



Llangattock School Governors' Easter Newsletter



Editor: George Smith Compiled by: Gail Jones

Easter 2015

An end of term newsletter from the Governors

Before we go any further, I must ask you to read and enjoy one of my favourite poems:

Musée des Beaux-Arts

About suffering they were never wrong,
The Old Masters; how well they understood
Its human position; how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just dully walking along;
How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting
For the miraculous birth, there must always be
Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating
On a pond at the edge of the wood:
They never forgot
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.
In Breughel's Icarus, for instance: how everything turns away
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may
Have heard him splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

(W.H. Auden)

(I recommend a look at Breughel's 'Icarus')

I am sure all that read this will be aware that this past term Llangattock School have enjoyed the enviable attentions of an Estyn inspectorate team. The staff had 4 weeks to ensure everything was ship shape and Bristol fashion. Many people including myself feel the advance warning could enable a poorly performing school to prepare enough to scrape through an inspection and then of course return to its old ways. The inspection came and went, Mrs Corlett and I were interrogated by a delightful inspector with a genuinely charming manner, the school was inspected, Mrs Smith, Sian Fielding and myself were duly given feedback. The details of this feedback I am unable to impart for we are sworn to secrecy until the final report is released and I cannot say any more. The burden of this knowledge is heavy upon our shoulders but this is why we three are in our respective roles. Our shoulders are broad, as the Royal Marines say, '99.9% need not apply'.

The staff and governors were very impressed with the attendance and support from parents at the parents meeting. During the week of the inspection I wonder how aware most of the parents were of what was happening at school during the 12 hour days the staff were obliged to work in order supply the inspection beast with vast piles of paperwork and meticulously planned lessons.

I would like to point out that the education our children receive is already to a very high standard and do we need to be inspected in this way?

Us parents all work very hard ourselves and we want our children to have a very good education, and we want to be able to send our children to school secure in this knowledge. While school life is very important to our children we as parents are very aware of life outside education. During that week we carried on as usual giving the inspection little thought certainly not experiencing the slog and anxiety the School Staff did.

We really want a well performing school, which is what we have, regardless of any inspection.

Last week the Nation was gripped by the exciting and rare event taking place in the Heavens. I am a simple man, a *son of the soil* as the Greek etymology of my name suggests. We know science explains why and how an eclipse occurs but I could not rid myself of the feeling that the eclipse was a sign, a portent of ill. Mrs Whittle gaily and blithely announced that as a Piscean she knew something good would happen to her, however I could not rid myself of this terrible foreboding. It can only be that the eclipse has foretold the departure of our Reverend Kelvin Richards. Kelvin has been an integral part of the community and school for 25 years and a generation of children will always remember him. I would like to thank him for his efforts and wish Rachel and Kelvin a rewarding future in the Perilous Realm of Talybont-on-Usk. In due course they can fully expect me to drop in at the vicarage for a glass of sherry.

'Go in peace! I will not say: do not weep, for not all tears are an evil.'

Gandalf to the Hobbits, Lord of the Rings.

EFFECTIVE MONITORING THROUGH LEARNING WALKS: AN EXAMPLE OF SECTOR LEADING PRACTICE by Sandra Harris

On 28 January two members of the Governing Body (Sandra Harris, Foundation Governor and Kathy Corlett, Non-Teaching Staff Governor) undertook a Learning Walk through the school. As part of our accountability to you as parents we wanted to provide feedback of that learning walk, an explanation of what it means and to provide an overview of the outcomes. We also wanted to share the fact that at a recent training session, we were very pleased to find that this was recognised by Powys Local Education Authority as sector leading practise!

So what is a Learning Walk?

Learning walks are one method by which the Governing Body can assure itself of effective monitoring of the performance of the school. It broadly entails observing classes and the general school environment, and speaking to pupils to review performance in specific areas. The learning can come from a number of areas:

- By walking in the shoes of our learners and seeing things from their view point
- By learning as governors and parents from observation
- By reviewing displays, work presentation and dip sampling for evidence
- By providing a 'fresh' pair of eyes on aspects of school life and asking the naive questions which can then prompt thoughts leading to improvement in practices

What was the focus of this particular Learning Walk?

This Learning Walk focused on *Independent Learning* and *Differentiation* across the school. We spent a morning observing all classes, talking to learners and objectively assessing the school environment. A monitoring sheet helped us to focus in on specific areas and a comprehensive write up followed the visit together with some suggested recommendations. As you would expect, the write up had specific evidence against a large number of areas for example 'learning and numeracy framework', 'clearly labelled and accessible resources' and 'Thinking Skills'. This was to demonstrate that clear evidence was found as opposed to individual opinion.

So what were the outcomes?

Well first and foremost I have to say that a personal overall observation was that as a parent and governor, I learned so much about the school during a relatively short period of time! The experience provided a sound comprehension of the amount of time, effort and planning by all to create the learning experience for our children. This method of monitoring is very effective and allows performance to come alive in a way that strategic plans and reports alone cannot.

