



Shepherds Down Governors Update

Hello and welcome to our 2nd School Governor Newsletter. We have important subjects we want to make you aware of;

- School **budgets**
- The new **GDPR regulation** coming into effect across all organisations
- Our approach to **school visits as a governing body**

School Budgets

As the governing body we ensure that we work together with the school to sign off the final budget for the coming year. During May the school budget has been going through a number of reviewed ready to be finalised and then approved by the governing body. The funding for our schools' budget is determined by the Department for Education (DfE) and our Local Authority using a nationally agreed rate. As part of our Governing Body we have a specific Finance Committee in place to review, monitor and challenge the financial performance of the school and determine how the money is spent.

As you know, funding for schools over recent years has become much tighter and so the challenge we face to ensure that we are using our funding in the right places has also become tougher. We have however agreed on a budget that will allow us to ensure that we can meet the needs of the children in our school, we do however still need as much support as we can from parents to help us to still deliver the nice to have activities that our children enjoy so much!

General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is coming into effect in May 2018. Schools handle a large amount of personal data. This includes information on pupils, such as medical information, images and much more. Schools will also hold data on staff, governors, volunteers and job applicants.

Schools will also handle what the GDPR refers to as special category data, which is subject to tighter controls. This could be details on race, ethnic origin, biometric data or trade union membership.

Peter, our co-opted governor tells us about the importance of Governor school visits

Most Governors are not involved professionally in education, and come from a working background in a variety of other industries and professions. The exceptions are of course the staff governors who are in school all the time! But for those of us Governors who work elsewhere, it is important for us to come into school when we can to gain as much knowledge as possible about school life, and also to see for ourselves the implementation of the approved School Improvement Plan ("SIP").

Although some of us do manage to visit for other purposes (as parents, or classroom volunteers for example), we have a formalised system for "Governor Visits" to ensure that between us we gain as good an insight into the overall running of the school as we can.

It's important that we are clear about the purpose of these visits, and in part that involves being clear on what the visits are **not**! The visits are definitely **not** an "inspection", and do not involve judgments on teaching, for the very reason stated at the beginning of this note – we are not on the whole educationalists. The aim is very much more to see the SIP in practice and to learn more ourselves about various facets of school life. The visiting Governors report back to the Full Governing Body after each visit.

The Spring Term's formal visit was conducted by two governors, and focussed on seeing evidence of support given to children's communication in class – this being an objective in the SIP. It involved 3 hours, spent mainly in numerous classrooms witnessing first hand a wide variety of communication strategies, techniques and resources being used by staff and children, both in learning time and at break/snack time. The visit was immensely encouraging and very informative.

It was useful amongst other things to learn what resources work best and which have less use. This alone can influence decisions on allocating resources. It's no secret that schools across the country are being squeezed on budgets, and this is felt particularly acutely in the special schools sector where the staffing levels per pupil are necessarily considerably higher than in mainstream schools, so anything we can learn about where money is best applied is really helpful.

This Summer term's visit is going to be done by another two governors, and will focus on pupil assessment schemes, and in particular the roll out of the new "I can" statements across the school.

If anyone wants to learn more about the visits programme then they should feel free to contact me in my capacity as governor responsible for organising the visits. Please pass your enquiry through Trudy at the School office.

What is personal data?

This data is already governed by existing DPA regulations, which ensure personal data is handled lawfully. However, the new GDPR has gone further and requires organisations to document how and why they process all personal data, and gives enhanced rights to the individual.

What the GDPR has done is taken the previous regime, built upon it and modernised it. In terms of schools, and the education sector in general, there's going to be much more of a focus on data protection and it's going to have to be much more at the forefront of peoples' minds.