

Parents' Evening – 19 February 2018

Q&A

Raising Standards

Q: Why has WBC let this happen. Why wasn't there earlier intervention? How long has it been known the school is failing children?

A: In 2016 the key stage results were not a cause for alarm. The school ranked 4,442 out of 14,459 and there was no sign that such a dramatic decline would occur. The 2017 results were consequently a shock with the school now ranked 11,971 out of 14,624.

Since September the local authority has increased the level of support for the school, including school improvement officer, early years specialist and other resources within the children's services team. In addition, a National Leader of Education has been provided by the local authority to provide a focus on raising standards.

Following the departure from the governing body of several long-standing governors, the local authority applied to the Secretary of State to strengthen governance with the appointment of an IEB.

Q: Why has an IEB been brought in?

A: A governing body sets the strategic direction of the school, holds the school to account, and ensures that the finances are well managed. Governors have a responsibility to both support and challenge the school. Bringing in experienced governors can accelerate a school's progress through their knowledge and understanding. An IEB, has the flexibility to work in small teams and review multiple aspects of a school in parallel. For example, finances, safeguarding, staffing, communications, SEN and PPG provision, statutory compliance, pupil progress, etc

Q: How is progress evidenced?

A: This is done in a variety of ways. Teachers use an assessment system which records progress against learning objectives. The teacher's professional judgement is then supported by periodic tests that provides objective evidence of progress.

Between the tests the evidence of progress can be seen in pupil's work and their books. This will be a key piece of evidence for Ofsted. In addition, senior leaders and external professionals evaluate the progress made by pupils through learning walks, formal lesson observations and their own analysis of the children's books.

The IEB will also be asking for further external validation to occur, for example by the local authority, national leader of education, or an Ofsted trained Headteacher from another school.

Parents should ask teachers about their child's progress, and what they can do to support their next steps.

Q: There was a feeling that IEB was all about FS & KS1 and not considering KS2

A: Every child matters. Every child should make progress. It is the responsibility of the IEB, school and every member of staff to support every child in making progress. Often, we think about the less

gifted children, or those with special needs, but it equally applies to high achievers so that they are challenged to reach their full potential.

The first IEB meeting will focus on pupil progress across the school, looking carefully at all groups, all year groups and all subjects to ensure that no child gets left behind.

Q: KS2 - what is going to be done to improve outcomes for children at top of school and with SATS coming up in May - what are we doing to ensure these children are given the best opportunity to do well?

A: The school has put in place smaller classes and a range of interventions to specifically improve Year 6 outcomes. The IEB will ask the National Leader of Education for his guidance on whether there are additional steps that could be taken. The IEB will also be looking at every year group to understand where there are barriers to progress.

Q: Are the statistics and data just about our school or Wokingham/nationally as a whole?

A: This is about the children of Beechwood. Every single pupil deserves the best possible education so that they leave the school ready and able to continue their learning at secondary school.

We do, however, operate in a world where results are closely scrutinised and measured comparatively at both regional and national levels. Doing everything we can to ensure that every child makes expected or greater progress is the current priority. If we're successful in raising standards the league tables will look after themselves.

Q: Is a progress measure the distance travelled?

A: Yes. For KS2 children the school measures progress since KS1. There is an expected level of progress and at Beechwood our job is to ensure that every child meets these expectations and preferably exceeds them. For example, a child that was a high achiever at KS1 will be expected to remain a high achiever throughout KS2.

For younger children, they will be assessed when joining the school and their progress measured against this starting point.

Q: Are we measuring progress against the individual's ability or against a set attainment target?

A: The school performance will be measured by both attainment and progress. Typically, the league tables measure attainment, which doesn't reflect what progress pupils have made.

Ofsted will focus on progress; less so on attainment. At Beechwood we will also focus on progress, as that ensures we are doing the best for every child, by maintaining their rate of achievement from their starting point.

Q: Is the pupil progress an issue throughout the entire school or just at end of KS2?

