

Minchinhampton Primary Academy

Newsletter No 6 2016/17

Dear Parents/ Carers

We have been evaluating our emerging 'relationships' policy. As part of this, we have held class meetings to get the pupils' views on the changes and on what they think works. We asked the pupils to vote with their feet around the question, 'What do you think helps a person to improve their behaviour towards other people?' These are only approximations and take no account of how the question was asked or at what point in a discussion it was asked. It is, of course, also only one question but the valuable discussions that ensued naturally became much broader than the initial question. These were the outcomes:-

65% of pupils said they felt giving people responsibility for other people in some way would help them learn to be more responsible.

10% of pupils said they felt praising people when they get it right could help them.

5% of pupils felt punishing them when they are not nice would make the difference.

20% of pupils felt helping them to understand how their behaviour affects another person would work.

Of course in reality, while we are looking for a consistent approach, we don't want a formula and all of the above will play their part at some point with so many different pupils finding themselves in so many different circumstances at so many different stages of their learning and lives.

Here are some of the children's thoughts coming out of the discussions. I have tried to offer you a balance of comments but also in line with the percentages above:-

'Responsibility is important because it helps you understand how others might feel.'

'Responsibility means you are doing something to help you learn.'

'The problem with responsibility is that people might find it too fun, while punishment is not.'

'Doing jobs can mean 'paying back' time but they also help you to think.'

'If you give them a job where they have to be nice, they have to think about how to do it.'

'What about mixing punishment and responsibility- a small punishment followed by giving them responsibility gives them a chance to learn.'

'We need other people to understand how we feel.'

'Helping people to understand helps them think first.'

'Time to talk is important as is thinking about what you say before you say it.'

'The best thing to do is make friends with them and be kind to them.'

'If you know how people feel when you hurt them, then you wouldn't do it.'

'We need to ask people to think about what they have done.'

'We need to explain to them that their behaviour is not helping them make friends.'

'Praise can be unfair and you might not believe the praise'

'Praise can lead to smugness and people being too full of themselves.'

'If you praise them, they will feel good and want to be good all the time.'

'Praise might make you feel good but people don't learn from praise'

'If you do something wrong and get punished, you'll think twice before doing it again.'

While the children's responses have been heartening for their levels of compassion and often a great deal more astute than we adults might give them credit for, it is also possible that they are trying to sing to our tune. We are of course therefore constantly reviewing the impact of this policy as adults.

One informal observation from my perspective is that, in the absence of a more formal reward and punishment structure, we are having to think sideways; look more deeply at a pupil's individual needs and find an approach that gets traction with them. I'm not suggesting we haven't always done this but there has been a noticeable and sizeable increase in both the dialogue and range of ideas being employed to help children. When I asked a class to sum up what they thought the relationships policy was all about, they said, 'learning.' Surely that has to be right and for staff this naturally involves more thinking.

Staff have said that they have noticed an increase in the confidence of pupils generally. The children are becoming more articulate when talking about their learning and are, I believe, also less likely to compare themselves with others in an unfavourable way. We are finding conversations with children about their learning have become 'broader,' as in less preoccupied with English and maths and more with the whole child.

The jury is still out. While the place feels warmer and more child-centred, we have to be certain that the 'control' side to a behaviour policy is fully heeded. There is no point in children, on the one hand feeling more autonomous, and on the other less secure because boundaries are not as tightly drawn. We have to get the balance just right for them.

One interesting development we are considering at the moment is whether we adopt a 'thinking mantra,' not in place of rules, but as a more helpful preoccupation. The first premise behind this is that life is all about decisions-- often unconscious yes, but happening all the same and we all go through the same basic process each time. The second premise is that in school we have need for simplicity and consistency and something that will aid thinking and decision making. The rules themselves can end up being inconsistently applied because there are endless possible variables – incorporating different individuals in different circumstances at different times in different emotional states. Individuals need to use their judgement each time. The 'thinking mantra' could be something like this:

Stop--or ask the other person to stop

Think-- What are you doing? What is the impact on others?

Choose-- - What are my choices? What is the best course of action for me and those around me?

From the start this has been about looking carefully at what we do (in particular the systematic aspects of school life which can be there more for the adults than the children); looking at making subtle shifts in practice to achieve better outcomes for the children and about applying principles as opposed to a formula. Thus far the majority of the perceived outcomes are positive and we seem to be easing the ethos of the school generally in an even more positive direction.