In summary we found:

- ✓ Evidence of independent learning and differentiation across the school and curriculum
- ✓ A consistent approach to standards across all classes specifically the gold, silver, bronze approach which promoted independent learning and differentiation. This approach encourages learners to work towards specific topic related targets and result in achievement of gold, silver or bronze awards
- ✓ Tasks were clearly explained to learners and opportunities were provided for any clarification if

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- ✓ Larger classes were well behaved and orderly despite their size
 - ✓ Evidence that specifically in larger classes, if one pupil required specific support or attention, this was potentially difficult with only one teacher and one LSA (although the management of this was handled very well).
 - ✓ The question/debate display encouraged opinions and promoted considering others views.

In terms of suggestions for improvement:

- ✓ Improve overall communications to ensure that the targets of the week/month are always communicated so that all staff (e.g. LSAs) are aware and can consistently support learners to achieve targets
- ✓ Consider introducing something along the lines of 'an hour/day in the life of the pupil' where parents can experience a typical day themselves which will raise awareness, enable constructive feedback and promote further partnership approach.

Where can I find out more?

Hopefully this has provided you with an overview of one way in which the Governing Body undertakes its monitoring role. Obviously there is a lot more detail which came out of this specific Learning Walk and if you would like to know more or have any specific questions then please feel free to contact/email Kathy or I, or speak to us at school. *Sandra Harris*

Clair Jones gets her hands dirty in the After School Clubs:

A question Governors are asked frequently is, "What do you do?". In answer, many varied tasks. From attending meetings to discuss finances and budgets, policies and procedures – sometimes writing them as well as discussing them – evaluation and improvement plans, training.

Much of this could be described as administration and is really important, yet the most absorbing roles that many Governors have is running, or helping out, with the many After School Clubs. This gives us the chance to engage with pupils in a less formal way, and to get to know all pupils, not just those in your child's year group.

Of the many clubs Governors are, or have been, involved with – School Band, Recorders, Chess , Lego, Story, Hockey, Netball, - the 2 horticultural-based Clubs which interest me are **Gardening** and **Eco Club**.

Gardening is for the Infants and Eco Club for the Juniors. In Eco Club we cover a wide range of topics - not just growing fruit, insect friendly flowers and growing vegetables! One week we may be pond dipping/clearing, worm charming, studying birds and insects; another week recycling waste items into new creations, learning about hedgehogs and native animals. All sorts of things. Ideas come from both the children and adults.

Importantly though, you do not have to be a Governor to help out. Eco Club is very popular and we really need enthusiastic helpers. Eco-related skills are welcome, but enthusiasm is the only requirement.

The Club runs 3.30pm – 4.30pm on Wednesdays. Please just come along, or speak to Clair Jones, Gail Jones or Marcel Smith.

Sandra Harris explains how Additional Learning and Special Education Needs are provided and managed by the school and asks for your views...

As you may be aware, each Governor on the Governing Body has an area/s of specific responsibility for which they provide additional focused support and monitoring, over and above the general role of School Governor. One of my specific responsibilities is Additional Learning Needs/Special Educational Needs (ALN/SEN) Governor.

In order to fulfill this responsibility effectively, I periodically meet with the SEN Coordinator, Mrs Marcel Smith, to ensure that I am up to date with any key issues, provide support where necessary and provide feedback to the governing body as a whole. As part of the Governing Body responsibility to parents, I wanted to provide an overview of my latest visit with Mrs Smith and use the opportunity to seek your views on how we can better communicate and engage with parents on ALN/SEN provision.

What happens at Llangattock Church in Wales school?

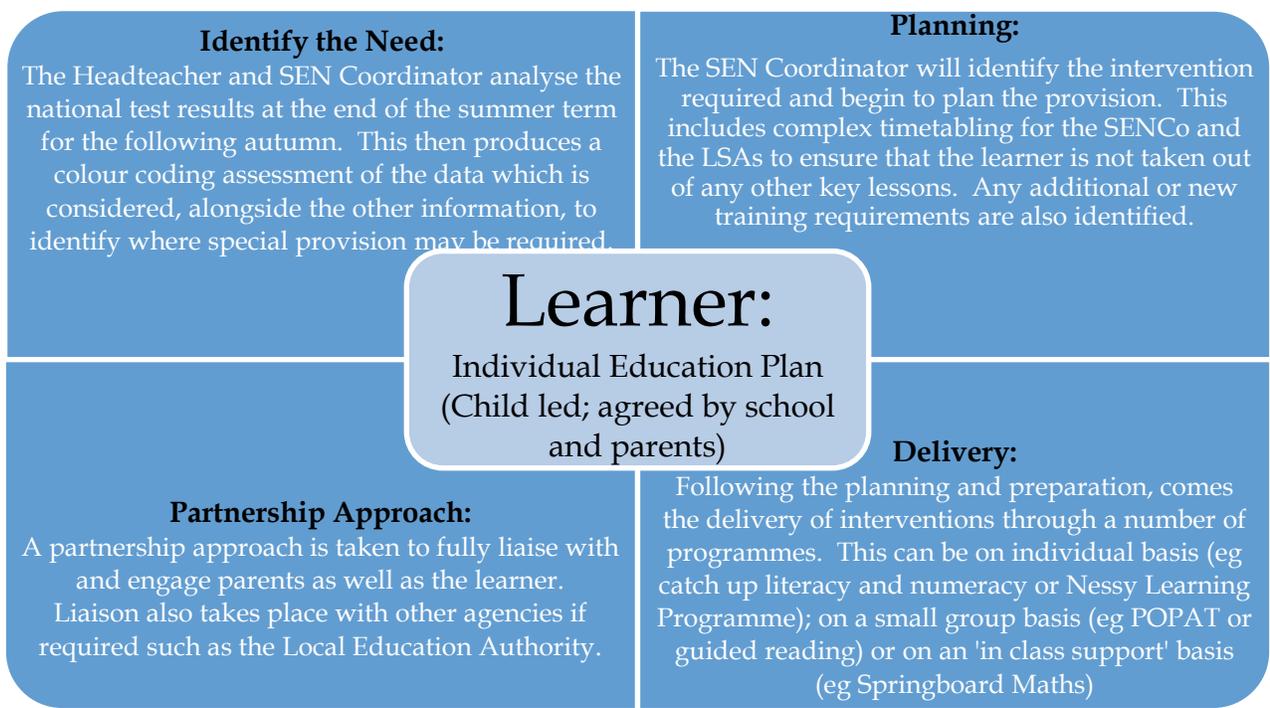
The detailed Policy for Special Educational Needs at Llangattock School can be found on the website under the policies section. It provides a clear statement of intent of how the school identifies, addresses and monitors a variety of special needs and additional learning needs at an individual level to ensure that all our children's needs are met.

