

## Heathwood Lower School School Year 2023-24 annual report from the Governing Board

Dear Parents and Guardians,

We are reaching the end of the 2023-24 academic year and this letter sets out a brief review of the year. It has been a privilege to see our children at Heathwood Lower School doing so well and living our school values. On behalf of the governing board, I would like to thank all the staff at the school who work so hard to achieve our school vision, led so well by headteacher Mrs Jackie Wright, and with support from her senior leadership team of Mr Paul Dicker and Miss Talia Romaine.

### Summary

This report:

- provides an update on how we have strengthened the Governing Board
- sets out that Heathwood Lower School has performed strongly against our School Development Plan for the year – with special highlights on participation, engagement and learning at the school; behaviour; and teacher qualifications
- celebrates the success of our school councils, clubs and activities; and of our Parents Teacher Association (PTA). Calls for more volunteers to join the PTA
- welcomes positive feedback from parents, including that 100% of survey respondents would recommend the school
- confirms that our safeguarding and financial management practices are effective, and how we are growing our wrap-around care provision. Explains how we have had to increase fees for pre-school and for meals, though we have kept these as low as possible
- includes information on changes to Government requirements on attendance going forwards
- thanks staff, parents and children for another wonderful year, and wishes our year 4 pupils all the best at their next school.

### School vision

Our school vision remains our guide for making strategic decisions for the school. Our 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.

### Governance

We have built up our governing board since last year and have achieved a full complement of Board members, bringing in a range of new skills and experience. We have been joined by the following new governors:

- Mrs Susanne Dove, a co-opted governor with extensive teaching experience, including in her previous role as headteacher at Heathwood Lower School
- Mrs Eugenia Kidd, a parent governor who is a civil servant and previously a librarian
- Mr Andrew Warner, a parent governor and managing director of a London-based social housing provider

- Mr Jim Whitaker, a co-opted governor with extensive experience of health and safety, and training
- Mrs Maxine Stanford has joined the board as staff governor, replacing Miss Bryony Leary. Our thanks go to both members of staff, for giving extra time to the leadership of the school.

We are always interested in hearing from anyone who wishes to find out more about becoming a governor so please get in touch if you, or someone you know, may be interested. 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 can make a huge difference to the school.

This year, governors have continued to provide leadership and strategic direction to the school, building on the excellent Ofsted inspection report last year. In our role, we have continued to focus on achieving our School Development plan, maintaining effective safeguarding practices and ensuring excellent financial management. In recent months, we have had a major focus on health and safety, implementing risk assessments, physical improvements and training.

All this has been aided by our amazing clerk, Mrs Kelly Burley, and we would like to thank her for her excellent work and service to the Board.

### **Priorities and performance: School Development Plan**

Every year, school leaders and the governing body work with our local authority school improvement advisor to set our school delivery plan and priorities. We have achieved the following in relation to the 8 school priorities set for 2023-24:

#### **Quality Of Education:**

- **To continue to improve standards and attainment to be in-line with, or above, previous data and national expectations** – the school has broadly met or exceeded this priority, which covers years 1-4, with only two exceptions:
  - the results are broadly in-line or better than the results the previous year for all but one class. For that one class, there is a high proportion of children with special educational needs in cognition and learning, and we have brought in specialist expertise, including Educational Psychologist advice, to help find ways to make further progress. 82% of children passed their Year 1 phonics screening test this year, which is a reduction from 87% the previous year, however this is always a priority and a focus in Year One. In Year 4, 72% of children scored 80% or above in their multiplication check, which is above the previous year. In all years, there has been an increase in the number of children reaching greater depth.
  - Heathwood has exceeded against national averages, for the most recent data available:

Children achieving a good level of development	Heathwood Lower School (2024)	National Average (2023)
Overall	81%	67%
Phonics Screening	82%	79%
KS1 Reading	93%	68%
Writing	86%	60%
Maths	90%	70%

- **To embed a curriculum that is designed to encourage children to build on and transfer knowledge and skills to the next stage of their learning** – the school has fully implemented key tools to enable an effective curriculum, including Curriculum Maestro, White Rose Maths, Twinkl Phonics and Spelling, Charanga Music and Teach Computing. These are all being utilised well across the school and build on previous learning. Staff have also implemented a new approach so that children have more time to respond to marking and feedback. We will have a new PE and Music curriculum ready for September.

