

Minutes of Parentlink meeting 18th May 2010, 9am.

Parents, carers and staff present: Kate Buchanan, Elaine Callanan, Liz Dowse, Ruth Crafer, Pat Treasure, Katrina Scior, Saida Ayadi, Inga Loca, Susie Graves, Rupert Graves, India Gebler, Harriet Gugenheim, Angela Bhardwaj John, Yvonne Bennett; Abigail Hopkins, Ursula Yates, Julie Horten, Jenny Puddington, Ninfa Restepo, Caroline Russell, Alice McAllister (chair), Matt Britt, Heidi Kortbaek, Aline Littlejohn, Suzanne Harris, Suzanne Ting, Siobhán O'Connell, Nurhoyot Yildit, Amal Abdullahi, Mich Bahn

• Welcome

Before Matt Britt arrived at the meeting Alice McAllister explained that, as the recent Ofsted inspection report had not yet been made public, it would not be possible to discuss this at Parentlink. The report is expected imminently, when it is published every parent will be given a copy along with the school's response and further information.

[Please see the end of the minutes for AOB points]

• Minutes of the last meeting, 30th March 2010

Minutes of the previous meeting were circulated.

• Staffing/restructuring

Matt said that it would have been good to put this in the context of the Ofsted report, but that this was not possible yet. He said the lack of leadership structure meant that there had been no link between the senior leadership and the classroom, with no communication up and down throughout the school, and therefore no consistency of experience and/or practice. He said that senior leadership have become reactive, not proactive.

Matt said that there is some satisfactory practice, but also pockets of inadequate practice where teachers have not been supported by leadership. In the past there has been an attempt to solve problems by adding in another member of staff, but this has not solved the underlying issues. There are 28 support staff and this is unsustainable.

Matt stressed the need to work quickly to ensure that teaching and support are of the highest standard. It is necessary to have a consultation process, and it won't be possible to preserve all jobs. There will be a layer of middle leaders – not class-bound – to drive learning forward. Classes will be looked at more individually – for example, it may be decided that setting is appropriate for one class but not for another. Support will be given where necessary. Team leaders will share the rationale behind this and explain it to parents and carers.

Matt emphasised that the children at Canonbury were a motivated, articulate, lively group who, on the face of it, had been doing well. However, he also said that there was a history of poor structure behind the school, and that the new staff model will support the children fully.

The new staff model will mean that every class teacher is able to honour their curriculum and has the support to deliver it. Music, art and drama will continue to be offered. Funding for Cubitt is in place and Daniel will work with teachers on planning and skills progression. Teachers need to be able to teach all aspects of the curriculum but money will be available to bring in specialist help where

necessary. Senior teachers will take on responsibility for seeing that these subjects are properly planned and taught. This will also happen with sport, a teacher will oversee PE and games lessons and work alongside the coaches. Matt explained that it is a requirement of the National Curriculum that class teachers take their pupils for music, sport, art etc. He said that when another person teaches that lesson the teacher loses responsibility for that subject. A parent was concerned that if a child's 'highlight of the week' was a subject currently taught by a specialist, they might lose that interest without expert tuition. Another parent said that arts subjects and sport could be inspirational for children with specialist teaching, and asked if it would be possible to maintain that with class teachers.

One of the new deputy heads will take on the role of Special Educational Needs co-ordinator, and 50% of their role will be taken up with this. Qualified teachers will deliver the extra support where it is needed. A parent expressed her frustration that her son's SEN support had changed so much over the last two years, and had only been positive since January of this year, so she was concerned about potential changes. Matt wanted to reassure parents and carers that the new system would be far more thorough for all pupils and would monitor progress much more closely.

A parent spoke about an initiative which had been put forward last term to help (mainly boys) with their fine motor skills. Parents and carers had received a text and letter but nothing had happened since. Class teachers had not been aware of the letters. Matt said this was unacceptable and an example of poor communication

Alice (chair) said that parents and carers at Canonbury had become used to hearing promises about 'improvements' which were then not delivered – for example, setting was not adequately replaced despite assurances that it would be. Parents and carers need to be able to believe that the children will benefit from these changes.

A parent had asked about support available for staff at what must be a very difficult and stressful time for them. Matt said that he understood his proposals did not seem fair to all staff. Staff have access to an Employee Assistance Programme, a helpline, and support from their Unions. Matt is communicating face to face with teachers, and also trying to be visible to parents and children, although this is not always possible with his current schedule. He realises that this is a difficult time and that teachers will feel stressed. He said that some staff have not been given the opportunity to progress through training during their time at Canonbury (as they should have been), and anyone in this situation who is being made redundant will be offered training to raise their qualifications.