There is a wide range of issues which our children can encounter, which can create a barrier to their achievement if it is not identified and no support is given. These issues can affect their well-being, their attitude to school and their performance and achievement. This is what we mean by additional learning needs (ALN).

Speaking from a personal perspective, not long after starting school, the reception teacher had some concerns about my daughter's speech. Having brought it to my attention, we discussed a few options and we agreed it was best to refer her to the Speech and Language therapist. Following a relaxed and very child friendly assessment in Brecon, the Speech therapist then visited the school on a weekly basis to provide the necessary support my daughter required. This was very much a partnership approach by everyone involved and following the support and intervention, my daughter's speech improved.

Special Educational Needs (SEN) is a subgroup of ALN and requires some different or modified course of action at school. Should any specific needs be identified, there are a number of different interventions available which are chosen and are tailored to the individual child to meet their precise need.

To help raise awareness, we have been considering producing some form of map or diagram to show how needs are identified at Llangattock School and the process that is followed. If you feel this would be useful then please let us know. However at a very high level, the following process keeps the best interest of the child/learner at the centre at all times:



My reflections following recent meeting with SEN Coordinator

My first reflection following my latest visit was that we need to clone Mrs Marcel Smith! I am always taken aback by just how much is involved in the SENCo role. Even though the role is part time, there is a tremendous amount of time and dedication given. I was also struck by how hard Mrs Smith and the LSAs work to coordinate and support the ALN/SEN provision and the need to work in partnership with parents to ensure successful outcomes.

Perhaps not so surprising there is a complex paper trail involved in the process however the amount of paperwork involved did surprise me. Even so, the importance of ensuring the focus remains on the learner and the need to increase the amount of time spent with children is recognised. There is a constant juggling of priorities when undertaking interventions such as ensuring that the children are not taken out of key classes, and consequently impacting on other areas of their learning.

You may be surprised to know that resources for the intervention programmes are purchased by the school direct from its budget and from money raised by the hard work of the PTA, and not by the Local Education Authority. There is some loaning possible amongst the cluster schools but not enough to cover all needs.

Above all I came away thinking how very lucky we are to have a school that cares about every pupil and their needs **as a whole** – which is difficult and challenging with competing priorities. An example of this is where Powys LEA guidance sometimes conflicts with school policy ‘scoring’ i.e. at Llangatock we want to provide help and support to pupils sooner than the guidance suggests!

How can we improve our engagement to work in partnership with parents better?

Every child at Llangattock deserves the best standard of education possible. In order to provide this, the school needs to work in partnership with parents and other agencies. Sometimes this does not always run smoothly for a variety of reasons such as communication problems or differences of opinion.

This is where we need your help, input and opinion ...

How can we better raise awareness of the ALN/SEN provision in Llangattock Church in Wales School and engage more effectively with parents for the ultimate benefit of our children.

Please let us know your views. Some suggestions might be:

-  Do we need more ALN/SEN resources on the school website for parents and children to access?
-  Should we organise ALN/SEN workshops on a specific basis i.e. a dedicated session, or as part of another session e.g. parents evening?
-  Would a drop-in morning be useful for parents so that there is an opportunity to speak to the SENCo on an individual basis without making an appointment?

If you have any views on these or any other suggestions or questions please let us know. You can contact Mrs Marcel Smith on msmith@llangattock.powys.sch.uk or arrange to speak to her at school. If you have any further questions regarding this article or my role as ALN/SEN governor, you can contact me at sandraharris2014@outlook.com or catch me at school.

Wishing you a very Happy Easter and we look forward to seeing all the children for the

Summer Term!