

**NOTES of a MEETING of the PARENTS and GOVERNING BODY of
SPITTAL CHURCH IN WALES VOLUNTARY CONTROLLED SCHOOL
HELD at the SCHOOL on TUESDAY 2 APRIL 2019 at 6:30pm**

PRESENT: Mr P Henton (Chair)
Mr R Barrett-Evans
Mrs S Bradbury
Miss J Hewitt
Cllr D Howlett
Mrs E Hughes
Mr B Rees
Mrs C Williams

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Steven Richards-Downes – Deputy Chief Education Officer
Alison Botarelli - Challenge Adviser
Steve Stretch – GSS Manager and Clerk to the GB
Charlie Blythe – Note Taker
Mrs R Elston – staff governor
Mrs A Mallinson – teacher governor

The Chair thanked those for attending and requested that the members of the Governing Body introduce themselves to the room.

The Chair explained the purpose and format of the meeting, stating that the Governing Body's responses would relate only to the questions raised through the signed petition.

Follow a question from a parent the Chair explained that Mr Mark Austin, Principal Challenge Adviser, was not available to attend this meeting, and that it had been agreed that the Headteacher was not required to attend, as this was a meeting with the Governing Body.

The staff and teacher representatives had been invited to attend, but would not participate as governors. The newly elected parent governors were also attending but in the capacity of parents so that they could comment freely without being bound by the collective response of the GB.

Before the meeting continued, the Chair politely asked that anyone who was not a parent or guardian of a child attending Spittal School leave the room; he also stated that the Governing Body had not given its permission to be recorded.

1 CATEGORISATION

(i) Petition question

“Given that the parents have now had sight of the Categorisation Report from ERW for Spittal VC Primary School can the Governing Body assure the parents that Spittal VC Primary School is in a position to move forward and what is being done to achieve this? We ask this because Spittal VC Primary School was previously in a position to move from a 'yellow' to 'green' category and within twelve months we have now moved down two categories from an 'yellow' to 'red' category. This is a huge concern as it has happened within such a short space of time with no forewarning. What has caused this sudden decline as the Teaching cohort has remained relatively unchanged as has the Governing Body. We would politely ask that the Governing Body respond.”

(ii) Governing Body's response

Following the March 2015 inspection, the school was placed in an official ESTYN category (LA Monitoring). With hindsight, the Governing Body (GB) agrees with the Local Authority (LA) view that the school should have been judged as requiring **Amber support**, especially as it took more than **two** years to get out of the official category (normally **one** year).

Weaknesses identified by ESTYN are largely the same as identified in the national categorisation report.

Improvements since 2015 **have not been sustainable and school data has not improved sufficiently.**

Schools are often given 2 to 3 years to make improvements to improve data.

Since their last inspection, the GB recognises that ESTYN have set higher standards for the quality of teaching and the progress pupils make.

The School Development Plan and LA Support Plan will ensure that good progress is made to address the weaknesses identified.

Monitoring systems are becoming more robust and actions to bring improvement are to come under increasing / improved scrutiny from the GB and LA.

(iii) Follow up from parents

A parent queried what category a school would be given if deemed to be a failing school; the Deputy Chief Education Officer stated that Spittal School had not been categorised as red because it was failing; it had been categorised as red to provide the requisite LA support required to address the weaknesses that had been identified.

In response to another query, the Deputy Chief Education Officer explained the categorisation allocation process, acknowledging that this may have been flawed in previous years. The issues identified with the process were being reviewed by Welsh Government (WG). The Deputy Chief Education Officer explained how an underperforming school or a red school (not necessarily the same thing), could also be a Pioneer School, such as Ysgol Harri Tudur/Henry Tudor School.

A parent commented that the school, Governing Body and parents needed to accept that a red support category meant there were issues to be addressed. A critical element of moving forward together would be to allow parents to understand the school's shortcomings and support its improvement journey.

In response to a query the Deputy Chief Education Officer informed parents of the areas for development. The LA Support Plan was then presented to parents on the projector screen. A parent commented that she felt it important that the SLT be involved in these meetings, as they were the members of staff driving the improvements. Parents were informed that the support received from Lamphey and St Francis schools aimed to improve leadership across **all levels**, not just the SLT.

A governor highlighted that there were two points within the Plan regarding parents; establishing a Parents Forum, and the school encouraging parental engagement. A parent stated that there would need to be unity between the school, the Governing Body and parents, all working together towards a common goal.

