

Spring Term 2018 – LGB Questions

Questions from Paul Cooper

Q. Mathematics Calculation Policy- has this been issued to parents? Is there any face to face support for parents who need help with maths?

A. The maths calculation policy was developed with teachers over a series of staff meetings to ensure consistency in teaching methods across the school. This is still at the stage of being agreed and is being brought to Governors to share. At the moment this has not been shared with parents but once agreed will go on the website for all to see. There is a current expectation that these methods are shared with parents through home learning so if children are expected to do these at home then the method is sent to accompany. This could be through an example at the top of the homework task or a pre teaching video on the homework portal that children and parents are able to access.

Q. Persistent Absentees- Of the 27 children with attendance lower than 90% how many have been referred to Education Welfare?

A. As per our policy all parents of the children on this list have received either letter 1 and 2 depending if the child's attendance has improved or declined each month. There is careful monitoring of this. We have made referrals for 3 children and have worked alongside educational welfare to resolve these issues with children moving to a school closer to home. We continue this work in a supportive and consultative way to engage parents and resolve issues amicably.

Q. Building and Site Premises Safety Inspection- Boiler House/plant rooms/electrical cupboards- gas and electrical safety- The cut off and emergency cut off valves/switches need updating. This issue has been picked up during the quinquennnial inspection. How and when are issues raised and added to this list actioned? If an action on the list becomes more urgent how is the issue escalated?

A. There is a procedure where issues are raised and added to the list of works and these are addressed on a needs basis. The list is regularly reviewed and jobs are given priority status where the jobs become critical these are addressed immediately. Some jobs may be left a little longer if they are not an immediate health and safety issues but as soon as this becomes critical they will be addressed immediately.

The emergency cut off value has been quoted in the boiler replacement and will be done when this is replaced and it is optimistic that it will be this year. The sky lights are more concerning and we are currently talking to the premises central team about the need to replace/repair them. The only other concern is the lack of hot water in the disabled toilet as the boiler needs replacing and this again is on the list of works but is currently not at a critical level.

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Questions from Tamsin Ross

Q. How are the adaptations to home learning at years 3/4 and 5/6 going to be evaluated? Is there any preliminary feedback?

A. The changes to home learning have really only been in effect for a few weeks as we started these in earnest in January this year. As parents with children across the school we have used this as an initial benchmark and have conferenced our own children about the engagement and appropriateness of this. Informally, we have discussed this with parents in meetings or at the end and beginnings of day and initial feedback looks promising although I think we could challenge expectations a little more! Formal feedback from parents will be sought next term through parent questionnaires and parent pupil interviews in July and this will form the basis of our evaluations at the end of the year.

Q. In the SEF, due to funding cuts, the reduction in capacity to utilise small group work and other interventions is referred to. How are staff adapting practice to respond to this challenge?

A. This is a constant challenge and at the moment the large majority of children are supported through quality first teaching and attention to differentiation within a whole class setting. Some year groups are becoming creative with their cohorts and are adapting their teaching groups with some having maths and English groups that see all three classes mixed and teachers narrowing the stretch in their classes and teaching to their strengths. All teachers and teaching assistants use alternative grouping at times to ensure the needs of the children are met in the best possible way and this is a very effective way to ensure good outcome. Children with most complex needs are now taking priority for the invention groups and we are monitoring this carefully.

Of course all teachers would like more support in the classrooms but with the cuts to education continuing we will have to get used to the fact this was an old luxury we can no longer afford to keep.

Q. The Calculation and Marking and Feedback Policies look like substantial and helpful pieces of work. Do you have any initial feedback on how the changes in practice have been received by pupils, parents and staff?

A. These have been put together by staff and are collective projects linked to school improvement. They are the expectation that they are able to hold each other to account and this has been very positively received ensuring consistency across the school. They have only just been introduced and some more work and dialogue is needed to ensure they are understood and appropriately used.

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Q. In the SEND report, it refers to there being 2 days per week to complete SEND work due to other commitments. Does this represent a shortfall on what's required? If so, is there scope to increase this resource, especially in light of the speech and language needs emerging in Reception and the winding down of the S&L unit?

A. With the commitment to raising standards across key stage 2 and especially at the end of year 6, in the current climate of keeping supply and cover cost to a minimal, we took the decision to use SLT in a teaching capacity to support the SATs revision and focus on school improvement in terms of raising standards in year 3/4. We are carefully monitoring the impact of this on our workloads and the work that needs to be completed at a leadership level and at the moment this is negligible and we feel we do have the capacity at the moment to do this. It is a short term commitment and will cease at the end of May. It has also had some benefits with leaders being back in the classrooms being able to drive school improvement by example and with greater speed and impact.

