

MINUTES - PARENT VOICE & ELT MEETING

6.30PM WEDNESDAY 22 FEBRUARY 2023 BALLROOM

ATTENDEES

Rick Clarke – Head

Becks Scullion – Deputy Head

Laura Griffiths – Deputy Head (Academic)

Andy Spink – Assistant Head (Student Development)

Giles Rudd – Assistant Head (Learning)

Nick Oram-Tooley – Head of the Junior School

Mark London – Director of Marketing & Admissions

Bill Bird – Chair of Governors

Vicki Nixon Chair, **Emma Tweed** Vice Chair, **Jo Bushill** Secretary, **Claire Karitzis** Rep Y1, **Szilvia Varnai** Rep Y2, **Natasha Hill** Rep Y3, **Neena Maidlow** Rep Y4, **Helen Jones** Rep Y5, **Ross Atkin** Rep Y6, **Miro Walker** Rep Y6, **Helen Davison** Rep Y8, **Fiona Turner** Rep Y9, **Carina Hamilton** Rep Y11, **Emma Webb** Rep Sixth Form

Apologies: **Manga Tharma** Rep EY, **Maki Fox** Rep Y7, **Sandra Laird** Re Y10, **Laura De Mierre** Rep Y11, **Malika Power** Assistant Head (Teaching)

INTRODUCTION AND ADMINISTRATION

- New PV members were welcomed and formally voted in:
 - Szilvia Varnai as Rep for Y2
 - Carina Hamilton and Laura De Mierre as joint Reps for Y11
 - Ross Atkin and Miro Walker as joint Reps for Y6
 - Jo Bushill as Secretary.
- Changes to PV's constitution were noted and approved:
 - an amended constitution had been distributed to all Reps at the last PV Only Meeting and the changes were all agreed unanimously, including:
 - reducing a Rep's term from 3 to 2 years
 - removing the cap of 18 Reps to allow more flexibility
 - increasing the number of parent officers from 3 to 4
 - making it possible to appoint Reps and officers at any PV/ELT meeting
 - some language changes to make the constitution easier to read.

- it was also proposed and agreed by majority vote at the last PV Only Meeting that we change the rules on who can stand as a PV officer to include any current Reps and also any Reps whose term had ended in the current academic year.

MATTERS ARISING/OPEN ISSUE UPDATES

COMMUNICATIONS

My School Portal Roll Out

Rick explained that the school has been looking at a program called My School Portal (MSP) for some time and they feel it will improve communications. MSP will create a dashboard for each parent that integrates all school platforms (including SOCS and peri music lesson timetables) and shows them all in one place. It will also reduce the number of emails parents receive.

The school are going to ask a group of parents to trial MSP during the summer term. If this trial is successful, MSP will be launched throughout the school in September.

The school's staff will be trained by MSP. This has worked well in other schools. The staff will then work collectively on the roll out and implementation of the MSP program.

Wider Communications Issues

Rick is aware that MSP will not fix all of the school's Communications issues but has other ideas for improvements, including:

- ongoing work with the Extended Leadership Team and wider Senior Management Team
- working with a communications expert who is also a parent and has experienced the school's communications
- sending all communications out on just one day of the week, which allows for focus on the quality of the communications and also checking of the details, including dates, times etc
- using SchoolBase to reduce the number of emails that go out without naming the child they relate to.

SCHOOL SURVEY RESULTS

Rick explained that 145 parents out of a total of 500 had responded to the school survey. This response contained useful information but was lower than hoped and may not accurately reflect wider views.

Bill added that the gold standard for parent feedback was hiring an external company to speak to a randomized selection of a minimum of 300 of the 500 parents at Frensham. The Governors are likely to do this.

It was reassuring to see that the trends coming through from the survey were the same as those coming through PV, indicating that individuals were resolving their issues with the school direct and that group issues were being identified by the Reps and being progressed through PV.

Rick is keen to share with parents the issues that were raised by the survey and the actions the school have taken in response and he would be sending out a communication in the next week or two in that regard.

A few of the survey replies suggested that staff were not always acting in ways that reflect the ethos of the school, for example by shouting at students. Rick stated that he wanted to be informed if and when this was the case and encouraged parents to raise these issues with him directly.

ACTION: Rick to write to all parents in the next couple of weeks feeding back on the results of the survey, explaining the issues raised and the actions the school have taken in response.

SCHOLARSHIP AND ENRICHMENT

Bob Keane, who is currently the lead for Scholarship and Enrichment, is retiring. Rick is interviewing candidates to fill this role and this is an exciting opportunity to look again at the program. Rick has had a good discussion with the Governors about what Scholarship and Enrichment should look like, including whether they should use the term 'scholar'.