The Deputy Chief Education Officer informed parents that progress review meetings were held every half term, where the school, governors and staff were held accountable.

The Chair reported that there were new and robust monitoring systems in place and that the 'proof would be in the pudding'.

The Deputy Chief Education Officer noted that improved self-evaluation processes would help the school to better inform the planning stage for the following year's SDP.

A parent queried why the Challenge Adviser did not identify the school's weakness in self-evaluation sooner. The Deputy Chief Education Officer acknowledged that this was something that the region as a whole had not been effective in doing. The LA had good systems that could be implemented at the school, but this itself would come with challenges. Teaching at the school was not poor, however it needed to be exceptionally good. The children at the school were capable of more.

The Challenge Adviser informed parents that she would be visiting the school on a weekly basis, and would monitor standards in classes and work with the staff to get them to an exceptional level of teaching.

1.1 FAILURE TO CHALLENGE THE CATEGORISATION / D-RATING

(i) Petition question

"In relation to point 2 we also understand that the Governing Body were made aware of the 'red' categorisation in November 2018 and chose not to challenge it. We politely ask why the Governing Body did not challenge this decision and ask you to inform us of what steps have already been taken and what measures have been put in place to address and remedy the weaknesses identified, particularly as the overarching weakness relates to poor performance by senior management within the school and this managed structure prevails at the current time. We ask this as the 'D' rating show very little prospect of remedying the defects. We ask the Governing Body to respond and inform the parents of the proposed path going forward for Spittal VC Primary School."

(ii) Governing Body's response

The GB was made aware of the **DRAFT** categorisation in November, 2018. The draft categorisation was not **RATIFIED** until January, 2019. During this period the GB, Headteacher and the Challenge Adviser actively began preparing how to address the areas that had been identified in the **DRAFT** report. This included:

- organising the training and support provided during inset days
- a GB self-assessment
- the setting up of the School Development Plan Committee
- developing a monitoring timetable for the GB.

The report **does not** refer to the poor performance of **senior leadership** – it refers to **leadership at all levels**. "Leadership" is a term given when discussing leadership at ALL levels – from T.A. to Class Teacher to Head Teacher, to the GB.

The capacity for improvement is a judgement on the progress of the school addressing past weaknesses rather than a "crystal ball" view of the future. As stated above, the identified **weaknesses have NOT BEEN FULLY ADDRESSED SINCE 2015**. Hence the judgement.

On hearing the evidence that the identified shortcomings were very similar to those identified in the inspection report (2015) the GB decided not to challenge the categorisation, as members were aware of some of the concerns.

The categorisation model is about the amount of support a school needs **rather than a judgement about a failing school** or a judgement agreed by the GB. The GB agreed this was the correct route to follow.

(iii) Follow up from parents

Following a parent question regarding the lack of information provided by the GB regarding the school's category, the Deputy Chief Education Officer explained the cross-moderation process that took place across the region in December. National moderation was then undertaken in January. The category could have changed based on the outcomes of either. Regardless, a governor reminded parents that the GB started planning with the SLT immediately, rather than waiting until January.

Following a parent question, it was reported that the GB had received training on self-evaluation to learn how to improve as a collective, which had been a positive process. The GB had also established the SDP Committee, which would identify where the school should be in terms of progress throughout the year, and monitor progress to ensure interventions were having an impact. Monitoring weeks had also taken place with the Headteacher of St Francis School; these involved governors participating in learning walks and listening to learners.

A parent asked why the GB had not involved all parents in supporting the school. A governor reiterated that the school's support category could not be officially reported until it had been ratified after the regional moderation process. Since then the GB had attended four meetings with parents. The GSS Manager provided an overview of the work undertaken by the GB since being informed of the categorisation, in an aim to improve its processes for monitoring. A meeting was held with staff with both Mr Stretch and the Challenge Adviser, as well as governor representatives, to ensure that all were aware of what needed to be done in order to improve.

It was agreed that better communication was needed.

The Deputy Chief Education Officer provided parents with an explanation of the 'D rating'; he reported that this related to the school's capacity to self-improve, without LA support, which it was not currently capable of doing at this time. He also reported that there were still inconsistencies across the school in various areas, which needed to be addressed. The school would need to tighten up on procedures to ensure that all pupils performed to the best of their ability. Procedures would need to be sustainable and transparent.

