

# St Francis Catholic Primary School

## Governor News

Issue One

September 2014



Welcome to the first edition of the St. Francis School Governing Body Newsletter, which marks the end of an extremely rewarding year, driven by commitment, fortitude and hard work.

Our newsletter informs you of our priorities and as a regular publication, it will keep you informed of our key activities and the strategic developments at our school.

On behalf of all the school I would also like to offer a warm welcome to all the children and their families who will be joining our school this term.

**Miss Sarah Whitbread - Chair of Governors**

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## Our Governing Body – The Role of the Governor

I would like to begin by telling you a little more about what it means to be a school Governor, for those of you who may be unfamiliar. The Governing Body is responsible for the strategic leadership of the school. Essentially, it decides what it wants the school to achieve and sets the framework for getting there. As lead professional, it is for the Headteacher to lead the school towards the targets set in an operational capacity.

Our Governing Body comprises, at present, nine volunteers, together with the Acting Headteacher and we are now well established in both outlook and mindset. We have three principal sub-committees which meet approximately every six weeks:

**Curriculum** - which monitors progress and attainment across all year groups;

**Finance and Premises** - responsible for budget setting and monitoring; and

overseeing premises matters;

**Strategic Committee** - which focuses on communications and the strategic direction of our school

Our nine members have a varied skillset, and have now undertaken Link Governor roles, intrinsically linked to their experience. Roles include Key Stages 1 and 2, Religious Education, Vulnerable Groups (including Gifted and Talented), Safeguarding and Policy Review. These roles ensure efficiency, deep understanding, and absolute accountability.

Our Governor profiles are now available on the School's website, [www.st-francis.kent.sch.uk](http://www.st-francis.kent.sch.uk) under the Staff, Governor and PTA link.

*'Governors are planning ambitiously for the school's future.'*  
- Janet Pearce, HMI



Nigel Godden, Chair of Finance & Premises Committee, enjoying Math's Week activity with Year 5

## Our Priorities this Year

A stark year ago, new in post as Chair of Governors, my job was to assess the climate at the school and establish those areas of immediate priority on a strategic level. Metaphorically, I had been given the tools with which to build a strong foundation, and needed to choose my materials with care. Addressing our children's historic underachievement - in essence the lack of progress - was of paramount importance.



I now have a group of committed individuals, working alongside me, who challenge effectively and have great ambition for your children's education.

Sarah Whitbread - Chair of Governors

Mrs Manser is part of that team, and writes here to give you a greater understanding of her individual role:

*'I have been a Governor at St Francis Primary School since March of this year. My background is in education, I am a teacher in one of Maidstone secondary schools, I have also taught in the primary and the adult education sectors in the past. In addition to this, I work for different GCSE examination boards and I am involved in the training of PGCE students (trainee teachers). I decided to become a Governor as I truly believe that my skills would play a significant role in improving our school.'*

*'I thought that I would be completely ready for this whole new challenge having had so much experience in the world of education over the last 20 years. I could not have been further from the truth. Had I considered the time implications of being a governor? Yes, I had. Had I judged the level of my contribution correctly? I think so; my experience of educational standards and initiatives supports the work we do with our school permanently. I do believe that being so motivated in ensuring all is in place for our children to receive the best primary education possible. There is only one area I had underestimated - how rewarding, enriching and inspiring it would all become.'*

*'As part of the Governing Body, and the Curriculum Committee, I attend regular meetings during which we get involved in decisions about all aspects of the running of the school; we make it our priority to promote ongoing improvements in standards throughout the school. My favourite part of the job is tracking pupils' progress and attainment; seeing how much the children improve term on term is the ultimate highlight for me. I also enjoy the whole dimension of working as part of a team of people with such different assets but yet all working towards the same goal, our children's future.'*

*'I can safely say that this relatively new role has been one of my most challenging to date - not only as far as the time involved is concerned, but also in making sure that we make the right choices at all times to allow our children to have the best primary school experience possible and give them the opportunity to exceed their abilities. It has been a short but very positive and eventful time since I started as a Governor and I am looking forward to supporting the children and staff at St Francis in achieving even greater success in the very near future.'*

## Communication

Good communication is vital to the effectiveness of our school and whilst we wish to promote transparency we must iterate that your child's class teacher, followed by the Acting Headteacher, are your primary points of contact. Governors are not education professionals in post at the school and it is not our role to cross into the operational. We are however, happy to discuss strategic matters with you.

**In person:** *If you just need a quick word, please feel free to approach your child's class teacher at the end of each school day, or please make an appointment via the school office.*

**Phone:** Call the school office on 01622 771540

**Email:** This is an efficient method for you to contact the school office, your teacher or the Acting Headteacher. The school office will always forward your emails confidentially to the intended recipient.  
[office@st-francis.kent.sch.uk](mailto:office@st-francis.kent.sch.uk)

**Parent Survey:** We are about to launch our Parent Survey. A link to the on-line survey will be published very shortly. This survey will give you an opportunity to provide anonymous feedback about the school, from which we as Governors will be able to capture issues, plan and share any improvements with you.

