

MINCHINHAMPTON PRIMARY ACADEMY
Governor Report 2022-23

Agreed visit details

Governor(s)	Activity
Katherine Meredith (Safeguarding link)	Governor attendance at parent forum 22/03/2023

Note of visit.

A group of parents had raised concerns with the school the previous week around both the new lunchtime menu and some of the messages their children were getting from some staff members around being told they had to eat/ try everything on their plates.

The school responded quickly by announcing a parent forum, to which all parents were invited to discuss this specific issue.

11 parents, including the governor, attended the forum and there was an additional member of staff present taking minutes who is also a parent of children at the school.

The parents were of children in Reception and Years 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Summary of the discussion at the parent forum:

NM outlined his understanding of the situation – some children are struggling with the new menu and some parents have therefore been withdrawing children from having school dinners. To have an uptake in school meals is a measure of success for school and also what parents want so we share the same aim. NM explained he has been directing staff to encourage children to try food due to food waste.

Children have been presented with the challenge of a new menu and then being asked to eat more of things they are unsure about.

NM explained he felt two key things were needed to help address this:

- 1)
 - Educating and helping the children needed to happen earlier – the school will commit to putting on future tasting sessions for children and parents
 - Tasting session to take place 27/03/23 for parents after school – this will be the first but not the only opportunity
- 2)
 - More active surveying and responses to the surveys, The Great Plate need to be more responsive to what the children are saying

One parent felt they actively want their children to eat meat and there aren't enough meat options.

A parent felt they themselves wouldn't want to eat the menu some days as the options are too obscure.

One parent raised that we went from a 3 week menu rotation with 3 options each day to a 2 week rotation with 2 options a day, which reduced children's choices significantly.

NM stated that school/ The Great Plate need to get the timings of surveys right and go through them together. There is also a need to get more parents engaging with the surveys. NM acknowledged that sometimes both options on the menu are a challenge for the children and that portion sizes have sometimes been too large for the age of the child.

Some parents were concerned about children developing negative relationships with food as a result of being asked to eat everything. NM explained that he gently encouraged children to try each bit of food; there is the issue that children want to get out and play so sometimes hurry and don't eat much. He might also ask them to finish their last bit of food if they haven't left much.

A parent suggested that children be given smaller portions and go back for more if they were still hungry. Several parents thought this was sensible.

A parent asked could children be given healthy, but safe, familiar food and questioned the timing of the new menu at a time when children are already anxious. They felt that we don't need to be too sophisticated with a menu for children.

NM stated that any negative impact on wellbeing is regrettable. This was the time that the school had the opportunity to start a new contract with a new catering company, the quality of food is the best it has been and the level of ambition in the menu is worthy but has proved to be too much too soon for the children.

A parent returned to the question of messaging from adults and Year 6 children and expressed concern about children's own appetite cues being overridden if they are asked to eat everything, as well as the nature and tone of the comments from MDSAs. Some other parents agreed that their children had been met with some more punitive responses/ language when they didn't want to eat everything on their plates. NM said he was not aware of Y6 pupils monitoring children's eating but some parents' children had raised this at home. NM agreed certainly for now staff can pause asking children to finish food.

One parent raised that their child with allergies had the same dessert every day for a term.

One parent said other parents had asked them to represent their voices at the meeting and pointed out that some parents find it hard to 'complain' because they are nervous to approach school.

NM stated that he would always listen to parents and that one well-measured opinion is enough for him to consider things.

A parent asked if school could capture pupil voice in school about their favourite foods – this was met with lots of support from other parents at the forum. NM said this could definitely be explored.

NM met with the head cook recently and will do so again. Tasting opportunities will be important and are the next step.

Implications for governing body

The governing body might want to explore with the school leadership team whether there is any support they can offer around capturing a greater proportion of pupil and parent voice going forward.