2 STAFF WELFARE

(i) Petition question

"We would like to raise our concerns about the management, competency, capability and organisational culture of Spittal VC Primary School, this is due to the visible low morale of the teaching staff we can see on a daily basis as parents. Organisational culture is set from the top and is fed throughout the whole school and indeed is heavily criticized throughout the ERW report. Ultimately the teaching staff are responsible for the daily care of our children and we want to ensure their

wellbeing is looked after. We would like to ask the Governing Body what is being done to gauge the morale and welfare of the staff to ensure that they all feel appropriately supported and in a position to deliver the support plan, particularly given the responsibility of the Governing Body for the wellbeing of staff. We ask the Governing Body to respond and inform us of what action will be taken and politely ask if the governing body share this view.”

(ii) Governing Body’s response

The GB feels that culture is set by ALL members of an organisation through beliefs and actions (not filtered down from the Head, but filtered throughout from all staff).

Staff wellbeing is the responsibility of ALL stakeholders and the LA takes seriously all concerns in relation to this.

Teachers are being supported via the LA Support Plan.

The Deputy Director and the Principle Challenge Adviser have met staff collectively and individually.

Staff have been signposted to how to seek appropriate support if necessary.

The GB plans to meet with teaching and support staff.

The school has various policies that support staff wellbeing including:

- Grievance procedures
- Dignity at work
- Whistleblowing
- Professional Standards for Teachers

Staff are aware of these policies.

The Chair hoped that this reassured parents, but emphasised that individuals needed to take responsibility for their own wellbeing.

Mr Stretch added that the GBs role was at strategic level, not the day-to-day operations of the school. The GB helped the school to set its strategic direction. No individual governor had special responsibilities in any area. Staff should follow the procedures agreed by the GB regarding any concerns they may have. Parents were to use the Complaints Procedures to raise any concerns, and should NOT approach individual governors.

(iii) Follow up from parents

A parent commented that policies were too formal and suggested that there should be a less formal process for a softer approach. A governor stated that the policies adopted by the GB had been accepted by unions and must be followed to protect all concerned. It was also noted that the LA's Grievance Procedure stated that 'the matter was to be dealt with informally initially'. A parent questioned whether the timelines outlined within the policies would be adhered to, as in her opinion and past experience, they had not.

A parent referred back to the fact that the GB had not yet met with staff, and questioned whether the GB felt it should have done. It was confirmed that this had been considered by the GB, however it was felt at the time to focus on the meetings with parents, so that the GB could then move on to meetings with the staff. The GB was aware that the Challenge Adviser had met with staff already.

3 COMMUNICATION

(i) Petition question

"We would like to raise our concerns about the communication within school, as it appears to parents that there is a lack of communication from management to staff and an overwhelming lack of transparency and a missed opportunity to work with parents for the benefit of the school. We politely ask that the Governing Body to respond and take action and also ask if you share this view."

(ii) Governing Body's response

The School and GB have acknowledged in recent meetings that communication between the school and parents // parents and school need to be improved. The GB would welcome parents becoming more involved and have recently taken the step to work with parents on the provision of sports within the school as an example.

However, the GB wishes to highlight a few occasions when the school has asked for support from parents; e.g. help with school trips and attendance at school organised curriculum evenings, where there has been limited support.

The GB hopes that parents will become more involved with supporting the school with pupil's learning, as there appears to be such willingness following the categorisation report.

The GB acknowledges that there is further work to do to ensure that parents are informed of school matters and events in good time.

The Head is encouraging the use of Class Dojo and the use of this by all staff will be monitored through reports to the GB.

It is worth reminding parents that the “Red Book” each child has can be used to convey some information to and from class teachers. It is acknowledged that this may not be appropriate for some information.

The GB requests clarification on what is meant by **“An overwhelming lack of transparency.”**

(iii) Follow up from parents

A parent stated that her child’s Red Book was never looked at or signed by the class teacher. This highlighted some inconsistencies in practice and would be taken back to the school staff.

3.1 COMMUNICATION (SCHOOL TO PARENTS)

(i) Petition question

“We are also concerned about the communication between school and parents. At times parents are informed about various things at the last minute and do not feel we are being kept up-to-date about formal issues affecting both our children and their school. The Class DoJo app and text messaging service was introduced at Spittal School as communication tools however they are not being utilised. We would like the Governing Body to respond and take action.”