Siobhán O'Connell, a parent governor, said that the governors have grilled Matt on all the issues and were fully aware of how difficult the whole process will be. However, the children need to move forward with their learning. Governor committees will be following the new, clearer system very closely, to make sure that what is supposed to happen WILL happen.

A parent said that there was a difference between restructuring staff and losing staff, and that parents and carers hadn't been informed about the latter. Matt said that it was not yet possible to comment on this, before the Ofsted report is published and the staff consultation period is complete. A parent said that they felt staff may be blamed for problems, when actually they were due to a lack of leadership. Matt said he was aware problems were not the fault of the teachers, and that they had been professional and loyal during difficult times at the school.

Announcements about the new staff model should be made by mid to late June. Therefore it should be possible to discuss this at the next Parentlink meeting on July 6th.

- **Communication**

A budget has been allocated for the new website. A meeting Matt had arranged with the website designers had had to be postponed due to their personnel being delayed by the ash cloud, he is hoping to have this meeting soon.

When the Ofsted report is published each parent and carer will receive a copy as well as information on how the school will move forward now.

- **Year Six support**

Historically, Year 6 have been taught in a more integrated way, parents had asked why this is not happening now. Matt said that the move away from setting had affected the way the children mixed, and also that a lack of leadership had polarized the classes. He has observed the two classes and spoken to the teachers. Additional support has been put in place, with another teacher working with them for three days a week, in particular with one class.

A parent asked what the school policy on collective punishment is, as this has been applied to Year 6 classes. Matt said there was no such policy in school and he was not aware of collective punishment happening. It was suggested that parents contact Matt directly if they have concerns over this.

- **School meals**

Many parents and carers feel that their children are not eating enough, and are then extremely hungry at the end of the day. Matt said that there should be enough food, but that occasionally the numbers for how many children are having free school meals are wrong. In September there will be a new system of staggered lunchtimes to reduce waiting/queuing times for children. Matt feels that the quality and range of food available is good, but that some children, especially the younger ones, are not able to see clearly what is on offer. This is being addressed. Aline, a governor, said that the quality appeared to have gone downhill and children were asking to switch to packed lunches. Another parent was concerned that children were given food they didn't like and this would affect the way they ate their whole meal. Another parent said that separating packed lunch and school dinner children meant that some children didn't eat properly as they rushed to catch up with their friends.

In Foundation Stage the children eat lunch very early (11.30) and are now no longer having a biscuit in the afternoon, so are very hungry. Fruit is available but doesn't fill them up. Matt said that the children should eat their lunches later and this will happen from September.

Matt said that Canonbury has the second best uptake for free school meals in the borough.

AOB

- **Pupil vacancies**

There are some vacancies in school (particularly FS) that have never been filled. Matt is aware of this but CEA (Cambridge Education @ Islington) are responsible

for filling places, so this is currently out of the school's hands. This is a frustrating situation which has funding implications for the school but, more importantly, it could create child protection issues if places are not offered to children who need them. The school office is following this up with the Schools Admission Team.

- **Walk to school week**

This year's Walk to School week is focussing on the benefits of walking to school for health. Parents are aware of possible risks from traffic and stranger danger but these risks are tiny when compared to the problems created by not exercising. Look out for Walk to School information around the building.

- **Bad language**

A parent said that there had been an increase in the use of bad language in school, in e-mails sent between pupils, and in the playground. There is also a worrying incidence of the children using 'gay' as a derogatory term. Parents and carers agreed that children need to be reminded and taught about not using offensive language, and also about not playing inappropriate playground games (including one currently doing the rounds called 'slave').

- **Canonbury Square crossing**

There are currently no lights at the Canonbury Square crossing and several parents were concerned about how unsafe it was. Apparently, local police are not able to supervise the road due to 'health and safety' issues. It was suggested that parents and carers contact the council – Liz Wathen – and that this needs to go in the School Travel Plan. Matt said that the school had already met and spoken with the council about the crossing, work is due to continue until the 24th May. Julie Horten offered to look into the problem.

Date of next meeting: July 6th 2010, 9am

**Contact Alice, chair of Parentlink by e-mail:
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