

Class Communicator Minutes 19.7.10

Before the agenda was addressed, the chair of Governors, Mr Dave Kidd asked to be able to speak to the Class Communicators.

He discussed how concerned he had become over the year about the way that Class Communicators had operated this year. He gave a brief outline of the history of how and why the Class Communicator meetings started under his direction - there had been no request to have anything of this nature from parents - and how it served a very useful purpose. However recent events had caused him some concern. His unease was intensified by item 1 on the current agenda (as emailed) and it greatly upset him. He feels that a small group within the Class Communicators have set a different tone to the meetings this last year. They have been a little confrontational and they have taken on a remit that is not theirs. They seem to feel that it is their right to tell the Governors what to do and how to run the school. Mr Kidd said that this is **not** the role of a class communicator; the Governors run the school and the Senior Leadership Team implement their wishes. In addition, the School Improvement Partner and the School Improvement Adviser with the Local Authority, play strong roles in supporting and developing leadership in the school.

Class Communicators exists by invite, not by right. Members may ask questions for clarification and bring the views of parents in general but not in a confrontational way. It is not about the views of members of the group, unless those views are reflected by a reasonable number of others (e.g. 1-6 is not enough – those people should seek clarification on an individual basis – even 7-20 may not be enough if it is a whole school issue, as this is still a very small minority of parents at school, though it would be sufficient if it were about a particular class or year group).

At this point a number of class communicators also added their disquiet about the way recent meetings have run and one said that she nearly didn't come because of the negative tone of the agenda. She also knew of others who had not attended because of the nature of the agenda and especially the first item.

Mr Kidd then raised the fact that the recent questionnaire returns in no way support the wording ('many parents') of Agenda item 1. Only 4% of the returns (9 out of 194) say that they disagree that Abbey Lane is well led and managed (6 from Reception parents). The Class Communicator group is here because he wanted to hear the 'parent voice', not one or two people but the general concerns of the community.

Due to the problems this year he proposed to change to using a proforma for next year. If Class communicators bring a 'grumble' then they have to include a 'praise'. The whole of the staff both teaching and non-teaching were feeling demoralised by the negativity of a very small minority of parents. At this point other class communicators present also said how they had disliked attending meetings this year because they felt that they were not able to input their say past a few very vocal members of the group. They felt that the setting of the agenda had been misused and there was full agreement from all the class communicators present to stop the emails across the group for the purposes of setting the agenda.

Mr Kidd then said that he is keen to work with parents to help and support their children. He had been happy with the previous years' meetings which had been profitable for both school, children and parents. This was because parents discussed general concerns rather than the personal concerns of a minority of people. None of the class communicators present said that they had inputted to the newest agenda and indeed hadn't known about the content until it was emailed to them. One

member said how upset she'd been to receive it and felt that the negativity had caused her to question whether she wanted to continue in the group. It was proposed and agreed that from now on the agenda would be written by 1 member of the Class Communicators and 1 member of the SLT (Mrs Stafford). Mrs Putland was nominated for the class communicators and unanimously supported to work with SLT to agree agendas in future, using the praise and grumble format.

Concern was raised by a CC that a minority of parents were deliberately stirring and was concerned about the impact this was having on demotivating staff in the school which ultimately would have a knock on effect on their children. Another CC said that the recent 'stability and good feeling' in the staff after a few years of turmoil (5 headteachers in 5 years) was very welcoming and positive for the school and much appreciated by herself. Others CC's present agreed. Mr Kidd said he would like some members of the CC to reconsider their position and would write about this. If parents have specific complaints they should refer to the complaints procedure.

All class communicators present agreed that item 1 was not appropriate for discussion at class communicators.

Mr Kidd then reported that officers from the LA who have both visited the school on a regular basis this year had reported back to Governors last week that the school has continued to improve this year. Even though the new Ofsted Criteria had been used which has made it harder for schools to achieve the grade given at the last inspection, Abbey Lane is still considered to be a Grade 2 (Good) school with Grade 1 (outstanding) features - paradoxically, this is actually an improvement. The LA acknowledges that the current leadership team had moved the school on and had done well this year. He reported that information such as this is not always communicated to parents officially by the school (as it may seem egotistical) but the parent reps of the Governing body could pass this information on.