(ii) Governing Body’s response

As above.

(iii) Follow up from parents

Again, a parent reported on inconsistent use of the DoJo system, particularly in Class 1 on certain days of the week.

The GSS Manager explained to parents the process of producing minutes of governing body meetings and making these available to stakeholders. It was agreed that draft minutes would be made available in the school foyer once they had been approved by the Chair of Governors.

4 SPLIT / SHARED TEACHER CLASSROOMS

(i) Petition question

“We would like to highlight our concerns as parents that the majority of our children are being taught in split Teacher classrooms and whilst we understand this is not uncommon and that there is nothing inherently wrong with this arrangement the issues we are concerned about are within one particular class; class 1. We are concerned about the

consistency and the quality of teaching and the impact that is having on the children's education and wellbeing. We appreciate that Teachers in management positions have several roles within a school, however this is indeed a concern when a particular class is having several different Teachers teaching within the course of a week as other duties appear to be put before the teaching element. How has this situation been allowed to happen and how will the Governing Body take action? We politely ask if the Governors share this view, as the parents view in this respect is validated by the ERW report."

(ii) Governing Body's response

The GB notes the concerns and will share the organisational structure of classes with parents and its expectations in relation of these classes and communication.

Classes staffed by two teachers, on a part-time basis, are the result of decisions made by previous Headteachers. The GB previously raised concerns about this.

Split Classes are used in other schools across Wales.

This is not a forum in which we can discuss individual classes or teachers.

The categorisation report highlights concerns regarding consistency of teaching due to the FACT that enough pupils do not make accelerated progress by the end of KS2.

Although staff have been given feedback on their individual performance, it is not appropriate to discuss this in a public forum.

The GB will put measures in place to monitor the frequency of absence by teachers from their classes.

Parents should use the school's Complaints Procedures if they wish to raise their dissatisfaction.

(iii) Follow up from parents

A parent raised a concern that the only class to appear not to be having parents' evenings was class 1. A letter was meant to be sent out to parents but nothing had been received to date. The Challenge Adviser agreed to chase this with the Head, but reassured parents that anyone wanting a one-to-one could request this.

A parent queried how the GB planned on monitoring the amount of time teaching staff spent in class; the GSS Manager explained how the school and the GB monitored and reported on this.

5 SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

(i) Petition question

“We would like to politely request to see the development plan for Spittal School, including the new curriculum for us to understand the future plans to ensure future achievements and positive outcomes for our children. Can the Governing Body assure the parents that this will happen and can they provide a timescale for parents to see the plans?”

(ii) Governing Body’s response

The School Development Plan is on the school website.

The school is in the process of discussing how to proceed and making the appropriate steps to make changes to the pedagogy (teaching).

Following an invitation, the Deputy Chief Education Officer provided information on:

- Teaching and Learning aspects of the new curriculum (“*Young People’s Guide*”)
- Professional Standards for Teachers

The Deputy Chief Education Officer would ensure that the documents he referred to during his report was available to parents.

(iii) Follow up from parents

A parent queried, if it was everyone’s responsibility in school to roll out the new curriculum, why the school needed a Headteacher!

A parent queried the current staffing structure and whether it would look the same in six months’ time, however this was difficult for anyone to say. However, if everyone bought into the support and change for improvement, the school could get to where it needed to be.

A parent queried the timescale for the school to get back to where it was, e.g. a green or yellow school. Parents were informed that the current aim was to have the required impact of ‘significant improvement’ by end of the current year. Realistically, as it was unlikely for a school to move from red to green, the improvement journey would take at least 18 months.

6 INDIVIDUAL PUPIL ISSUES

(i) Petition question

“We would like to highlight our concerns about the follow-up of individual pupil issues which at times are significant in nature and relate to the wellbeing and development of that child. Parents are overwhelmingly concerned that issues are raised and initially listened to by the management of the school however support mechanisms are not put into place or practice and not acted upon or followed up as methods of support by the management. We would like the Governing Body to discuss the lack of formal structure for this and put one in place which is adhered to. The inability of the management to deal with these issues could have serious ramifications.”

(ii) Governing Body’s response

It is not appropriate to discuss provision for individual children in a public meeting (Breach of the Act).

Individual concerns should be addressed to the Headteacher in the first instance, through the school’s Complaints Policy.

Strategies are being developed to ensure staff are aware, where they need to know.

Strategies will include keeping records of written information shared with the staff.