#### Behaviour and Attitude:

- **Improve the attendance for vulnerable groups** – we are making good progress, but this continues to be a priority. For Heathwood children receiving pupil premium grant, attendance until the end of June this year was 94%, compared to 91% in 2023. This compares with attendance for the whole school of 95%, and all pupils nationally of 93%. The lowest attendance months so far were December and January, when the headteacher had to send out 16 letters raising concerns about persistent absent rates. Well done to all those children and families who have increased their attendance and to all our children who received attendance postcards for achieving 99 or 100% attendance.

We know getting to school is not always easy and school staff are available to help with complex matters. Attendance for vulnerable groups is a top priority because the evidence shows that children who have good levels of school attendance tend to have better wellbeing, education and life outcomes. From the first day of term to the last, the small moments in a school day make a real difference. Every school day is full of moments of wonder, curiosity and connection. Such moments matter, and attendance counts.

For this reason, the Government has implemented new requirements on attendance for all pupils which will apply from August 2024, and we will be updating our school attendance policy accordingly.<sup>1</sup> All schools will be required to consider a fine when a child has missed 10 or more sessions (5 days) for unauthorised reasons. The first fine will be £80 - £160; the second fine will be £160. Fines per parent will be capped to two fines within any three-year period. Once this limit has been reached, other action will be considered - this could include a fixed penalty notice of up to £2,500; an Education Supervision Order or a Parenting Order; or a court prosecution, with the potential for a community order or a jail sentence up to 3 months. Any fines will be passed to the local authority and the Government, and will not be retained by the school. For more information, please go to: <https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2024/02/29/fines-for-parents-for-taking-children-out-of-school-what-you-need-to-know/>

- **To embed consistent high expectations of behaviour and school values** – we are so proud of our children at Heathwood Lower School. So far, in the first 9 months of the year, we have awarded 3,932 merits to children for living our values. Whilst five letters were sent home regarding behaviour incidents, these were all between September - December 2023, and there have been no such letters at this point in 2024. In the school's most recent wellbeing survey, 86% of children agreed or strongly agreed that children behave well at school, compared with 79% in the July 2023 baseline.

#### Personal Development:

- **To embed high expectations of participation, engagement and learning across the school** – we are delighted to say this has shown huge improvement and we now have positive engagement with all areas of learning across the school. This has been a persistent challenge in recent years, following the Covid pandemic, and it is wonderful to report such progress.

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<sup>1</sup> New requirements are from the 'School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024'

- **To develop and embed a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing** – this academic year, the Central Bedfordshire Council Mental Health School Team has been working with our school and has carried out two staff training sessions, a training session with children who act as buddies for others, and a few sessions with parents, including a workshop which was attended by 12 parents. All classes now have weekly circle time using a ‘time to talk’ approach and we also make sure there are lessons in personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE). We have regular wellbeing surveys and, in the most recent survey, 96% of children felt that people noticed when they had done well, compared to 79% in the July 2023 baseline.

#### **Leadership and Management:**

- **To develop a programme of staff training and professional development for subject leaders** – the school has taken a range of action, including a range of further training and subject specialism engagement for subject leaders; and more time for subject leaders to monitor and evaluate the delivery of the specific subjects through Curriculum Maestro. Looking more broadly, all members of staff have had access to continuous professional development and we would particularly like to congratulate Miss Leary on completing her NPQSL, Mrs Marsh and Mrs Cunningham on successful gaining Qualified Teacher Status and Mrs Ottaway for achieving her NVQ Level 3 Diploma in Specialist Support for Teaching and Learning in Schools.

#### **Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS):**

- **To embed and provide high quality practice and provision in early years** – to help achieve this there has been a renewed focus in pre-school on ensuring the use of play is purposeful and offers children a range of learning opportunities, making good use of both indoor and outdoor equipment; and we have also brought Curriculum Maestro topics into pre-school and Reception. In Summer 2024, 81% of Reception class children achieved a ‘good level of development’. This compares to 75% at Heathwood in 2023, and 67% nationally in 2023 (the most recent data available).

#### **Feedback from you**

We know that Heathwood Lower School remains well regarded in the community and there were 85 applications for the September 2024 intake for our Reception Class.

Last year, we had 75 responses on **ParentView**, the Ofsted platform for giving feedback on schools. That was a brilliant response rate, as Ofsted remarked when they completed their 2023 inspection which reaffirmed the school as ‘good’ and with plenty of positive feedback. This year, we only received one response to ParentView, which means we were not able to access a report. Please do take a moment to provide feedback as it does not take long - [Give your views | Ofsted Parent View](#).<sup>2</sup>

However, we carried out a school survey of parents in December 2023 and received 77 responses, which is brilliant and really helps to inform our approach as a school and as a Governing Board. 100% of respondents said they would recommend Heathwood to another parent; 100% felt the school made sure children were well-behaved; 98% of respondents who had raised a concern felt the school had dealt with that properly; and 96% believed their child was doing well at the school. The lowest scoring result from the survey was on whether children could take part in clubs and activities, where 90% agreed or strongly agreed that was the case, but 4% disagreed and 5% did not know.