**Website:** [www.st-francis.kent.sch.uk](http://www.st-francis.kent.sch.uk) keep up to date by viewing our website

## Our Impact

In addition to committee meetings we hold regular progress meetings with the Senior Leadership Team, and many training sessions both in and outside of school, most recently, after reflection of HMI's fourth monitoring visit in 'Monitoring in the Classroom' and 'Roles and Responsibilities,' to embed our practice. This term, Richard Ashton, Chris Cooper and I undertook monitoring visits to Mrs Walker's class in Year 6 and Mrs Allen's class in Year 4. It was extremely encouraging to see children eager to learn, engaged, interested and polite.

We believe our foundation is now a solid, consolidated one, on which we are looking firmly towards the structure of the future. We hope to become recognisable to you, as strategic leaders, on the school's website you will find reports of class visits made by Richard Ashton in Reception Class, and Nigel Godden as part of Maths Week.

*'Each child showed enthusiasm in the tasks, they were keen to both ask and answer questions, and were fully engaged in the lesson. They were all very polite, courteous and asked questions in an orderly manner ... [they] respected the equipment they were using, a real credit to the school.'*

Nigel Godden, extract from 'Maths Week Activities'  
St. Francis School website.

## Sustainability

Sustainability is key for us as a Governing Body. We have a great deal of responsibility on our shoulders and one chance to make a true difference to your children's education. We aim, through these regular newsletters, academic Progress Reports and our increased profile at the school, that you will become more informed and as a result, confident in our combined abilities and commitment.

## Link Governor Roles – Enrichment and Religious Education

A new concept is the role of the 'Enrichment Governor,' who will be looking at the wider scope of the school, beyond data and attainment, to the nurturing effect of a well rounded education on the whole child and the wider community.

*'As link governor for RE, and the wider religious dimension of the school, I spend quite a lot of time asking myself: How can we nurture the faith of all our pupils - not just the Catholics - during the years they spend with us? Faith of course comes from God, but it is our privilege to share in the task, as Pope Benedict put it on his visit to England, of preparing your children not just for this world but the next.'*

*'As with every other aspect of the work of the school, success depends on partnerships. We look forward to welcoming in September our new parish priest, Canon Luke Smith, and we hope he will soon be a familiar face around the school.'*

*'We are well aware, however, that more important than teachers and governors, more important even than priests, are all you mums and dads and carers who by your instruction, example, and love, help the children at this school become what they are meant to be. With your support I have no doubt we can make St Francis a mighty stronghold of faith, and a great place to live, work and learn.'*

-Richard Ashton - Curriculum and Strategic Committees Member; EYFS; Equalities; Enrichment and Religious Education Link Governor.

## What is the Pupil Premium and Why is it Linked to Free School Meals?

The Pupil Premium is additional funding given to publicly funded schools in England to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and close the gap between them and their peers. We would like to outline some changes that will affect our ability to claim this important funding from Central Government.

The Pupil Premium is paid directly to schools based on the number of pupils who are eligible for free school meals (or have been eligible for Free School Meals at any time in the last 6 years) from Reception to Year 6. The funding will rise from £953, to **£1,300** per pupil in the coming academic year, and it is clear that the money can make a huge difference to our school, enabling it to give the children extra support, for example, funding extra tuition or to help pay for children to take part in clubs or trips. The current uses of the Pupil Premium are listed on our website under the link 'Statutory Information'. **It is imperative to be aware that the Pupil Premium is *not* used as an indication of attainment, and when a 'Gifted and Talented' child is in receipt of the Pupil Premium, the funding may be used to accelerate achievement.**

The Government has just introduced a scheme that as of September 2014 all Key Stage 1 children are entitled to a free school meal and this means we may struggle to identify children who qualify for Pupil Premium. Many children are entitled to free school meals, for example, if one parent is receiving income support, job-seekers' allowance or child tax credits, then this would mean the child is eligible. If your child qualifies for free school meals but does not like hot dinners and prefers a packed lunch, the school can still claim the Pupil Premium.

An important part of the Governors' role is to monitor the use and the impact of Pupil Premium funding at St Francis School and we can evidence the visible impact on progress of those children supported by Pupil Premium.

You can view the full list of eligibility criteria and apply online at <http://www.kent.gov.uk/education-and-children/schools/free-school-meals> Information regarding whom is in receipt of the Pupil Premium will remain entirely confidential. If you think you may be eligible, please do take a moment to visit the website, or alternatively contact Mrs Blanden, Acting Headteacher, who will answer any questions you may have.

## HMI's Fourth Monitoring Visit

Janet Pearce, HMI, completed her fourth monitoring visit earlier in July and we are extremely pleased with her report which accurately states the progress the school is making towards the removal of Special Measures.

*'[Governors] have acquired a thorough knowledge of the school and they make sure that answers to their questions are backed up by clear evidence. ... Nevertheless, they also take proper account of the school's current position and the need for continued rapid improvement. Governors have attended relevant training, and like the rest of the school, they have grasped opportunities to learn with enthusiasm and energy, while maintaining a realistic view of the performance of the school.'*

- Janet Pearce, Her Majesty's Inspector

## The New Academic Year - Looking Ahead

As parents you will be aware from my letter of 11 July that we are extremely pleased with preliminary SATs results and will share these in detail with you as soon as possible when they are validated.

Again, we would like to take this opportunity to thank all staff members who have worked tirelessly this year to enable your children to succeed; the children themselves who speak with clear pride of their achievements and you, the Parents and Carers whose support is integral to the success of the school.

We have set a clear standard for the coming academic year, and will continue to ensure that these standards are met and built upon.