We will be holding another parent forum early next term to give us a chance to

feedback in more detail as well as discuss other initiatives and changes in school.

Information

Clubs: Spring 2017

We run a lot of clubs at Minchinhampton: they are an important part of our offer. I cannot 'expect' staff to do them – they are run over and above anything listed on their working conditions and/or job descriptions. However run them we do because we all want to provide many and various opportunities in school for children to develop interests and hobbies. Many schools run clubs- few run as many as we do. However there is always a flip side to this—and my biggest concern is the weight of admin they can bring to the office staff. This is why we have tried to simplify the process by which we inform you. I understand a new process takes a little time to settle in but have taken note of a couple of concerns that came to us at the outset of this term. As a result we will be putting club lists up on the windows of the Entrance Area on the first Thursday of term as well as texting you if your child has not got into a club. It would help also if you kept a note of the clubs your child had applied for— this is easily forgotten over a holiday period.

Please try to contact Kerrie Bennett on k.bennett@minchscool.net ahead of time (this term preferably) if you have any questions or needs concerning the club your child would like to attend.

Please contact Mr Moss or Miss Tonner ahead of time (this term) if you any queries/ concerns about the process of allocating pupils to clubs or the running of the clubs. Please pop in or send an email to admin@minchscool.net.

Information from clubs sheet:

Applying for clubs: All clubs will need to **applied for/ re-applied** for on a termly basis. The club list will be issued at the beginning of the last week of term. If your child wishes to take part in any clubs please complete a club request form (there is one on the back of this letter or, if you need more, they can be picked up from the school office). Please complete one form **per** activity, **per** child. Forms should be handed in by the **Wednesday 14th December**. External Clubs run by external providers, such as Kick Off, will have a separate letter and tear off permission slip and they must be paid for **prior** to your child starting, otherwise your child will not be insured and will not be able to participate.

School-run clubs run by the school should be applied for using the form overleaf.

Finding out if they have a place: We will inform you by text by the close of day on the first **Thursday** of next term if your child has **NOT** got a place in a club. Club lists will also be put up in the Entrance Area on this day. Please try to avoid contacting the office before this time.

When they run: All clubs will run for a whole Autumn, Spring or Summer term. They will start in the second week back and continue through to the final week (except for the summer term when there will be no club in the final week.) All clubs run from 3.15 – 4.15 (unless otherwise stated). When a club is **cancelled**, we will inform you before the start of the school day on bulletin boards and/or by text. If it is cancelled later than this, we will always 'look after' the children until 4.15 wherever necessary

Comedy Night

Two thirds of the tickets available for the 2017 Comedy Night (Friday 17th March) have already been reserved. Please email comedy2017@hotmail.com to reserve yours.

Learning News

Visit by governors to look at school achievement data

On the 15th November a team of five governors visited the Academy for two hours to evaluate the evidence of how pupils are learning and the extent to which they are meeting national age-related expectations, as well as the extent to which all children are deepening their learning relative to where they were last year. The visit comprised a one-hour meeting with the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) to discuss the latest data made available by the Government and gathered by the teachers about the children's learning. This discussion focused on data in Reading, Writing and Maths for all children and for children with any kind of disadvantage, such as Special Educational Needs or Disability (SEND), Pupil Premium (PP), English as an Additional Language (EAL). Governors have a responsibility to question the Academy on how they use all funding that comes to the school, but also any additional funding for EAL, PP and SEND to ensure the children benefit – in particular by helping them 'close the gap' in learning with their peers. Mr Moss then took governors on a Learning Walk, visiting 7 of the classes across the school. We visited classes learning Maths, English and discussing language and writing structure in a shared writing of the class chapter for the whole-school book writing project.

We are delighted to say this was a very enjoyable and informative visit with some inspiring discussion about achievements of the children, the high levels of attainment of national age-related expectations and the way innovative strategies have been deployed across the school. Governors were impressed by how well the teachers worked as a team and demonstrated a strong understanding of their children, both individually and as a school community. It became evident how teachers are using the new Behaviour Policy to develop the children's motivation and independence of learning – important foundations for their learning for life, not just at Minchinhampton. Other examples we heard about include the drive to increase enjoyment of reading, the Growth Mindset approach and the book writing project. All these featured in the discussion about the children's learning. During the Learning Walk we heard from several of the children who confidently and clearly welcomed us to their class and explained what they were doing and how they were learning.

