

Emmbrook Junior School Parents Forum

Meeting Minutes

Friday 18th October 2019

8:50 to 9.55am, EJS School Hall

Attendees: Rob Fenton (EJS Head), Yasmin Caird (EJS), Sam Dowse (Chair of Governors), Mell Morris (Yr 3), Emma Mitchell (Yr 3), Christine Leddy (Yr4), Martina Smith (Yr4), Emma Wilkinson (Yr4) (Chair), Jo Tucker (Yr5), Cathy O'Conner (Yr5), Clare Doyle (Yr6), Jo Westrap (Yr 6)

Apologies: Kylie Fletcher (Yr 6)

1. Welcome & Introductions

Emma W. welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially our new members Emma M, Mell, Jo W and Kylie (in her absence). The Forum also welcomed Yasmine Caird, who is Rob's new support worker. Emma W stated that there had been a huge number of emails into the Parent's Forum (36) and on behalf of the Forum wished to express thanks to everybody who has sent items into the Forum for discussion. This great response may have been because Rob recently agreed to amend the terms of reference to remove the requirement for the same item to be nominated three times.

ACTION: The amended Terms of Reference have been circulated for all committee members to review

2. Update from Mr Fenton

Rob confirmed that he will be leaving EJS at the end of December. He assured the Forum that the SLT and Governors are working hard together to ensure a smooth transition for the children.

Sam advised the Forum that the Governing Body are investigating many options and burning the midnight oil to do so. They think that they are close to pursuing a great way forward for the children and will share progress as soon as they are able.

3. Review of previous minutes 28 June 2019

Most actions arising from the last meeting were resolved and minuted in the previous minutes. There were outstanding issues regarding lost property, school clubs and lunchtime food which are discussed further down.

a. Lost Property process

The process agreed previously by EJS comprised the Year 6 monitors collecting up the named lost property and distributing it back to the correct classroom. The unnamed items would stay in the box and be cleared out at the end of every half term. However, this process is not enough to keep up with the volume of lost property, especially in the winter months when it is often wet and dirty. EJS Forum suggested that they would be happy to take on the lost property. Kylie and Jo W. will act as Forum leads and work with Claire Freeman to go in every few weeks to sort the lost property. Named items will be returned to the school office for them to distribute to the relevant classroom and unnamed items will be cleared out at the end of every half term.

ACTION: Kylie and Jo to liaise with Claire Freeman. EJS will make lost property an assembly item to reinforce to the children the importance of looking after their own things.

4. Parent Feedback

a. School clubs

This topic was raised to the Forum seven times. The main issue was about clarity regarding how the clubs are allocated. Rob responded to say that the school intend to move to Scopay for all payments including clubs, trips etc. This means that going forward, clubs will be signed up and paid for on line.

A number of parents highlighted the need to have the list of clubs early with plenty of time to allow parents to sign up. Rob confirmed that the school have already actioned this for the Spring and Summer terms, however, the letter for the Autumn term clubs still do not go out until September. This makes it very late for parents to align clubs for multiple children and arrange childcare. Also, the allocation letters are issued piece-meal and quite close to the start of the clubs. If the clubs letters were issued the term before, this would give the office staff more time to complete the allocation so that letters for all club acceptance can be issued at the same time.

A discussion was had surrounding how new Year 3 children could sign up for clubs in their first Autumn term as their Scopay access does not go live until after they have joined the school. One suggestion is that the letters can be sent to them in the preceding Summer term at the same time as everyone else and they can sign up via the school office.

The Forum requested that the school tell parents that if a club is over-subscribed, then places will be allocated at random. Currently, there is no carry-over between terms, however, Rob advised that the school will look at whether they can put a system in place whereby once a child has been awarded a place in an over-subscribed club, they will not be eligible to do that club again for the rest of the year.

Parents have also raised the issue of under-subscribed clubs, for example, there are only 7 children in the Year 3/4 football club. Forum members suggested that the school advertise which clubs have spaces at the same time as announcing the club allocation.

Parents also highlighted the fact that the cost of clubs had gone up, both for internal and external providers. Rob stated that they had no control over the cost of outside providers. The costs of the school-run clubs have gone up by £5 as the school now need to pay teachers for their time to run an after-school club. This also enables the club to run with fewer children (i.e. a club which costs £20 requires 17 children to do the club to make it financially viable but a club which costs £20 only requires 15 children).

Rob also said that Mr Fisher now has a full time-table and is therefore not able to run as many clubs so more clubs have had to be allocated to external providers. EJS would like to put out a plea to any parents etc to come forward if they have the time to run an after-school club as this would be the only way to reduce costs.

