



PARENTS' FORUM

16TH FEBRUARY 2022

“Microsoft Teams” meeting – 31 parents attended

Mr Parr and Mr Barber welcomed everyone to the meeting.

PANDEMIC UPDATE

HJS continues to implement safety measures to minimise risk of covid infection: although the government has stepped back from Plan B measures, there are still high numbers of cases in the South West and we saw a spike in school reported cases a few weeks ago. Therefore, we still ask adults to wear face coverings in school when moving around the building and we are restricting the number of visitors into the school. We hope to be able to relax some of these measures soon. We are awaiting the prime minister’s announcement on 28th February.

We’ve been holding assemblies with two year groups at a time in the Hall, and we have resumed singing, with up to 180 children together, since last September. Neither of these activities generated an increase in the number of reported cases. From September until January, we had a steady 10-12 children and 1 staff member absent at any time. Since Christmas, in common with many schools, we experienced an Omicron spike which meant for one week case numbers went rapidly up, and then came rapidly down again. Pupil covid absences are now in single figures and all members of staff are back. If the trend continues, we hope to resume face to face parent meetings and whole school assemblies soon.

The current round of parent consultations have been held online again, because of uncertainty. Although this is convenient for some parents, it means that teachers do not build the same relationships with parents and parents cannot look at their children’s work. Next time round, we expect to go back to face to face meetings, but the system gives us the flexibility to arrange online meetings for parents who cannot make it in to school.

We have scheduled some days after half term when parents may come in first thing in the morning to look at their children’s books. We need to manage numbers carefully, so have opened this up to one year group at a time. When the time is right, we hope to revert to our usual open afternoon format, but this is a tentative first step towards allowing parents back in to the building.

Since the start of the pandemic, the library has been out of action, due to concern about the virus being transmitted by children handling the books. We lent a lot of books to children during lockdown, and these now need to be sorted and replaced on the shelves before we can reopen the library. We are asking in this week’s update for parents volunteers to help us sort the library out and to come in at lunchtimes so that we can open the library for children. It is a very popular lunchtime choice for some children who would rather read quietly than chase a football around.

SAFEGUARDING

The topic of safeguarding is enormous and keeping children safe is our highest priority. It's not just about children who are in danger of being hurt or harmed, but more broadly about their wellbeing. We want to make sure that every child is able to report any worries or concerns, or ask questions, in a way that feels comfortable to them. Classrooms have "bubble boxes", in which children can discreetly post a message to their teacher, and Teams also provides the opportunity for children to send a message directly to their teacher or other trusted adult in the school. Parents can send safeguarding concerns to us using the safeguarding@henleazejuniorschool.co.uk email address.

Mr Parr has launched a competition for children to design posters to put up around the school reminding them what to do if they want to report something. The deadline is 28th February, so it would be a good half term project.

CURRICULUM

Since September, staff have been working hard on the review of the HJS curriculum. We are proud of the broad nature of our curriculum and firmly believe that it has to be meaningful, enjoyable and forward-looking.

Meaningful – children have to see how it is relevant, to understand the purpose, to join it all up and make connections so that it helps them make sense of the world and their lives. Children might not always appreciate the purpose at the time, but give them practical examples and role models to inspire them.

Enjoyable – you need to be in the right frame of mind to get the most out of learning, and it's a lot easier to learn and remember if you are happy and enjoying the process. Even the tedious bits (like grammar) can be made enjoyable by skilled teachers.

Forward-looking – the world is constantly changing, and we need to prepare children not just for the next stage of their education but for their lives as adults. The curriculum cannot remain stuck in the past: technology and communication is changing rapidly; history doesn't stand still; sustainability and environmental education is more important now than ever before. Our curriculum has to evolve and respond to the children's interests and prior knowledge.

As we are reviewing our curriculum, teachers are also checking to see how well it represents the diversity of our community. Where do children see themselves in the stories we read, the art we study, the science we learn about, etc. We want our curriculum to reflect our core values:

HJS is an inclusive school where everyone feels they belong.

We want our curriculum to excite and inspire.

We want children to be creative, curious and critical thinkers.

We want them to be confident, motivated, and respectful people.

We will be publishing full details of our curriculum on the website so that parents can see what we teach in each subject and how we explore learning through our topics, from Year 3 through to Year 6.

We've done some exciting work with our colleagues in the infant school this year. Subject leaders from both schools have met up with each other, to get a better idea of how learning progresses from infants to juniors, so that the whole curriculum is a seamless journey.

When Ofsted come to inspect us – which they will at some point, but we will be given less than 24 hours notice – we hope that we will be able to excite them with the same enthusiasm that we have for our curriculum development work.

SUSTAINABILITY AND DIVERSITY

As mentioned above, sustainability is important to us, and we are working with our eco-consultant, Tom Warmsley, to develop lesson plans about such things as growing food and reducing our energy consumption that will be embedded in the curriculum. We are ready to fill up our newly built raised beds and we plan to be reaping our first harvest this year.

We are investing in books and other resources that help us to teach about people from diverse backgrounds who have made significant contributions to science, literature, history, art and music. We recognise that our school has a large white middle class population, but we also have a significant number of children from different ethnic and social backgrounds. We want to make sure that there is no gender bias, and that everyone has equal opportunities and aspirations.

EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITY AND ENRICHMENT

We have been taking part in a number of sports tournaments this year – mainly football and netball. There are events coming up for younger children and at least two cricket competitions in the summer. We are proud to be a school that fields truly mixed teams, with boys and girls equally represented.

We are planning to hold our Music Evenings live just before Easter. Children will perform so much better in front of an audience. We'll plan carefully for a safe number of people in the Hall, and if the guidance changes nearer the time, we can always revert to a recorded concert like last year.

In response to questions raised by parents, we have a couple of ideas to put to Shine;

Can they offer an after school gymnastics club?

Can they offer a starter football activity for girls who may be put off by joining in with too many enthusiastic boys?

In response to a parent enquiries after the last coffee morning, Shine are now offering a Forest School club from Term 4, available to book now on their website.