The current Scholarship and Enrichment program looks for students who have both passion and the drive to do more. This requires a combination of aptitude and attitude. The school will give but the scholar must also be prepared to give back. This means that it is not necessarily the students who are best at something who will choose to join the program.

ACTION: Rick to provide PV with an update in the Summer Term.

PERFORMING ARTS

This has been on the agenda for some time. Emma T is setting up a focus group with the first meeting set for the 9 March. The group will work with members of the leadership team to consider what students and parents want, review the current provision, identify gaps and explore how to enhance the Performing Arts provision further.

To ensure all year groups are represented and a wide range of views are heard, Emma T (6th form), Helen D (SS), Ross (UJS) and Claire (LJS) will take the lead. The lead Reps will invite

students and parents from outside of PV who have fed back on Performing Arts to form a core group. They will then extend the invite to all parents. Rick has requested that we aim for 15 members or less to keep discussions manageable.

ACTION: Emma T, Helen D, Ross and Claire to set up the focus group to start on 9 March.

FOOD

The current catering contract with Holroyd Howe is coming to an end and the school is beginning a tender process that will have a new contract in place for September.

This is a good opportunity to collect feedback from parents and students about the food and snack provisions. Natasha is working with the Bursar to reinvigorate the feedback process.

ACTION: Natasha to continue to work with the Bursar to collect feedback to inform the tender process.

ROAD CROSSING

The issue of the road crossing by the main car park has been raised again. Despite the school's best endeavours to ensure students are regularly reminded of all aspects of road safety and the school installing speed limit signage, students are crossing carelessly and cars are not adhering to the 20mph speed limit on Frensham Heights Road. Parents hope the council might install a zebra crossing and the Reps have organised for many parents from across the school to write to the local councils and MP.

This is a parent-led initiative and is fully supported by the school. The letters have led to local councillors becoming involved and to Surrey County Council agreeing to make a safety visit to inspect the crossing and assess its safety. This visit will be unannounced and will take place in mid-May during the morning and afternoon peak times. Following this visit, the Surrey CC will make safety suggestions (they may decide a zebra crossing is not appropriate but will put forward their recommendations).

Rick explained that the school has been trying to improve the safety of this crossing for a number of years but the council's system tends to be responsive to incidents rather than proactive. Rick is therefore delighted with the progress that has been made and thanked all parents involved for their help.

ACTION: Natasha to continue to liaise with the council and school regarding the safety visit.

BOARDING CHANGES

There has been lots of feedback and concerns shared with PV reps about the boarding changes. Rick has only received feedback from one parent. He is disappointed that more parents didn't contact him direct so that he could reassure them.

Both Rick and Bill explained that the boarding changes have been well thought through and the subject has been on the Governors' agenda for several years. The number of students boarding nationally is in decline. This is a significant challenge for the independent school sector and has impacted schools across the UK. In the last ten years, the number of students boarding at Frensham has reduced from over 100 to just 60. In order to protect the school and ensure it remains future proof the school needs to make sure all school spaces, including boarding houses, are being used in the best possible way. These changes will improve the cost effectiveness of boarding and also the quality of the provision. If the number of boarders increases again, the school will react and make changes as appropriate.

Bill confirmed that the international boarding market has gone and shows no signs of coming back. The Governors are clear that they want to continue to offer boarding as they see it as part of the fabric of the school. The current boarding model however is not affordable. The school has good income but, like the rest of the UK, is facing inflation. The Governors estimate the school's inflation rate is nearly 20% (the current CPI rate is 10%). The Governors do not plan to pass this all on in the fees, instead they have asked Rick to make efficiencies. They have asked Rick to protect the beating heart of the school, safeguarding areas such as boarding, languages and performing arts whilst also making each area more affordable. This must be done to ensure the school remains viable in the long term. The Interim Bursar has done a great job with this.

Rick added that there are other challenges facing the independent sector that the school need to consider and plan for, such as a labour government considering changes like adding VAT to fees or taking away charitable status and business rates relief.

Bill stressed that the school is not in financial trouble precisely because they plan for these eventualities. Bill added that all money the school makes goes back into the school for the education and benefit of the children. This includes the money made from weddings and holiday lets etc (circa £250k pa).

Bill explained that the clear instruction with regard to all enterprise initiatives is that they do not impact or interfere with the business of the school in any way. If parents ever feel this is not the case and an initiative has interfered with the education or wellbeing of the students, they must tell the Head or senior staff who will work with Governors to ensure this does not happen again.

It was felt that this information was very helpful and reassuring and should be shared with all parents. These issues will be explained to parents in the next fees letter from the Governors and also on the Zoom call about the boarding changes, which Bill will attend if possible.

