

Dear Parents

It is hard to believe another school year has almost finished and we would like to update you about what the governing body has been involved with over the past months. There are three core functions and an extensive list of statutory duties that all Governing Bodies must fulfil and there are several other expectations that effective governing bodies comply with. Below we give some examples of how we have accomplished these duties and requirements:

a) ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction;

We have considered the school vision and agreed to take some more time to review this with other stakeholders over the next few months. We want to ensure that the caring and nurturing 'spirit' of Priory and the high expectations we have are clearly and relevantly expressed.

Our school development plan outlines the strategic direction for the school and we have formulated this from the OFSTED requirement to improve and the desire we have to see our children build strong foundations academically, socially, and in their characters, for success throughout life.

Over recent years we have established strong working relationships with our local schools and we work collaboratively with them for professional development of staff and to advance school improvement. We have made an agreement with them so that we can all be mutually supported, enjoy economies of scales and share good practice.

All schools have the opportunity to become academies, which gives a school more autonomy but also much more onerous responsibility to provide all the services and resources it needs for itself.

We have carefully researched the academy options open to us but cannot see enough advantage to become an academy at this time. It is something we will keep under review as the political scene changes and more advantages may become apparent.

b) holding the Head Teacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils;

Within the school development plan we have agreed the strategic priorities, aims and objectives for the school and put in place plans and targets to achieve them. Governors regularly monitor the progress towards these targets, with the new assessment measures, gathering first hand evidence through visits, reports, meetings, data analysis and staff appraisal. We are delighted that so much progress has been evident this year, but we have questioned and challenged the school when progress seems to have stalled and targets have been missed. We have tried to ensure that remedies have been actioned and intervention has been effective so that our school provides a caring and stimulating learning environment that enables children to achieve their best. We have been delighted that all staff have been committed to the success of the school and they have undertaken training, striven to embed good practice and supported each other in this pursuit. Their commitment has been outstanding.

c) overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure the money is spent well;

Despite the increasing pressure on budgets we have managed our finance and spending in line with policies and procedures, funding initiatives such as the provision of ipads, projects such as the re-arrangement of the classrooms, staff room and IT suite and supporting rich learning experiences inside and outside of the classroom, for example residential experiences and sporting activities for all year groups. We have also planned for the future, made staffing appointments and anticipated staffing needs as the number on roll increases but the funding for it from Government follows retrospectively. We continue to plan expenditure to keep the school safe and well resourced, and to meet the continuing professional development needs of staff to ensure teaching and leadership is of a sustainably high standard.

Meaningful and effective engagement with parents is important, but not always easy to accomplish. A couple of governors always try to attend parents evenings so that they are available for parents to talk to - and they take the opportunity to look at pupils work aswell. They are often at other school events too. The open minutes from our meetings are available at school for anyone to read. We also take note of completed questionnaires. The large number of parents' responses returned recently provided good information about the majority view of the school experience. This year there are positive responses in many areas and we are particularly pleased to see that more parents feel better informed about the governors role and identity.

OFSTED provide a similar questionnaire (only 12 questions) on the Parent View website. Results from this are available for anyone to look at on the wwweb, to give them an insight about a school but OFSTED also use it before an inspection. We encourage you to complete it if you have a positive view of our school. It can be found at - <https://parentview.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

If you have any concerns about what happens in school please talk to/contact the school staff about it promptly, they will do their best to give an explanation or find a remedy.

In response to Government regulations we need to reconsider the size and make up of our governing body by September 2015. Currently the make-up reflects a variety of representative stakeholders but the new make-up will be 'skills-based'. This change **will highlight the direct impact that the constitution and membership have on the governing's body ability to provide effective governance and contribute to the success of the school. Effective governing bodies seek to have within their membership as a whole expertise and experience in analysing performance data, in budgeting and driving financial efficiency, and in performance management and employment issues, including grievances. They also need skills to work constructively in committees, chair meetings and to lead the governing body. All governors need to work in the best interests of the pupils with a strong commitment to the role and to improving outcomes for children, the inquisitiveness to question and analyse, and the willingness to learn. They need good interpersonal skills, appropriate levels of literacy in English and sufficient numeracy skills to understand basic data.*

Preliminary analysis of the skills , qualities, knowledge and experience available on our governing body shows that we have overall strengths in the majority of these areas. Members have brought relevant knowledge, transferable skills and life experience to the role and have added to those with specific training. It is a wide ranging, frequently changing and responsible role and developing understanding of the actual role often happens 'on the job'. As Governors we have undertaken an external review and a self-audit to identify our areas of strong and weakest performance and put in place training, policies and actions to improve. A recent assessment by the Education Advisor indicated that the Governing Body was operating effectively.

If you would like to attend one of our governing body meetings as an observer, to see one element of the role in action, please get in touch so that we can make arrangements for that.

Our next full governing body meeting will be held on Tuesday 23 June 2015 at 6.00pm.

Thank you for your ongoing support, it is so important to a successful school.

Anne Baldry
Chairman of the Governing Body

**Taken from the Department for Education's statutory guidance on the constitution of governing bodies of maintained schools .*