

School Year 2022-23 annual letter/ report: Governing Board/ Chair Governors:

Dear Parents and Guardians,

As the 2022-23 academic year draws to a close, I would like to set out a brief review of the year and the work we have done as a Governing Body to help the Heathwood Lower School to continue to thrive and serve all our children to the very best of our abilities.

School vision

At the start of the year, we refreshed our vision, which is fundamental to our approach and decisions at all levels in the school. Our school vision is for every child to embed a love for learning, to be passionate about the world around them, to celebrate differences and be kind. Our children will learn important life skills so they leave Heathwood equipped to be successful learners ready for the next steps in their lives.

Strategic leadership of the school

Mrs Susie Dove has been an excellent headteacher and we were very sad to see her leave at Easter. However, Mrs Jackie Wright has been appointed as her replacement, with Mr Paul Dicker promoted to Deputy Headteacher and Miss Talia Romaine promoted to Assistant Headteacher. A change in headteacher can have a major impact in any school, and we are pleased that the transition has gone so smoothly, despite all the immediate challenges around Jackie's cancer treatments and an Ofsted inspection. That is testament to such a skilled and dedicated senior leadership team, and we are so proud of them and the school as a whole.

Not surprisingly, the recruitment process has been a huge focus for the governing body and we have put in many hours together to test the field and make sure we found the best headteacher for our school.

Governance

We changed our governance model and structure at the start of this year to accommodate the fact that, like many schools, we have a relatively small number of governors. We therefore removed most of our committee structures and we now meet together as a full board roughly about once a month during term time. We also have a separate pay committee, which meets once a year and then by exception as needed, and a complaints panel which meets by exception as needed. Finally, for the second time, we will be spending a day together during the Summer holidays as a strategic planning day for the year ahead.

We also worked to increase our number of associate governors – non-voting members of the governing body with specific skills who we can approach on specific matters.

There have been quite a few changes of governors this year. We were very sorry to say goodbye to the following governors during this year:

- Hayley Fitch who stood down as a full governor at the start of this year, but continues as associate governor on finances
- Darren Ball who joined the board on 27th April 2022 as parent governor, and as chair of the pay committee but has just stood down owing to pressures of work. Darren has also been our health and safety expert and has undertaken a number of site inspections throughout the year
- Jackie Aspinwall who joined the board on 14th September 2022 and had to step down owing to family reasons

- Gilly Brown who joined us on 18th January 2023 as an associate governor with specialist skills on the curriculum and who has stepped down following promotion to headteacher in a school in a nearby village.

I would also like to give heartfelt thanks to Rose Gunter who will be standing down as a governor at the end of this academic year. Rose has been an amazing and long-standing part of our school community as a grandparent and a highly proactive governor and member of the PTA. She will be incredibly missed.

Sadly, we no longer have enough governors to meet our minimum number of 7 governors as required by our instrument of government for the school and so we have reported this to Central Bedfordshire Council, as well as informing the Ofsted Inspector in our recent inspection.

I hope our first meeting in the next academic year will appoint six governors, compared to our minimum requirement of seven, so we are looking again for another parent governor and we are always interested in hearing from anyone who wishes to find out more about becoming a governor. Governors are voluntary and provide their time for free because they want to see the school and our children succeed – a bit of time and existing skills could make a huge difference to the school and, as the saying goes, many hands make light work.

Performance

On the 16th and 17 May 2023, we had an Ofsted inspection under Section 8 of the Education Act 2008. This means that the inspection was ungraded, to check whether we were maintaining our 'good' status. If the inspector had found any concerns, then there would have been a further subsequent inspection, in greater depth, to re-grade the school under Section 5 of the Act.

I am delighted that we are still considered a 'good' school. The inspector was incredibly positive about the school and we are so proud about the feedback about how our staff and our children are truly bringing to life our school values and ethos. For example, the inspection highlighted that children are happy at the school, that there is a strong and diligent culture around safeguarding and care, that kindness is demonstrated by children and staff, and that families feel welcome and included.

Our many thanks to the 75 parents that provided feedback on ParentView – this was an exceptionally high response rate and your views really did matter in the inspection. We hope to continue to receive plenty of feedback and reviews through ParentView on an ongoing basis (even when we do not have an Ofsted inspection happening) as this is so important in helping governors to provide informed oversight for the ongoing effective performance of the school.

We were also very pleased that the inspection recognised that governors are very committed, have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and priorities and use this to challenge and support leaders effectively.

School Development Plan delivery

Every year, school leaders and the governing body work with our local authority school improvement advisor to set our delivery plan and priorities. For 2022-23, our top priorities were:

- Quality of education: to recover and improve standards back to pre-Covid levels; and adopt a improved curriculum
- Behaviours and attitude: to improve attendance for vulnerable groups (as being in school makes a huge difference to child outcomes)

- Personal development: to embed high expectations of participation, engagement and learning
- Leadership and management: to restructure the senior leadership team, and develop a programme of staff training and development.

We have achieved or exceeded the vast majority of these priorities:

- Education standards – Attainment standards are rising and we are continuing to work towards exceeding our previously achieved levels. Attainment standards in Early Years were pleasing this year, as was the number of children passing the Phonics Screening in Year One in June.
- Our curriculum - this year, the school introduced a new curriculum, using Curriculum Maestro. Whilst this was a major change, we are very pleased about the positive difference it is already making for the teaching and learning experience, and this will only get better as the approach gets further embedded, evaluated and developed over time. This was the main recommendation from the inspection – to continue to embed and improve this change, building on a strong base as school leaders have created a broad, balanced and ambitious curriculum, with resources carefully selected to suit pupils’ needs.
- Attendance for vulnerable groups – attendance for children in receipt of pupil premium grant increased to 91.21% in June from 89.6% at the start of the academic year and a low of 88.31% in December. However this continues to be a priority area going forwards.
- High level of participation, engagement and learning – the Ofsted Inspection report highlighted that the new curriculum for foundation subjects has raised expectations of what pupils should know and understand, and that pupils respond very well to leaders’ high expectations of behaviour.
- We have successfully restructured the school leadership team and continued to support staff professional development. Two of our teachers are currently working towards their NPQ and our Headteacher has successfully gained her qualification as Senior Mental Health Lead. All staff have the opportunity to attend relevant training and teachers leading Maths and English have attended training sessions to support their leadership and subject expertise.

