

Minutes of Parentlink meeting 2nd February 2010, 9am.

Parents, carers and staff present: Jane Grimston; Ursula Yates, Beatrix Payne, Susie Graves, Suzanne Harris, Harriet Gugenheim, Angela Bhardwaj, Yvonne Bennett, Khadija Ahrazem; Julie O'Reilly, Michaela Field, Heidi Kortbaek, Sarah Wallis, Carine Wittenbol-Ocak; Abigail Hopkins, Julie Horten, Jenny Puddington, Caroline Russell, Alice McAllister; Leigh Norgrove, Emma Knight

• Minutes of the last meeting, 1st December 2009

Minutes of the previous meeting were circulated.

Setting: The removal of setting from the classroom continues to cause concern. Parents stated that their children were not happy with the new arrangements, and they were not being targeted with their work as before. Emma Knight said that it was a difficult transition time. There is meant to be a specific plan for groups (or 'pods') of about 6 children after the main activity has been set out. It has been hard for teachers to adapt, with Teaching Partners providing support. It is important that there is a trained teacher doing the focussed teaching on the small group.

A parent asked: 'Over what period of time do teachers aim to see each child?' Leigh Norgrove will pass this question on to Lisa Horton for Key Stage 2, in Key Stage 1 it is 6 children per week. For example, in KS1 during English lessons, a group will focus on using commas in their work. In Maths, a different 'pod' of children will have that focus.

A parent said that Canonbury had been enthusiastic about getting rid of settings, and yet so far it appeared that the new system was not being delivered as promised. She said that teachers appeared too stretched, with the result that no groups were receiving the required support.

A parent asked how teachers were feeling about the new system, saying that if the teachers find it hard to cope then that will affect performance all round. Emma said that change is always difficult, but that she was positive. She said that teachers have to work very hard to prepare for classes, and it takes time for a new system to be implemented.

A parent asked who had given the Executive Head the mandate to change the system at a time of transition for the school. Another parent said their child was bored, more than they ever had been before.

Caroline Russell (ex-Chair of Governors) said that the move away from setting had not just been Sue's initiative, Mich and Lisa had been working on the idea for some time. The new system is helping some children to move onto more independent learning.

Another parent expressed concern that the two year-group classes were now no longer mixing as they had done with setting. Some children are overwhelmed by the larger class sizes and have had their confidence knocked by having less attention and being in a class with more able children.

A parent asked what parents and carers can do to support the new system.

Julie Horten, Chair of Governors, said that Matt Britt, Canonbury's incoming Head, had already shown that he would be a 'listening' Head, he wants to find out what children think, and has already set up meetings with each year group.

A parent expressed her concern about her child in Year 5, who is struggling with reading and therefore unable to read questions in tests. She had been told someone would read the questions for her child, but felt that this was not going to help in the long term. Parents and carers suggested that the parent speak to the child's teacher again, and press for extra help, including a reading volunteer.

• **School dinners**

A parent had contacted Parentlink concerned that her child was not eating enough at lunch and was extremely hungry after school. Emma Knight said that many children do not add the salad or vegetable options to their main course portions, and need to be encouraged to do so. She said there is a lot of waste, children often leave some of their food in the rush to get out and play. A parent asked how children are monitored. It was agreed that some children, especially those who eat very little, could do with some gentle encouragement. If a parent is concerned that portions are too small, it was suggested they discuss this with the class teacher.

Vegetarian food is often eaten by children who also eat meat, so there is not enough for the vegetarian children. It was agreed that if vegetarian food is so popular, the kitchen staff should look into making a larger quantity.

Follow up: look at portion sizes and waste, to see what can be done to increase supply without also increasing waste. Leigh said that Caterlink would be prepared to talk to parents and carers and is receptive to their views.

Parents and carers were told that children in Foundation Stage, who have lunch early at 11.30, are given a digestive biscuit and milk in the afternoon.

• **DVDs and videos in school**

A parent had expressed concern that too many films were being watched in school time, particularly in the run up to Christmas when it was felt that the TV was used as an 'electronic babysitter'. Emma spoke about the school's 'Espresso' site used to enrich learning. However, the concern is about Disney-type films, not educational ones. Emma said that some teachers (especially with younger children) will use a video to give children quiet time during break, the children will lie on the carpet and relax. Other activities will be going on at the same time. She said that not all children will watch a film, others might only watch for 5 minutes.

Emma was asked if there was enough lunchtime cover, so that the TV was not being put on due to lack of staffing. Emma was not aware of this happening.

• **Nursery Funding**

The Government has announced possible changes to Nursery funding which could mean that school hours change for this age group. Deputy Head Mich Bahn had told Alice McAllister (Parentlink chair) that it was much too early to say what the changes might be, and that it would not affect Canonbury in the foreseeable future.

Continued...

AOB

- **Sue leaving**

A coffee morning is scheduled for February 12th 9-10am, to say goodbye to Sue Seifert. The PTA was planning to discuss an appropriate gift for Sue at their next meeting.

- **Head lice**

It was reported that head lice were proving to be a real problem in some classes. It was asked that a text be sent out to alert parents and carers of the need to check their child(ren)'s hair regularly, and to encourage children to tie long hair back.

- **Meadow**

The playground 'meadow' area has been out of bounds for some time due to an unsafe wall. Leigh reported that this problem has been rectified and that this area should re-open for the children after half term.

Date of next meeting: March 23rd 2010, 9am