#### **Wellbeing, values and enrichment**

As shown in our school priorities, wellbeing and strong values remain very important in the school.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://parentview.ofsted.gov.uk/login?destination=/give-your-views/survey/6802>

This year, we continued to have our weekly enrichment sessions on a Friday, which are loved by the children.

Our 5 councils, School Council, Rights Respecting, Fair Trade, ECO and Sports, have all met at least once a half-term and presented to the whole school in assemblies, sharing their ideas and achievements. The school council have considered the views and collected votes around the awarding and recognition of achievement and changes have been put in place for September. The Sports Council have worked together to create a wish list of new PE equipment and ensure Buddies have the resources they need to organise and play games at lunch time. The Fairtrade Council and Rights Respecting Council have held very successful coffee mornings, raising valuable funds for charities. The ECO Council has continued to consider environmental factors and have re-submitted their application for Distinction of the Eco Award. Members of the councils are elected by their peers during the first week of school in September, based on a pitch as to why they want to be elected and what they will try to do over the following year.

Our residential trip this year was a new adventure, which took place at The Chellington Centre. The children had an amazing time taking part in boot camp, a river study, art activities and map making.

Governors have also carried out multiple different health and safety risk assessments this year, and made a whole series of practical changes to manage physical risk, including the safe storage of paper files. The school has continued to apply a strong focus to safeguarding.

#### **Heathwood Parents Teachers Association (PTA)**

The PTA is a huge support to the school, and we thank them on behalf of the school for everything they do. It is wonderful to see the energy and enthusiasm they have brought, with special thanks to Alicia Maclean, Lauren Bennett, Simon Clowes and Libby Copeman.

We are very sad that this PTA committee has stood down and we urge other parents and teachers to come forward and help the PTA remain and thrive. If you would like to know more, please contact the school office or email [heathwoodpta@gmail.com](mailto:heathwoodpta@gmail.com)

This year, the PTA has raised over £12,000. They have funded amazing sensory pathways around the school and grounds. These sensory pathways create a series of guided movements for children to follow, shown by markings on the ground or walls. As children follow the path and complete the movements, they work off excess energy and develop their motor and other skills. The various movements on a path are often designed to engage different parts of the body and brain, from frog hops to spins and wall pushes.

#### **Finances**

The school continues to have highly effective financial management and we have a balanced budget. Our main expenditure has been on staff, with additional spending on a new IT server; lots of new PE equipment and the new communication boards on the field and playground.

Balancing the budget has been particularly challenging because of the wider economic position. We are currently forecasting to remain within budget for the next year (2024-2025) and the year after that (2025-26) but only by using up our small amount of annual carry-over. The financial position for the third year (2026-27) currently looks bleak and we will not be able to avoid a deficit on our current approach unless there is an increase in funding. Governors will continue to keep the position under close review and we are hopeful that there will be changes that will improve our current financial outlook.

We are very conscious that the cost of living crisis has affected all our families, as well as us as a school. Staff are working incredibly hard to keep costs down, without overly undermining quality,

and we have been bench-marking against other schools in the area to make sure we are being both creative and thorough in our cost management. However, we have reached the point where our fees no longer cover our costs so we have no choice but to increase our fees, though we have kept these increases as low as possible.

At the start of the next academic year, we will increase the cost of a school meal by 15p to £2.60. We will also bring pre-school fees in-line with Government funding to £22.32 per session for two year olds and £15.06 per session for three and four year olds.

### **Wrap-around care**

Our pre-school is available from the age of 2½ until children move into lower school. From April 2024, we started offering wrap-around care for up to 6 children in the pre-school, with provision starting at 8am, and then finishing at 5.30pm. This is a one-year trial and, so far, take up for the new academic year has already shown an increase with 11 families signed up from September. We hope this trial will be successful and we can build in more flexibility over time. We recognise that such extended hours are increasingly needed by families.

Our main school wrap-around care continues to thrive. On our busiest days, 30 children attended Breakfast Club and 25 children attended After School Club.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, this has been another busy year. We are delighted that the school continues to make such a positive difference for our children and in bringing our school vision to life. In particular, seeing the return to active participation across all our subjects has been wonderful and will help our children thrive.

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

Paula Bangs (Chair)  
Beth Sedgwick (Vice Chair)  
and all the School Governing Board  
July 2024