



Emmbrook Infant School



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Chair's message

Welcome to the Spring Term Governor newsletter.

I'd firstly like to introduce four new Governors to the team. Following a skills audit, we identified gaps which we had the opportunity to plug by filling some vacant seats. Kate, Michelle, Darren, and Richard all bring a wealth of passion and commitment to accompany their professional skillsets. Do take a moment to read their introductions below. I'm delighted that they have joined and that we were oversubscribed with Parents volunteering - sadly, we couldn't take you all, but we were overwhelmed with so much interest.

To give you some insight into our activities, you might be interested to learn that there is typically one of the Governors visiting the school between 2-3 times per week. Whilst the operational running of the school is perfectly executed by Mrs Gillard and her staff, Governors are keen to be visible and active in our duties, whether that is agreeing policy change, overseeing financial diligence, drilling into achievement data, or joining for assemblies. In fact, as a governing body focused on whole school improvement, we identified the need to re-evaluate our three year strategic goals. Consequently, with the help of all staff, the Governors are mid-way through an exercise to clarify and set the vision for the school and the strategic priorities. You can read more on our approach and progress below.

We think that 2017 may be an 'Ofsted year' for EIS. When the Inspectors call with half a day's notice of their intention to visit. As a 'Good' school, our aspiration is 'Outstanding' and the whole school is focused on delivering the best that we can for the children. Academically, our results are in great shape and in many cases far exceeding National averages. We've also identified three focus areas where we are employing tactics in our School Improvement Plan to yield even higher in the future. We are rigorous and invest in helping the school both benchmark their service and identify improvement. Firstly, the WBC School Improvement Officer regularly visits and using Ofsted criteria the school was awarded 'Gold' by WBC, as a school which was locally assessed outstanding or strong good. In addition, we commissioned an independent review by a former Ofsted Inspector and Head Teacher. We were thrilled with the results which recommended 'outstanding', proving the excellence of the Head Teacher and all staff. Read more on this below. Given how close we could be to an official Ofsted review and rating, we are not sitting on our laurels, but instead working to deliver governance and support to the school to make it easier to deliver fantastic learning experiences.



In the background, be assured that the Governing Body has their eyes on the key issues of the moment. Whilst I cannot comment on sensitive topics, we are continually being proactive in discussions to gain advantage for the school in areas such as whether to join a Multi Academy Trust, how to achieve cost saving through a consortium approach such as a Wokingham Trust, and how the school may

be impacted through impending changes to the Government funding model. At the heart of our thinking is always how any major changes would impact the children in our care.

I wanted to recognise the wonderful work of our Hearing Impairment Unit, which we host on behalf of WBC. It is amazing to see the work being delivered and how the HI children are integrated into the school. Indeed, the inclusive, friendly and tolerant nature of the school and children means that our HI unit is full, giving impacted children a chance for regular schooling combined with the extra support to help them succeed.

Finally, I wanted to take this opportunity to let you know that I have decided to take a break from Governing and will be leaving the EIS Governing Body. It has been a remarkable four years for me and I've had the privilege to see my son progress through the school and onto Juniors. You should be pleased to learn that the EIS governing body is incredibly blessed with experienced and committed members who are very well placed to lead the school to further success. I would also like to express my gratitude to the hardworking staff of the school who work tirelessly to make it a success. I will also miss seeing the children and the many successes they have throughout their time at the school. They are always so well behaved around the school and they are a credit to you as parents.

I would like to introduce Tony Charters as your new Chair of Governors. This is a fantastic choice and I will be supporting Tony during a transition period. Expect to hear more from him in the Summer newsletter.

I wish you all a fantastic Easter and a great Summer

Ben Clarke



New Governor – Kate Benson

My name is Kate Benson and I have joined the governing body as a co-opted governor from Jan-17. I have lived in Joel Park for 10½yrs, relocating here for work. My husband and I have 2 children – Daniel (4) in Green Cygnets & Emma (3), who will (hopefully) be starting EIS in Sept 2018. I enjoy being actively involved in my local community as I am on the Joel Park Residents' Association (JPRA) committee & am the editor of the JPRA newsletter.

Skills that I bring to the governing body are that of leadership (I currently manage project teams of up to 50 individuals), data analysis (I use Microsoft Excel and its' formulae and functions on a daily basis) & financial (I currently manage, negotiate and track the budgets of 4 different vendors, with the range €5-€50 million each). As a governor, I am looking forward to building on the 2yrs experience of working in education that I have, from a previous role as a research fellow at the University of Bristol, where I delivered biochemistry lectures & tutorials as well as supervised undergraduate lab projects.