ACTIONS:

- **Rick** to facilitate the Boarding Zoom Call on Monday 20th March.
- **Reps** to encourage any parents with concerns about the changes to contact Rick direct.

REPORTING

There has been feedback on a number of reporting issues, including:

- inconsistencies in grading
- demoralising drops in the grades given compared to previous years
- subject reports should include more detail than one challenge and one celebration
- school values integrated into the grading system (as is already happening in the JS).

Rick suggested a Reporting parent focus group to work with Laura, Giles and Malika.

ACTION: Vicki will set up a focus group and contact Laura for dates.

COLLABORATIVE WORKSHOP: CAPTURING, COLLATING AND FEEDING BACK PARENT VIEWS

In the last two years, PV has made lots of changes, which have for the most part worked very well:

- PV are hearing from a wider range of parents
- PV are achieving resolution on issues quicker and far more readily than before
- Wider topics are being addressed more quickly with meetings and groups being set up as things happen
- Parents are being involved and heard on important, relevant, innovative topics like Gender in Sport, the Aldridge, Transition, Behaviour, Values, Reporting, Food, Performing Arts...
- Relationships between parents and staff are improving and trust is building
- It is easier to recruit Reps and more people are keen to take on the more involved and time-consuming officer roles
- Feedback is no longer being used as a stick to beat staff
- Sensitive issues are being dealt with in a more constructive and considerate way
- It feels so much more like collaboration. The school are keen to hear what their customers want and the customers are keen to help achieve it.

In order to ensure that we are getting the balance right, PV would like to review how we obtain, manage and share feedback.

The group split into two groups to discuss the following questions:

1. How can parents make staff feel valued?

- Cards - It means so much to staff to get positive feedback.
- Educate parents on how important positive feedback is.
- Keep it simple – the easy and simple wins often have the most impact:
 - Find the teacher at an appropriate time – morning / after school / coffee morning and say it in person
 - Send an email direct to the person and say thank you
 - [Using the other parent forums / forms / QR codes etc is good but not as impactful]
- PV and Management to send monthly reminders.
- More likely to happen in a personal exchange.
- Teachers who don't receive positive feedback in the summary can feel demoralised.
- Ensure any positive feedback received is fed back to staff (and their line managers).
- Teachers giving teachers positive feedback.
- Record the positive emails sent directly to the school in the positive feedback sheet.
- Can JS or SS harness student feedback?
- Happens more in the JS than the SS.
- Gratitude lens.
- Ask the students "who has made a difference" and feed that back.
- Display the positive feedback on noticeboards around the school – café, drop off and N-3. Could tie this in with the café refit.
- Display it on social media.
- Handwritten postcards for parents to use to thank staff.
- Postcards at reception/café also stickers and tokens.
- Virtual postcards.
- Timing of feedback needs to be improved – it should be received on the same day it was sent.
- Photos of all staff with a brief description on the intranet.
- More in person contact.
- Email introduction with photo to a new class.
- Intranet to include contact links.
- Notes in school bags.
- Diaries.

2. How can parents constructively share views?

- The privacy of your child can be a barrier to feedback.
- Hold communications refresher on how to give feedback.
- Communicate all resolutions to parents so they know feeding back is worthwhile.
- Need to rebuild trust in the school – trust might be a more effective area to focus on.
- Trust varies across the years.
- Don't have the same level of relationships as before.
- Face to face parent evening meetings are important.
- How to ascertain feedback on matters being addressed if we cannot ask for it?

- Classlist – likely to be kinder than WhatsApp as more managed.
- Close the loop – more feedback needed from staff to follow up and close out issues.
- Guidance on how to communicate feedback - need a code of conduct for feedback.
- Parent portal/intranet.

ACTION: PV meeting to consider the ideas raised and develop a proposal for improving how PV obtains, manages and shares Feedback.

AOB

The Introduction of Sniffer Dogs

Feedback has been received about the decision to introduce sniffer dogs. The vast majority of the feedback received so far has been positive (both parents and students) but there have been some concerns raised. Rick stated that he does not want drugs on the campus and that he would not apologise for that. He firmly stated that there currently isn't a drug problem at Frensham and he saw these measures as a way to ensure it stays that way.

Feedback had also been received from Junior School parents, who had heard messages through word of mouth from parents with children in the Senior School. The information being second hand and perhaps slanted with interpretation was leading to misinformation and alarm as a result. Rick stated that this was very much a Senior School issue and that he and Nick felt it did not need communicating to JS parents. However, Rick took on board that community initiatives that may not directly impact all students could still be of interest to the whole school community and that direct communication to all parents on these initiatives might help to reduce any misinformation being spread.

Thank You

Carina thanked the staff for being so generous with their time.