

31 October 2016

Dear Parents and Carers,

As usual at this time of the year I am writing to provide you an annual update from the Governing Body.

It would be difficult to start with anything other than an enormous thank-you to Clare Cormack, who has recently finished her term of office as a Governor. As most of you will know, Clare's tireless devotion to the School has been the driving force behind many of our successes in recent years, from the new buildings to robust Ofsted preparation, and we will all miss her dearly!

However, as always the cloud has a silver lining – this time in the form of Gary Chater. Gary recently won a very closely contested Parent Governor election (perhaps a first for Stoke Row?), securing his place just three votes ahead of the next two candidates. As you will have seen from the personal statements, Gary's skills list is extensive and we very much look forward to working with him.

In case you missed it over the summer, we also welcomed Yvette Kershaw to the team as a Foundation Governor. Yvette brings considerable experience as a teacher and school Senior Leadership Team member, vital for our duties in scrutinising school performance and strategic planning. She has truly hit the floor running and is already proving a huge asset to the team.

Elsewhere in the School you will already have noticed the changes in the office. This reconfiguration was very deliberate: to put in place somebody to take face-to-face and telephone queries in the morning, thereby allowing the Bursar and administrator to get on with other duties. We may be a small school, but that doesn't excuse us from any of the bureaucracy and paperwork required by everyone from central government downwards. In fact, as county councils wind down due to funding cuts and increasing academisation of the schools they manage, the pressure on school offices is only going to increase.

Otherwise we are in a period of relative stability at Stoke Row. Not so at the Department for Education however, who insist on continuing to tinker with tests and standards. We are therefore once again prioritising our internal assessment systems (as you may recall, the old 'levels' have gone): this is to ensure that teachers can accurately track pupil progress against new curriculum expectations and feed these data back to governors. We are also focussing on opportunities to provide suitable challenge to pupils of all ability, and allowing children whenever possible to achieve a deeper understanding – 'mastery' to use the new vernacular – of curriculum areas. This is in line, of course, with our School values of Perseverance, Achievement and Excellence.

As you might expect, one area which is always at the top of our priority list is keeping our children safe. Among other developments such as improved site security, and as part of our continued commitment to the most up-to-date safeguarding procedures, we will now be requesting two references from anyone who generously gives up their time to volunteer regularly in school. I hope this will not be too onerous and does not dissuade you from volunteering (we need you to keep showing the School value of Kindness!). The latest Safeguarding policy is available to access via the website.

And our final key focus will be on money. As I know from my meetings with other local Chairs of Governors, most small schools are finding their budgets incredibly tight at the moment – and Stoke

Row is no exception. If any of you have ideas for where we could cut costs or opportunities to raise money, please do let us know.

I hope to see many of you over the coming months. As ever, please get in touch with any comments, concerns or ideas.

Kind regards,

David Lowe