Fun fact: the London 2012 Olympics holds a special place in my heart – we watched the opening ceremony with 2 day old Daniel, took him to day 1 of the athletics when he was 9 days old & watched my sister perform in the sailing as an athlete!



New Governor – Darren Payne

Hello, my name is Darren Payne and I'm one of the new Co-Opted Governors having joined in the Autumn of 2016. I have 2 daughters currently at Emmbrook Infants: Abigail (6) and Imogen (5). I applied to be a Governor for the simple reason that I wanted to get more involved in their school life and I see the role of Governor as an excellent way for me to both learn about their education at Emmbrook infants and to also give something back to the local community. So far, I've had the opportunity to attend one full Governor's meeting, observed a number of sub-committee meetings and served Christmas lunch to over 160 hungry children – thanks to Corrina the rest of the team at Emmbrook and the other Governors for making me feel so welcome!

In terms of my professional background, I'm a Law and French Graduate with over 16 years' experience in Sales and Sales Leadership roles in the world of information technology. Outside of work I try to find time to do some swimming, cycling, running, golf and watching (unfortunately no longer playing) rugby.



New Governor – Richard Oughton

Hi, my name is Richard Oughton and I am a newly Co-Opted Governor having joined in the Autumn of 2016. My wife Claire and I have lived in Wokingham for over 15 years and I have three children, Joshua (13) who previously attended Emmbrook Infants School, Emma (5) who started at the school in the autumn term and Toby (2). I have had previous experience of being a school governor and I applied to become a governor again as I wanted to become more involved with EIS as well as give something back to the local community.

In terms of my professional background, I have worked for a well-known Retailer since completing my degree and I currently lead a large team in our Bracknell based head office. I really enjoy my work and I hope that the skills I have developed will be welcome within the governing body - my role requires me to collaborate with a number of teams which means I am used to challenging conversations, I am accountable for setting clear vision and strategic direction whilst working within an ever-changing environment. Outside of work, when not spending time with my family, I enjoy cycling (mainly mountain biking), and watching motor sports or rugby - made even better if my eldest son is playing.



New Governor – Michelle Barrett

I am Michelle Barrett, and I am a parent Governor elected in October 2016. I grew up in Emmbrook and attended both the Infant and Junior school myself. I have one daughter Izzy (4) who is in Red Cygnets.

I previously spent 13 years working for the police service, focusing on Missing Children, Child Sexual Exploitation and Domestic Abuse and will bring this Safeguarding experience to the team. I volunteer at a social club for the elderly residents of Emmbrook and at Christmas they (and I) had the pleasure of the Infant School Choir singing Christmas songs to them.

I am excited to have been appointed as the SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability) Governor, as I believe each child's individual needs should be recognised and supported so they can achieve their potential.

Governor Day – an invaluable insight into school workings

“Everyone is a genius. But if you judge a fish on its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.”

Albert Einstein



Most Governor meetings are in the evening, after a busy day, kids bath time and before a late dinner. It's a luxury then for us to meet during the day with a packed agenda but with chances to meet with teachers, assistants, staff, and children. Our Governor Day in early February was a mix of learning about some of the school initiatives and discussing our three-year strategy.

In the morning, we were treated to a series of interactive presentations and discussions whilst sat on the small chairs in Robins classroom (the children were elsewhere!). I suddenly felt six again.

First topic was the EYFS curriculum - a whistle-stop tour from Mrs Freemantle and Mrs Cooper on the high expectation that is placed on our reception year, how topics are included in the curriculum and how using teaching assistants enables a structured and methodical approach to building confidence and skills in our youngest. It is a fine balance between challenging them to progress and remembering that they are only 4. It was here where the Governors learnt how successful the investment in the outside learning zones has been.

Laugh you might, but we were next tested on our Phonics! Miss Gaitens and Mrs Stamp gave an incisive overview of how Phonics is taught and tested. Now I know why my daughter touches her chin with different fingers sometimes when she reads. Phonemes, digraph, trigraph and graphemes - I'm not sure school was this tough when I went! A pass in Phonics is usually around 32 out of 40 so home help is vital to build the children's skills.

Next, we were treated to a session with Mrs Hardwicke, our Hearing Impairment teacher. Amazing to see her work and results with children. In fact, having the HI unit at EIS goes a long way to reinforcing inclusion and tolerance amongst all children, plus giving opportunities to learn some signing. We were all left feeling very humbled by the success and impact of Mrs Hardwicke's teaching.