Questions from Louise Gordon

Q. Attendance - Illness has been a major factor in the school attendance figures so far this year. This may put our target at risk for end of year. Are there any repercussions if we miss this figure or is it just a figure which we strive to achieve?

A. We set the school target to be aspirational and improve each year and we will work hard through monitoring and following up any concerns appropriately. If we do not achieve this target, we will be disappointed but will aim to meet it the following year.

The national attendance target is 96.2% and if we fall below that this will trigger an audit from Educational Welfare to check our current practice and offer any recommendations. We know our practice is robust. We are on track to meet the national expectation.

Q. Resources and staffing have and are at times being stretched throughout the school. Is there any light at the end of the tunnel, with regards to budget to improve this in the next school year? Is there any set budget reporting in place yet?

A. We have an operational budget this year and recent review meetings with the central finance team shows that this is manageable and currently in a health position. We do have to work within this budget however although any additional money the school raises falls outside of this. It is anticipated that if we finish this year in a healthy financial position this will alleviate some pressure in the next financial year.

Both myself and Jo Slate have had training on the financial package this year and regular meetings with the finance team. These have been invaluable in understanding how the package works and how to access the funding correctly. There is now an order window in place and there are also controls to stop overspend. Although we are still finding our way with this we have greater confidence and trust in the systems and monitoring in place.

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Q. Has the appointment of a Deputy Head had a positive impact on the day to day running of the school? Does the HT feel this has helped and supported her in maintaining some work/life balance?

A. Having a deputy head in place this year has meant that school leadership has been able to operate at full capacity and has given us all the time, space and energy to challenge expectations across the school, support the mentoring of staff at all levels and drive school improvement from the ground up. We have been able to work in classes this year alongside teachers and this gives us a better appreciation of the challenges and how to overcome these in a way that is positive for all and not from a judgement perspective.

Robinne has very quickly grown into the role taking the additional responsibility in her stride and has developed personally and professionally in a very short space of time. This is continuing with coaching support from myself and another Ventrus leader and is now increasing her knowledge into the finer workings of a school.

Workload and capacity will always be an issue in education but I think the school addresses this very well and leaders lead by example having very realistic expectations for all. This is supported by the recent engagement survey work.

Q. The netting and monkey bars have now been removed from the Adventure Trail and the flooring is still in need of repair. Is there any further update on this?

A. The warranty on the equipment is no longer valid so repairs will be considerably costly for this piece of equipment. It is not something that we can currently commit to and it is on the list of repair works. We have been talking to the chair of Friends of OV about supporting some of this work in the future and they are considering this within the context of other projects they also have in mind.

Questions from Sam Clarke

Q. Reduced TA's - This features strongly throughout your report. How much of an impact is this having on the day-to-day school activities? The anticipated strain is apparent from your comments, but is there hope that this will improve in the future?

A. With all the changes to funding in education, cuts to SEND funding and the increases in pensions and redundancy costs etc it is likely that we will have to plan for less TAs in the future. All schools are in similar positions and this is not likely to improve. We have to focus our attentions on getting best practice in the classrooms and look at using our TA support creatively and effectively.

The Directors of School improvement are currently undertaking a piece of work across all Ventrus schools to establish a core offer of TA support that school should have access to and then build on this with additionally funded support through SEND and PP provision. This is expected to happen over the next few weeks in time for the budget setting meeting.

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Q. Given the size of the current reception cohort, is there a plan and resources in place for moving into yr1 in September? I'm aware that this was previously an action point following the same situation with the current yr2 cohort. Similarly, is there a plan for the current yr2 cohort moving upstairs to yr3? As we all know, space and staff are limited, and as detailed in your report, phonics is proving tricky for the current set-up of mixed yr1&2. Are we in a position to limit this going forward?

A. We had planned for KS1 to be supported by a school direct student this year to support the teaching of phonics in smaller groups and were disappointed that their placement dates had been set in the spring term rather than the autumn term. When our student returns in the middle of March we are anticipating her support the teachers in delivering an effective phonics programme to split year groups again.

We are currently trying to assess the position in terms of numbers for next year and anticipating what this might be. On March 1st we have our Director of School Improvement visit and both Robinne and I will be discussing pupil numbers and looking at the possible spaces we could use if we have capacity for additional staffing. This meeting is closely followed by the budget setting meeting on March 21st where we will be able to assess if there is any funding for additional staffing and where this will be best used. We are committed to trying to find the best possible structure without impacting further on depleting finances.