

**BOLNEY C.E.P. SCHOOL**

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**Governor Newsletter May 2016**

National Curriculum Tests (SATs)

There’s been much talk in the press recently concerning testing in primary schools. No doubt you will all have your own personal views over the value of formal testing in years 2 and 6. Clearly tests provide a snapshot of a child’s ability and can inform next steps for their development.

Ofsted use the headline results as a measure of how schools are performing, although their value as a measure of the quality of teaching and learning is questionable. Certainly using the results to compare schools has little merit, and comparing children either in the same school or across schools is a very dangerous activity, which shouldn’t be encouraged. We aim for our children to grow to fulfil their own potential, this will be different for each one and achieved at different times. To judge success or failure based on tests taken over a week or two at certain ages can only lead unjust pressure on the individual, but for what gain?

Debating the whys and wherefores of tests is a luxury teachers in schools can ill afford. The fact is they exist and schools have to prepare themselves and the children to do the best they can. This year has seen a huge change in the way these tests are set and assessed, probably the biggest change for several decades. This has created a lot of extra work in planning and preparation for teachers, coupled with a new curriculum, many traditional practices and methods have had to be rethought. Adding to the pressure is a lack of clarity from central government over the exact form of the tests and assessments; the whole thing is likely to change again over the next 18 months.

This has meant for a very unsettling and stressful period for teachers. At Bolney our team is well prepared; their dedication has led them to be some of the best prepared in the area. This should be applauded. Since joining us in January Mrs Kenny has guided staff through the maze of uncertainty, not easy when you are trying to settle into a new role and school community.

As SATs continue to take place we urge you all to show your support for all the staff and children.

How can I help?

All of the above is triggering a number of reviews into school policies and practices. A number of surveys have been sent home, with the intent to get a clear understanding of your views as to where the school currently is and how we move forward together. We thank-you for all your responses, evaluating these and formulating development plans does take time. Ensuring we put the best plans in place, with as little disruption as possible, is vital.

More generally you can help your children by engaging with their education as much as possible, talking to them and spending time to fully understand the reasons behind home learning tasks. We talk a lot about the golden triangle of communication between child, home and school. Regular communication between you and your child’s class teacher helps all to understand what’s happening in school and at home. Our staff are generally available on the school gate at the end of the day for a quick informal chat. To discuss any important issues appointments can be made through the office to arrange a mutually convenient time to meet. These are important opportunities which should be taken up; past experience has shown great benefits for all parties, especially the children.

Vision, values and aims.

The schools vision, values and aims make up the fabric of our ethos. This, in turn, creates the foundation for all activities throughout the school. Governors and senior leaders are constantly evaluating these to ensure they are appropriate and fit for purpose. New curriculums, inspection frameworks (both Ofsted and Church inspection) and government initiatives, such as British values and the Prevent strategy (surrounding extremist views), shine a spotlight on our values, so we must be confident in them and their application.

A couple of years ago we reviewed our vision and aims and settled on what’s below:

*Be the Best You Can, Guided by God.*

 *Our aims are to lead all learners to be:*

* *Successful learners who enjoy learning, make progress and achieve;*
* *Confident individuals who are able to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives;*
* *Responsible citizens who make a positive contribution to society.*

Since then we have been planning a detailed review of our values, especially considering it's been at least eight years since they were last looked at. The recent changes in senior leadership at the school postponed this until we had a new head teacher in post.

The last INSET day saw governors and staff coming together to consider these values. During that process we felt that there were some values that overlapped our aims such as achievement, which is more of an outcome rather than value. We also discovered one or two were missing, such as resilience. While discussing the values it became apparent that many are interlinked and flow from one another.

For instance to love one another is to be respectful, polite and caring. To love yourself is to live a healthy, fulfilling life where you celebrate success, but maintain resilience when things don't go as well as you first thought. To love your surroundings is to respect and care for your environment, leaving it for others how you would like to find it. Naturally there are many more examples.

This led to our decision to find our core values which underpin all that we do here at school. From these core values all the others will flow. Therefore it is important to us to consult with both yourselves and the children as part of this process.

Values tree

About six years or so ago, two talented parents from the school painted our values tree in the hall. This has become a much loved, admired and copied symbol of our school values and ethos. This review doesn't alter that, however as with all things in life, the values tree needs to develop as the school does. Our plans, once the consultation is over, are to change the wording on the tree branches. Our core values will be positioned on the tree trunk and main branches, then on the smaller branches coming from each core value will be the other values that link to them. This will enhance the tree and make it easier for the children to relate and link the values together. Many of the values will remain; however, we are altering the presentation of them so the children can see the links. The alterations will hopefully happen over the summer holidays ready for the new school year and linked with a new program of collective worship (assembly) themes. We will explore each value, and all the values that link with them, with the children in many different ways.

Academies and collaboration

Another area of education recently in the media is the academies agenda. Over the years the governing board has done extensive research into the implications of this for Bolney. We are in a good position to respond to whichever way the government decides to go.

Part of this is growing informal collaborative links with local schools. The NEARs network in our area has been around for well over 20 years. In many ways trail blazers of cooperation in schools, this network is not just about sporting events, but staff and governors at all levels working together to identify best practice and efficiencies. We'll keep you informed of any changes in the academies landscape.

Budgets and other things

May is always budget setting time. This year, through no fault of the school, we have seen income drop by £40,000. Governors and senior leaders have worked hard to maintain prudent well managed finances, which allow us to set a balanced budget maintaining a high level of provision, even with this short fall. Governors constantly audit and benchmark expenditure ensuring quality provision that is value for money. We have to thank Zoe Belton, our School business manager for her talented, diligent stewardship of the school finances.

As always it’s the whole community around the school that makes it such a success. We wish to thank all involved, including yourselves. We also like to hear your views at any time and remind you of the confidential governor email for any queries and questions.

governors@bolneyschool.org.uk.

Best wishes,

Peter Sutton

Chair of governors