

## **Coffee Morning 15<sup>th</sup> May 2017**

11 parents attended.

### **Funding**

A leaflet was available – dropped off by a parent last week – advertising a March Against School Budget Cuts. This prompted a discussion about the impact of education funding cuts on HJS.

Some predictions have suggested that schools like ours will not lose as much as feared, but there is such uncertainty about how the proposed national funding formula (NFF) will be managed that it is impossible to make reliable forecasts for the future. Bristol is currently one of the better funded local authorities, so stands to lose from the NFF, but HJS is currently one of the lowest funded schools in the city, so may not lose as much as others. We don't yet know how the funds will be distributed locally. We can be certain, however, that we will have less to spend in coming years.

Governors have not yet set the budget for next academic year. We are hopeful that we will not have to make substantial changes immediately, but based on current predictions, we will need to reduce expenditure significantly from 2018. This will involve finding creative solutions if we are to avoid having an impact on the experience of our children and on their academic attainment.

Whilst the government claims it is investing more now in schools than in the past, the reality is that schools everywhere are facing financial challenges. There are more children, and costs have risen. Some schools have already had to reduce staffing or cut courses. Many have written to parents about the cuts, and some have asked for voluntary donations to boost their income.

A parent asked if there would be any financial advantage if we were to be a primary school rather than a junior school. The funding for a primary school would be less than the combined funding for two separate schools with the same number of pupils. However, a single organisation has more flexibility in placing resources where they are most needed. Organisations the size of an infant or junior school, or even a primary school, will struggle to remain viable if funding falls below a critical level. Partnerships and collaborations will therefore become increasingly important in the coming years.

NW24 Teaching and Learning Partnership, of which HJS and HIS are members, is becoming well established as a powerful collaboration between schools in this part of the city. We now have 25 member schools, including primary, secondary and special schools, academies, local authority and church schools. We collaborate at Head level, but also Governors and Business Managers. We have active networks for Deputy Heads, Literacy and Numeracy leads, Special Needs Coordinators and Pupil Premium leads. This year we have run an NW24 School Council which has made recommendations for greater pupil connectivity in the future.

Through NW24, we have been looking at the potential for savings on administrative costs through bulk purchasing and joint procurement of services. We are looking at ways of sharing expertise and providing support services for children which are no longer available from the local authority or outside agencies. Schools are increasingly expected to provide levels of support that health, mental health, social care and other services no longer have the capacity to provide.

A parent asked how we could be expected to maintain the same high standards with reduced funding. There is no easy answer to that. The demands made of schools get greater, but the resources available get smaller. We are still expected to achieve ambitious academic targets and narrow the achievement gap for disadvantaged pupils and children with special educational needs, but we have less money to provide additional support.

The governors are looking at both short term and long term goals, to protect the interests of the children currently in the school and to ensure the school remains in a position to meet the needs of the community.

### **SATS**

Year 6 children completed their SATs last week. The school was very proud of the way they handled the tests – no outward signs of stress or panic, no tears, lots of smiley faces.

One parent reported that her child had said they'd been told these were the most important tests of their lives, and this made them anxious until reassured by an older brother. This does not sound like a line that teachers at HJS would take: we try to make the SATs stress free, and only encourage children to do their best on the day. We also explain to them that the test results are not the most important information passed on to secondary schools. Year 6 teachers meet with heads of Year 7 and pass on information about each child's strengths and needs, and if there is a discrepancy between the test result and the teacher assessment, it is usually the latter which carries more weight.

Year 6 are still completing work on their writing portfolios and science work, both of which are judged only by teacher assessment, not by tests.

Year 3, 4 and 5 children will be doing similar tests in Reading, Spelling Punctuation and Grammar and Maths in the next few weeks.