A parent stated that she had been very satisfied with how the management of the school had addressed an issue she had raised in the past.

7 PARENTAL SUPPORT

(i) Petition question

“The parents consider that they are best placed to support the school where there is a genuine openness and transparency. The parents would like to support a visible Governing Body, and as a move towards this, we invite the Governing Body to a meeting of the parents in order for the parents to explain current issues and concerns which can be worked on together. A suggestion would be that a parent forum is established to meet with governing body on a termly basis; what are the Governing Bodies’ thoughts about this and would you be willing to attend a separate more informal parent meeting within the next 7 days?”

(ii) Governing Body’s response

The GB is keen to open a transparent relationship between parents and the school (not just with the GB). Consideration will be given to ways to achieve this.

The GB is keen to work with a “*Parents Forum*” that represents the views of ALL parents.

The GB welcomes ideas on how this forum should be set up, represented and organised so that it can best benefit the school. But it does not feel that another meeting within the next seven days, as requested, is required to do this. The GB is prepared to hold another meeting with parents towards the end of the summer term to review the progress made following this meeting.

The Challenge Adviser stated that a good next step would be to identify a school with strong parental engagement, and request that some governors visit to see how this worked, before considering how it would be achieved at Spittal School. Mr A Birch from the LA had experience in supporting schools in setting up parent forums.

The Deputy Chief Education Officer stated that the forum would need clear terms of reference and what it aimed to achieve.

The GSS Manager stated that the membership of the forum needed to be ascertained and that the links with parent governors could be beneficial. Parent forum meetings should always have a clear agenda. It was suggested that views expressed at this meeting could be discussed by the Parent Forum.

ADDITIONAL TOPICS AGREED BY GB

1. The difference between the ERW report and an ESTYN report

The Deputy Chief Education Officer clarified for parents that:

- ESTYN was the inspectorate/regulator for all schools in Wales
- ERW was the regional consortium.

The categorisation report was written by the school’s Challenge Adviser, who was employed locally by Pembrokeshire County Council. The Challenge Adviser worked with the school to write these reports. Their role was to gather evidence, challenge the quality of this evidence, and agree recommendations for improvement.

2. Professional Standards for Teachers

Parents were informed that the new Professional Standards for Teachers was publically available on the WG website.

Previous standards had been used for capability and disciplinary purposes, whereas the new standards were meant to support professional development.

Following questions from parents it was reported that:

- (i) members of staff were accountable to the school and the LA in terms of their performance
- (ii) progress towards performance management objectives was monitored through the performance management process
- (iii) it was the responsibility of individuals to evaluate where they were in terms of their own performance
- (iv) the new professional standards were now used during performance management.

3. The role of the GB with particular regard to complaints and grievance procedures

The GSS Manager had nothing further to report on this matter.

This concluded the meeting.

The Chair hoped that parents felt reassured that strategies had been put into place and that the GB was monitoring the progress of the school. The GB would aim to meet with parents again at the end of the summer term.

The meeting closed at 9:09pm.

CB

Agreed Action	Responsibility
To improve communication systems between the school, the GB and parents.	Head / GB
To follow the school's policies and procedures in relation to: Grievances; Dignity at Work; Whistleblowing; Professional Standards for Teachers	Staff
Parents to use the school's Complaints Procedures if they wish to raise their dissatisfaction.	Parents
To arrange a meeting with members of staff and the GB.	Head / Chair
To ensure that staff used the 'Red Book' as a communication tool between class teachers and parents.	Head / Class Teachers / Parents
To ensure that draft minutes of GB meetings were made available in the school foyer.	Headteacher
To put measures in place to monitor the frequency of absence by teachers from their classes.	GB
To follow up with the Headteacher regarding the parents evening for Class 1.	Challenge Adviser

To ensure that information regarding the below was made available to parents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching and Learning aspects of the new curriculum (<i>“Young People’s Guide”</i>) • Professional Standards for Teachers. 	Deputy Chief Education Officer
To identify a school with strong parental engagement, and request that governors visit to see how this worked.	Challenge Adviser
To establish a Parent Forum.	GB / Parents
To provide support on establishing a Parents Forum.	Alastair Birch
To establish clear terms of reference for the Parent Forum stating what the group aimed to achieve.	Parent Forum / Alastair Birch
To arrange another meeting with parents towards the end of the summer term to report on progress.	GB

DRAFT