Suggestions have come into the Forum for new clubs, such as Yoga and Mindfulness, as well as a suggestion to timetable morning (i.e. before-school) clubs. EJS are happy to look into any new ideas, especially given the success of the cooking club. All new ideas for clubs are welcome and need to be sent directly to Jane Banks in the school office.

ACTION: School to send all club letters out at the end of the preceding term (**including Autumn term clubs 2020**); Allocation for all clubs will be announced together. Under-subscribed clubs will be advertised at the same time to allow more children to fill the spaces.

b. Reduction in PE

This was brought to the forum by six parents. Concerns raised highlighted the significant impact of reduced exercise time on children's health and well-being. The change in the time-table meaning that children now come home in their PE kits twice a week also means the added task for parents/children to return PE kits to school far more frequently. The Forum also raised the point that the EJS policy states that children will have more than 2 hours physical exercise per week.

Rob confirmed that PE time has been reduced from 1hr50mins per week to 1hr40mins per week. This is because the timetable has been changed to allow for an increase in English to 5 sessions per week, an increase in spellings to 3 sessions per week and the introduction of the teaching of times-table (rather than just testing).

The school also need to meet the requirement of Collective Worship every day and they do this by doing a full assembly four times a week. This assembly is now done in the afternoon. Forum suggested that the parameters of Collective Worship could be met by doing a class-based activity on some of the days rather than a full assembly every day.

Rob stated that the school are also feeling the impact in the change of timetable, for example, in a recent Year 5 PE lesson, eight children had to sit out as they had forgotten to bring their PE kit back into school.

ACTION: The SLT are due to meet in the next half term to review the impact of the change of timetable

c. Reduced break time

This issue was raised by four parents and again the concerns raised highlighted the significant impact of reduced play-time on children's health and well-being. Rob confirmed that there had been a 20% reduction in break-time to 15mins per day. Forum members also highlighted that there are instances where classes are intentionally and unintentionally let out late to breaktime which when you only have 15mins to play, go to the toilet, chat to your friends is a significant amount of time.

Rob confirmed that the reduction in break time was also a direct result of the timetabling change. Sam confirmed that looking at getting children moving more during the day was part of the school's Improvement Plan and they take the emotional and physical well-being of the children very seriously. Forum members suggested the Daily Mile, incorporating movement into lessons, reinstating PE and break-time to their previous levels, using the available time in the morning (i.e. 8.35 to 8.50am)

ACTION: The SLT are due to meet in the next half term to review the impact of the change of timetable

d. School Work

Whilst individual class issues are not the remit of the forum, five parents raised the general issue of school work, such as why has the times-tables challenge been scrapped? Why are the Reading records not being checked? And what is the plan for homework?

Rob said that the school have introduced new initiative in reading and maths (hence the timetabling change). The Reading Race is still happening and the Reading Records are being checked regularly, however, the school have scrapped the individual certificates. Feedback from the Pupil Voice (via the school council) was the school was using too many methods of rewards (four merit certificates, times-tables rewards, reading certificates etc) so they were losing their value.

Rob explained that a new national curriculum for timetables has been rolled out which requires all Year 4s to be tested on times-tables up to 12x12 next June. Therefore, the bronze, silver, gold etc certificates have been scrapped and instead times-tables are now being taught rather than just tested.

Homework remains as communicated by the school: regular reading, learning times-tables and grid homework once a term.

ACTION: EJS to communicate when and why time-table changes are happening so parents are able to understand the resultant impact

e. School toilets

The issue of the state of the toilets was raised. Rob said that Mr Gregory checks the toilets daily. There is an ongoing problem with the outside toilets and they are in need of refurbishment. Rob clarified that he had categorically never told children that the outside toilets were locked/not refurbished because of the way the children treated them. He confirmed that the school had had to fund an asbestos survey before any works could be carried out. This has now been completed so they are waiting for the council to release the funds for the refurbishment work.

5. Date of next meeting – 13th December 2019

Emma stressed the importance of continuity between the Forum and the SLT with Rob's imminent departure. Emma and Clare offered to meet with Ruth Scales and suggested that another member of the SLT attends the next Forum meeting.

ACTION: EJS to confirm how the SLT will be represented at the next meeting. Also, to consider the option of providing feedback on the issues via email prior to the meeting to allow for meaningful discussion in the meeting itself.