Finally, we were introduced to 'Deeper Learning' by Mrs Gillard and Mrs Wright. Not a part of the national curriculum, but building firm foundations for learning right across the curriculum. Imagine a child has learnt their five-times tables, will they then be able to apply what they have learnt about the patterns involved by calculating 13×5 as $60 + 5$? Or know that if we kept counting in fives would we ever reach 154? if not, then explain why. It's about the application of what they have learned. With a deep understanding of core content, children can use that knowledge to solve problems, think critically, communicate effectively, and be self-reflective about their learning.

During the afternoon, the team sat in the main hall, still on the little chairs, but with beautifully behaved Cygnets filing past from time to time. We had a meaty topic to discuss. We all know that the school is operating at a consistently high level and delivering great results, but what does the future offer? How do we maintain performance when things are changing around us? What approach should we adopt to guide and lead the school to sustain excellence and adapt to our environment?



Strategy is a huge part of the Governing role. It sets the direction and goals; it gets the buy-in of all staff to a common direction; it lets parents understand the aspirations and ethos of the school. Simply put, our execution is excellent but we need a reshaped strategy to keep us there.

We're not ready to share the Strategy yet - we are still mid-process. You can be sure that we want to retain the mass of great things that the school does, but add clarity and focus to what we need to focus on - factors both internal and external to the school which are heading our way.

In advance, we solicited input from all staff and governors, helping us to capture everything which is important to delivering a superior teaching performance and educational environment. We have even begun to test and refine our Ethos; articulate our mission and vision; understand the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that face us; and use the inputs to guide us towards a handful of strategic goals. This work will likely be completed and released by the early part of the Summer term.

So, in wrapping up on Governor Day - thank you to the school for accommodating us, preparing concise presentations, and making excellent strategy inputs. We all feel considerably more knowledgeable, empathetic, and supportive.

“Mock”sted – we asked a former Ofsted Inspector to visit

No matter how good we think that we are, there is nothing better than an independent assessment to focus attention and highlight areas for development.

The Governors were keen to complete such a review of the whole school using a previous Head Teacher and Ofsted Inspector. It also had the benefit of putting the school into a dry run environment for when the real Inspectors descend upon us. So, with delight, we welcomed the arrival of Jill Forbes BA, MA (Ed) to the school during November.

miStAkEs
are proof
that you are
TRYING

Engage with us

We're always keen to hear your thoughts and ideas regarding governance at the school plus feedback on what you would like to hear more about. Drop us an email at:

bhunter@emmbrook-inf.wokingham.sch.uk

Please also keep yourself up to date with what is going on at the school by regularly checking the website at:

<http://emmbrookinfantschool.co.uk>

Like the new climbing frame?

A stunning addition to the school!



Jill took time to review and talk with many of the staff and engage with children to understand and question how things were being done. She soaked up the ethos of the school and settled down to questioning Governors, the Head Teacher and Staff in the style and format of a real Ofsted inspection. She was not here to catch anyone out, nor trip anyone up - but to draw out the excellent work being delivered by the school:

- Our results were well recognised as being above national averages and Jill could see initiatives which had contributed towards achievement and progress.
- Outside in EYFS (Reception), Jill was much impressed with the investments that we've made in developing learning zones.
- Children spoke extremely confidently about their positive experiences in the school and with school trips.
- Even the Governors were complimented on the depth of their involvement with the school and their desire to pursue progress.

Jill was equally diligent in helping us see improvement areas, many of which have already been actioned, including perhaps the most pertinent challenge which is to help the children enthuse and enjoy their reading more. Here, we have already implemented steps in our School Improvement Plan (see website) to purchase more non-fiction for the library, enhanced monitored reading and the addition of guided reading sessions in Reception (FS2) year.

We were thrilled to have not only passed our MockSted, but to receive Jill's recommendation for 'outstanding'. This was an incredibly valuable learning experience for Staff and Governors, which serves to reinforce our commitment to delivering the best possible education and learning environment for all our children.

Next Newsletter

Expect to see it towards the end of the Summer term as we begin to wrap up the year.

Have a lovely Easter break from all your Governors.

Ben, Corrina, Darrell, Darren, Fran,

Jaime, Jenny, John, Kate, Michelle,

Paul, Richard, Sarah and Tony



Emmbrook Infant School



TEAM; Together Everyone Achieves More

Focus on Art

Three lovely pieces, highlighting the talent and skills within the school inspired by self-portrait and still life:



Alex
Evans



Amy
Hall



Ella
Desai

Congratulations to all our budding artists across the school. It is the collages and art exhibitions which add a real sense of life and happiness to the school corridors.