9th March 2018

Dear Parents/Carers

Some of you will already be aware of the relationship committee that is taking forward a piece of work to set the way all parties around the school communicate. Since taking up my role as chair of Governors I have seen a considerable amount of communication around the school. The vast majority of communication constantly inspires me and makes me glad that we have such a proactive student, teaching and parent body that pull in a common direction towards better outcomes for the children in our collective care. However, the single thing that I have found worrying is the manner in which some parents, very few to be honest (but enough), continue to feel it is appropriate to communicate with the teaching staff within the school.

Having seen some of this communication I have thought long and hard about the root cause of the attitude that comes across in it. I am sure that the reasons for the tone taken by some parents will be many and various and deep seated in individuals experience and beliefs. However, what is striking in some of it is an underlying theme that shows a complete lack of respect for the teaching staff as professionals. I will declare my colours here, as someone married to a teacher I have had a reasonable exposure to the profession over the years, I therefore know that it is still possible to meet people that think because you are a primary school teacher you play the guitar and sing ‘Kumbaya’ all day before having half the year off. It is unfortunate that this somewhat Dickensian attitude is still around and seemingly can manifest itself in a belief, in a few people, that some sort of professional hierarchy exists between themselves and the school staff, that in turn makes it acceptable to communicate ‘down’ to the staff.

What we actually have the great privilege of having at Minchinhampton Academy is one of the most cohesive, inspiring and hardworking teams of professionals I think I have ever seen. The constant striving to be better, to embrace the latest research in an effort to improve, while at the same time caring and nurturing the whole school community is deeply impressive to witness at close hand. Most importantly, when one of our children needs support, potentially in a way so subtle that many might struggle to spot it, the professional, highly trained and deeply experienced staff are there for them. Supporting the children using techniques grown from an extensive programme of continuous professional development that energizes the staff to constantly challenge themselves to the benefit of our children.

It is therefore a great shame that a few parents fail to recognise this and seem to see teachers and the wider staff as some sort of lesser profession; I would re-iterate that the behaviour to which I am referring is thankfully restricted to very few. I suspect the vast majority of Minchinhampton Academy parents will have not allowed the general devaluing of professions such as teaching in wider society to have influenced their behaviour towards the exceptional set of professionals we are lucky enough to have in our school. I would commend the work on relationships and communication, being led by Margaret Sheather, to you all. This work will be considerably enhanced if approached from a start point that the staff of the school deserve recognition of their position as highly skilled professionals. In line with that status, as professionals, they will always be happy to engage constructively with anyone who shares the aim of talking to improve outcomes for all our children.

Yours,

Mark Catt

Mark Catt

Chair of Governors

Minchinhampton Primary Academy