At this point, Rob had to leave the meeting as he had another meeting to attend. Forum members stressed the importance of valuing the Parents Forum, especially in light of the volume of comments received. It is important that the school recognises the communication pathway and responds to the issues raised. Clare emailed the remaining points to Yasmin and she fed back the following responses from the school:

a. Class assemblies

Item raised: The issue of loss of opportunities for public speaking practice for students, now exhibitions have replaced assemblies.

Response from EJS: Children have the opportunity to speak publicly in front of a big audience in Year 4 and 6 due to productions. The National Curriculum states that children "are competent in the arts of speaking and listening, making formal presentations, demonstrating to others and participating in debate" - we ensure they get this opportunity during class lessons in both dedicated English sessions and other lessons across the curriculum.

b. Communication from school

Items raised: "It was previously agreed that all paper letters sent home with children would also be sent to parents by email but this isn't happening". And "the email frequency from the school to parents. In the past 24 hours I have received 10 emails which is just too much"

Response from EJS: The office manager is going to send out a reminder to the team that all letters need to be emailed - apologies if this hasn't been happening. The office have tried to reduce the number of communications sent to parents. They are trying to get the balance right of communicating information and over loading parents with emails. They get a number of requests to send out info / reminders every day and there have to decide which are most important. They have also worked on only sending info to the relevant groups of parents.

c. Lunchtime food and seating

Items Raised: Why do children who have packed lunches have to sit on a separate table? And the low standard of the school meals (often over or undercooked, portion size, running out of options)

Response from EJS: Logistically, if the children are mixed up it is very difficult for the lunch time controllers to tell how many they are able to send in for hot dinners and how many for packed lunch. School catering is a traded service and we can review at the end of the contract. This will need to be done in conjunction with infant school who also use this service. Meals are monitored informally on a weekly basis. There is a log book for any issues in the office. Please let us know of any specific problems and these will be passed onto the catering company.

d. School photos - alignment with EIS

Items raised: The possibility to use the same company for both schools to take all school photos.

Feedback from EJS: Thank you for your feedback. We will be reviewing this in preparation for Autumn 2020. However, class photos scheduled for the summer term will still be done by the current provider.

e. Use of plastics

Items raised: Waste on school trips due to the school requesting that lunch is brought in a plastic bag and drinks in a disposable bottle. The school has a responsibility to start our children in good habits for life like bringing a picnic in reusable packaging.

Feedback from EJS: Thanks for your feedback. We will definitely consider this for future trips depending on the facilities they have available.

f. Attendance statistics

Items raised: The emphasis on attendance in the news letter and the end of school reports, which give no acknowledgement that some children have developmental, emotional and social, medical or mental health needs which mean that they have to attend appointments in school time and impacts their attendance through no fault of their own.

Feedback from EJS: There is a cluster policy that all Wokingham Town West schools have signed up to regarding promoting good attendance. A regular attendance of 90% means that a child would still be absent from school for 4 weeks a year. Although we recognise that some children have needs which require time out of school, it is our responsibility to encourage good attendance where possible. If there are issues around attendance we do have services, such as the Education Welfare Officer, who can support and advise families.

g. Disciplining children

Items raised: The use of yellow and red cards as punishment is still very public punishment of the children which the school say they want to avoid. Also, the policy that it takes 3 time outs before a parent is informed.

Feedback from EJS: The behaviour policy is currently being reviewed and your feedback will be taken on board.

h. Holiday clubs

Items raised: The closure of the Funtastic holiday club. Is there any considerations for a holiday club to be run at the junior school? Or in conjunction with the infant school?"

Feedback from EJS: The two schools are looking into a provider. We will update you as soon as possible.

i. Teaching Assistants

Items raised: Not enough TA coverage, especially in Year 3 classrooms.

Feedback from EJS: Year 3 and 6 are the only years that have a full time TA in the classes. We recognise that year 3 is an important transitional year. In the case of staff sickness we cannot always cover a short term absence.

6. Update from Infant Parents Forum

The feedback was regarding the topic of aligning the school photos: *There were a number of comments from families who have children at both the infant and junior schools about the individual school photos. The infant provider (Tempest) print the proofs the day of the photo (with 7 days to return for free postage), however the junior proofs are not yet through over 1 week later. The sibling photos are taken with each provider and are a challenge to coordinate & families do not know which sibling photo to order as the junior ones are not yet available A proposed solution is for both schools to use the same provider on the same day. CG confirmed that Tempest are their preferred provider and the details have been shared previously with the junior school, who decided not to use them. The issue/these minutes will also be shared with the Emmbrook Junior Parent Forum*

7. AOB

All items discussed have been minuted above.