

February 2017

Dear Parents and Carers,

Thank you for the fantastic response to our questionnaire just before half term. We had 94 responses which is nearly half the families in the school. There is a table attached to this letter which lists every comment we received; any comment that may have enabled identification of an individual child, parent or member of staff has been reworded to make it anonymous.

There were 41 positive comments about the ethos or feel of the school. You told us that you think the school is friendly, inclusive, supportive and a happy, safe place. You feel that staff have a good rapport with the children, encouraging and fostering confidence in them. One or two people said they felt there could be more parental involvement. School is very keen to work with parents. We firmly believe that children do best when parents and school work alongside each other. Do check book-bags for letters home, email for updates and the school website for information. If in doubt please contact the school office or your child's teacher who can tell you about what's going on in school and how you can be involved.

Over 40% of people mentioned the staff as the main strength of the school; descriptions such as fabulous, approachable, amazing, encouraging, friendly and caring, were typical. We totally agree with you that the major strength of Little Paxton School is the people who work here – they make the school what it is. Some of you picked out specific staff members for praise whilst a couple noted occasions where experience with a particular member of staff was not so good. It would be invidious to identify individuals here but your comments, whether positive or negative, will be passed on.

The high quality of teaching and learning was also mentioned by 40% of you. Several parents also said that school is very supportive and inclusive in meeting the needs of all pupils, including those with additional needs. If you have concerns that your child is not getting the support he or she needs please come and talk to the class teacher. The SENCo and the Inclusion Worker are both available to work with children and families to assess children's needs and ensure that appropriate support is offered.

A few parents mentioned that they felt the school could offer more (or more varied) PE and sports within the curriculum. This is a topic which the Curriculum and Standards Committee of the Governing Body is currently looking at. We would welcome any comments or observations you may have about this area.

There were mixed views about homework. Some feel the variety and depth of homework topics are good, while others feel that homework takes too long or is too difficult and would like more guidance as to what is expected. No child should be spending large amounts of time doing homework. If you feel your child is spending too long or is becoming distressed please speak to the class teacher. Homework is given for a variety of reasons (consolidating work covered in class, encouraging children to work independently, enabling children to study a particular area in greater depth) but it will not succeed in its goal if children don't understand what's required or are unduly worried about it.

You said you feel that whilst results are indeed good, the school is about so much more than this: you told us that all children feel valued and individual success is recognised in appropriate ways. Some of you asked for more explanation of the reward systems in school and also questioned how fair these are. It is almost certainly true that teachers vary in their propensity to give out rewards but our staff do not show favouritism; they work hard to ensure all pupils receive the education they need and deserve.

I'm sure the children could explain the rewards system far better than I can but here's my understanding of it. School uses a merit system: children are awarded a merit for something significant that is "merit-worthy" which can vary from child to child: what is merit-worthy for one might not be for another. These merits are collected on a card which once full results in a bronze award, the next full card gains a silver award and the third a gold award. Our children are so successful that many gain second, third or higher bronze, silver and gold awards during their time at school. Raffle tickets on the other hand are given much more freely for good behaviour, improved hand-writing, helpful attitude and such like. The raffle is drawn once week and the winner picks a prize. It is true that not everyone can win but the children like the recognition of earning a raffle ticket and accept that this is only a chance, not a guarantee, to win a prize.

12 people specifically said how happy their children are at school. On the other hand, 6 mentioned concerns about bullying. We fully acknowledge that there are occasions when children are quite nasty to other pupils. Although these are small in number, all incidences that are reported are taken very seriously and all children are given opportunities, during PHSE, circle time and assemblies, to reflect on what bullying means and how others may feel if they are treated badly. We have a strong anti-bullying policy which staff use to deal with issues that may arise. If you suspect your child is the subject of bullying it is imperative that you report this so it can be investigated.

There were a couple of other concerns about pupil well-being which will be passed on to staff, including several about the cleanliness and maintenance of the building and site. There have been some problems caused by staff illness recently which have been exacerbated by the lack of agency staff available (they too have had a higher than usual illness rate).

24 respondents said that good communication is a strength of the school, while 18 mentioned areas that could be improved. These included giving more notice of trips and events, giving more information about topic work, sending fewer emails. School tries to give as much notice as possible of what's coming up (see the diary dates section on the website) but sometimes this isn't possible or information is inadvertently omitted from newsletters. We apologise when we get it wrong but, on balance, feel it is better to send too much rather than too little communication.

About 20% of respondents praised the variety of extra activities, whether these are organised by the school staff or the LPSA. 6 people would like to see more. We support additional activities as these contribute to children's enjoyment and learning but this needs to be manageable for our staff. If you have great ideas for new activities do share these or why not join the LPSA and help put them into practice?

Whilst recent changes are seen as an improvement, school dinners are still causing concern. The school is looking at what alternative providers may be able to offer and we will update you with our findings and any decisions about possible future changes.

14 people identified good leadership and organisation among the strengths of the school, which is very gratifying. Thank you all for the considered responses you gave. Some topics which you raised may not have been covered in this letter but all your comments will be shared with the staff.

In your own words: Little Paxton is a fantastic village school with caring and brilliant staff and a strong emphasis on family and community involvement, where all are included and learning is engaging and fun. We would add to this that the school benefits hugely from supportive and interested parents and carers who are so willing to work in partnership with us.

Yours sincerely,

Penny Conway

Chair of the Governing Body