies, and become part of a multi-academy trust; this is a huge issue for current maintained schools like ours to try to find the best solution for our school for the future. The widely-publicised pressures on schools - whether these are financial, staffing, safeguarding, academic, children’s health and wellbeing, and many more - are very real. Getting the balance right and meeting the expectations of “all stakeholders” (as the DfE now refers parents, children, staff and the school’s wider community) is a constant challenge. Referring back to the JARV and the views of our HIP, an external professional with experience of many different schools, it seems that we are finding an effective balance and this is enabling our school to continue functioning as an outstanding school.

A new school website: One aspect that several of you felt could be improved is the way we communicate with you, particularly with regard to the school website. Whilst our current website is packed with useful information and has served us well for several years now, it clearly no longer meets the needs and expectations of parents and has become quite outdated in both its appearance and usability. We are currently working on the costings, design and content of a new website which will hopefully address many of the communication issues you mentioned. We shall keep you informed on progress – this may take a while, but we want to ensure that we get things right - but will keep our current website fully updated and fit-for-purpose in the meantime.

Bernards Heath Junior School: United in Learning

The words and statements on our new Visions and Values poster produced last year underpin everything that goes on at our school. We look forward to continuing to work with you “united in learning” to ensure this school continues to flourish as an outstanding school.

Mary Liming, Chair of Governors, March 2017