In the next academic year, we are supporting two members of staff – Mrs Amy Marsh and Mrs Tracey Cunningham - to undertake teacher training qualifications. I know they will be incredibly dedicated in teaching and studying, and our appreciation goes to them and to our senior leaders who will be actively tutoring and supporting them within the school.

Pupil attendance and attainment

Heathwood Lower School remains well regarded in the community. There were 76 applications for the September 2023 intake for our Reception Class.

Values and wellbeing

We continue to have a strong focus on our values, wellbeing, participation (including in school councils) and enrichment.

This year we have had regular meetings of all 5 councils, School Council, Rights Respecting, Fair Trade, Eco and Sports. Members of the councils are elected by their peers following a pitch as to why they want to be elected and what they will try to do over the following year. These elections take

place during the first week back to school in September. Meetings are attended by Rose Gunter as British Values governor. This process shows democracy in action at Heathwood - The Pupil Voice!

We are pleased to announce that our Eco Council has recently gained the Green Flag Award with Distinction and Rights Respecting have been awarded a Recognition of Commitment Certificate.

In addition to the above awards - hot off the press! Heathwood has this year achieved The Communication Friendly School Award. This is an award that celebrates all of a school's achievements with regard to supporting communication for all children across a school. It also highlights all of the work completed to support children with Speech, Language and Communication Needs. In the report, the Speech Therapist stated that 'It is easy to see that the importance of communication is at the heart of your school, and staff recognise that it underpins much of the learning that takes place. We would like to commend you on being the first school in Central Bedfordshire to gain this award - an achievement you should all be proud of!'

To further enrich our pupils' education they can take part in a number of clubs, activities, competitions and trips:

Clubs: Let's get creative, Choir, Stem Club, Chess, Sewing, Percussion, Bee Netball, Relax and Chill, Calm and Create

Tournaments / Competitions: Tag Rugby, Cricket, Gym, Netball, Football, Hockey, Tennis and Cluster Sports.

School Trips (to name a few): Roald Dahl Museum, Higgins Museum, LegoLand, Science Museum, Tring Museum, Whipsnade Zoo, Rushmere, Hampton Court and Hazard Alley

Residentials: Year 3, 2 days at Caldecotte. Year 4, 3 days at New Barn

Enrichment Events: Macmillan Coffee Morning, Children in Need, Christmas Jumper day, Christmas Fair, World Book Day, Fair Trade Coffee Morning and Fair Trade Fortnight, Red Nose Day, Year 4 Bikeability, Mothers Day Assembly, Father's Day Enrichment, Heathstock (summer fair) and a Macmillan Fundraiser Event

Heathwood PTA: Are a huge support to the school, and we thank them on behalf of the school for their continued support.

Funds raised by the PTA are spent enriching the school environment and helping to purchase resources that the school budget just cannot stretch to. They have raised an amazing £6,600 this year by holding a number of events including, mufti days, cake sales, a jumble sale, a book fair, a self care evening, children and adult pottery painting days, quiz night and Winter Wonderland. What have they done with these funds?

- Worked hard to regenerate the sensory garden, an area above the car park that had become a jungle to a quiet peaceful place to be used by staff and children.
- Decorated the Library and updated it to a computerised system, also adding 100's of new books
- Supplied topic books for each class
- Provided Easter Eggs for the children
- Purchased sun sail shades for pre school
- Made contributions towards coach trips
- Contributions to the Year 4 leavers hoodies
- Contributed to the end of year inflatables for use by the whole school

It doesn't stop there... The PTA are already planning for next year and will be focusing on sensory pathways around the school and new playground markings.

Financial

The school continues to have effective financial management and we have a balanced budget. Our main expenditure has been on staff, with additional spending allocated to Curriculum Maestro (our new and exciting curriculum) and many other educational resources.

Balancing the budget has been particularly challenging with the wider economic challenges and the number of unfunded cost increases that we have been managing as a school. Your contributions to the PTA's fund-raising events have made a huge difference for creating fun and discretionary extras for our children.

We have actively managed to keep fees and charges at existing levels this year as we are very conscious that everyone will be feeling the pressures of cost-of-living increases. However, we have also carried out a number of detailed reviews as subsidising some costs would not be a sustainable or fair use of the school budget. At the start of the next academic year, we will need to increase pre-school fees to £15 per session for two year olds and £13.50 per session for three and four year olds; the cost of school meals by 15p to £2.45; and the costs of any school premise lettings for non-school related events to be confirmed. We have worked hard to keep these increases as low as possible.

We are delighted that our wrap-around care provision continues to be popular, with attendance reaching our highest figures yet; 30 children attending Breakfast Club and 23 children attending After School Club on our busiest days!

Conclusion

Overall, this has been a very busy year with some major changes. I am delighted that we have managed those changes smoothly and that the school is demonstrably making a positive difference for our children and bringing our school vision to life.

I wish all our class 4 children a wonderful and bright future as they move to their next schools – we will miss them, but I know they will continue to make us proud.

Paula Bangs
July 2023