Item 2 - School dinners

The menu provided by Chartwells is a balanced menu. Children are given the choice from the menu. Unfortunately they may not choose a balanced meal but only take the parts of it that they like. If parents are concerned then it is recommended that they provide their child with a packed lunch. Alternatives to Chartwells are simply not available. Abbey Lane looked into setting up its own meals service 5 years ago – one primary can't afford it alone and no other local schools would join Abbey Lane to go independent. The LA decides who gets the contract. Mr Robinson said that the school had acquired Healthy School status and that a 'Lets Get Healthy' club and a cookery course club for KS2 will be running next academic year.

Item 3 – Extension

David Metcalf and Brian Cave are in charge of this at the LA. Their contact details are on the letters that have gone home to parents. Mr Kidd repeated that school had only had input on the given floor plan, not on any extra floor space. There will be meetings in the new school year to discuss this with parents. Mrs Fletcher suggested that parents would be able to object once the planning application number was known. She guided parents to the place on the council website where it would be held. It was likely to be in the holidays. Mrs Fletcher offered to draft a letter to give to parents signposting them to the relevant area and giving guidance on how to submit objections. Mrs Stafford offered to send this information out to parents via a letter if Mrs Fletcher would draft it out. Mr Kidd reiterated that although the initial consultation with school had been badly handled by the capacity and planning department who did not seek the views of the school first, through the intervention of

the Governing Body the Inclusion and Learning Service (previously Advisory Service) had become involved and improvements to the plan were achieved.

Class Communicators asked if there would be any green space available, what kind of roof would be on the build and if it was going to be a 'green' building. Mr Robinson suggested that we could ask for Astro turf but the price would probably be too much.

Item 4- Religious Education

No one present was able to expand on this item as they were unsure of its background. A class communicator said it was another example of the agenda being drawn up by a minority number of people and it was not a general concern.

Mrs Stafford reminded Class communicators that parents have the right to withdraw their child from particular RE lessons if they felt strongly enough.

Item 5 – Art exhibition.

Again no one was able to expand on this item. One class communicator complained about its presence on the agenda as school does a great number of extra things and they wouldn't be able to cover the entire curriculum if they took part in everything. All others agreed.

Item 6 - Website

Mrs Stafford reminded the class communicators that there had been several issues manning the office this year. People had been off on long term absences either with sickness or secondment over the year, one member had handed her notice in after returning from maternity leave which had meant that 3 new people had needed to be trained up at various times over the year. This had been a huge impact on the ability of Mrs Overton to carry out her normal duties, one of which is adding to the website. Mrs Stafford apologised for the inconvenience and explained that from September there would be extra staff in the office (Mrs Gregg) which would enable Mrs Overton to carry out her normal duties. Also she had been offered help with the website from one of the people who originally set it up whose child starts in Reception next academic year.

Item 7 Class communicator's minutes

The minutes of the Class communicators would from next year go on the website. Due to green issues paper copies would only be issued to parents who request them.

Item 8 – Questionnaire

The results of the questionnaire were handed around to class communicators. The results were extremely positive. The vast majority of parents had ticked the agree strongly or agree to some extent on all the questions. Some parents had complained that the questionnaire was too short however Mrs Stafford pointed out it was the questionnaire devised by Ofsted so any complaints could be directed to them, not to the school. Mr Kidd pointed out that the Ofsted questionnaire is the only means of gaining feedback from parents in most schools. When he had told other Heads and Chairs about Class Communicators, many had said "You're opening up a can of worms" but he had always felt, until recently, that Abbey Lane parents would not abuse this opportunity. The class communicators present said that they were pleased with the results, but not surprised. The area with the fewest ticks in these two columns was the one about variety of trips and class communicators said that this was perhaps because several year groups go to Weston Park. Mrs Stafford said that staff were going to get together at the beginning of next year with their diaries to say where and when they were going on trips to alleviate this problem.

Meeting finished at 3.10pm. Next meeting TBA with new class communicators.