A: Throughout the whole school

Q: Ofsted - what happens if we get negative outcome or if the IEB isn't successful?

A: If the school is rated 'Requires Improvement' we will be given time to demonstrate that we have the capacity and capability to make sustained progress and become a good or better school.

If the school is rated 'Inadequate' the likely outcome is that the school will be required to join an academy chain. Academisation is not inherently bad, but it will take the school's destiny out of its own hands.

If we have time, we will be able to show improvement and an upward trajectory. The IEB and NLE will be seen positively by Ofsted. However, the school is currently in a vulnerable position and we are expecting an inspection imminently.

Q: Are we going to change the "rounded" education currently provided that is valued by parents to concentrate on core subjects to tick boxes for WBC and Ofsted?

A: The initial priority will be to raise standards in core subjects so that the children are prepared for secondary and able to successfully access the curriculum.

We will not abandon the wider curriculum, school trips and other activities; these will be protected wherever possible. However, we must appreciate that if we don't raise standards in the core subjects the school will fall into special measures and forced to become an academy. The curriculum policy at this point will be determined by the academy chain.

The strategy is to focus on the core subjects; improve the quality of teaching; embed robust and consistent practices and build a solid, sustainable foundation from which the school can then broaden its curriculum.

Q: What will be done for more able pupils

A: Every child, including more able children, will be challenged. Our NLE is working with middle leaders to create a consistent planning process that includes differentiation and challenge for every pupil. Through the school's assessment system, we will be able to see the progress of high achievers. Parents should also ask their child's teacher about differentiation, challenge and resultant progress.

Communication

Q: How often will we communicate with parents?

A: The current intention is to publish a weekly newsletter that will be a combination of updates from the IEB and other school information. In addition, the IEB will be available at parents' meetings and we have a small mini-team tasked with developing an overall communication strategy.

As part of this we will look at some of the concerns raised such as the welcome parents receive when coming into school and how communication in both directions can be improved so that the parent voice is heard.

Q: Some (but not all) parents felt there was a lack of parental contact with teachers (e.g. start and end of day). How will this be addressed?

A: We will investigate by talking to staff in the first instance. There may be specific reasons why teachers are unavailable on certain days or other factors that we are currently unaware of. However, the IEB would agree with the general principle that parental access to teachers is a valuable way of understanding progress and supporting a child's learning. Once we have agreed a consistent approach with staff we will communicate this to the parental community.

We are also aware that there is a concern from parents of Foundation Stage children and generally about the drop-off and pick-up arrangements. We are looking at this to see if a solution can be found.

Q: Where and how will the IEB communicate with parents and how are we going to reassure the parents of children due to start in September?

A: We will hold further meetings for parents, so that we can provide an update on progress, and an opportunity to ask further questions. There is no reason why we can't extend an invitation to prospective parents as well as current parents.

If we have contact details for prospective parents, the IEB would be very happy to include them on the distribution list for newsletters so that they can see the rapid progress being made.

The most likely date for the next open meeting is early in the summer term.

Q: How are we going to publicise information particularly to wider community?

A: We will investigate this as part of an overall communication plan. Newsletters will be publicly available, either on the website, or from the school office and in the future, there is no reason why a wider audience could not be invited to open evenings.

Information for Parents

Q: Please could parents have more information about topics/subjects and expected outcomes, so parents can further support child's learning

A: We understand the requirement and so we'll work with the school and staff to improve the flow and quality of information. We will also look at good practice in other schools do, such as Frays Academy and other schools that the IEB members are associated with.

Q: Would it be possible to have planning before topics are taught via the website or Facebook so that we can support our children with their learning?

A: We'll look at how best to do this without requiring teaching staff to undertake additional administrative tasks. If this is something that can be done quickly and easily, or managed by the office team, then we'll certainly do our best to provide this information, but not at the expense of teaching time with the children.

Q: What has been put in place for Y6 who will be transitioning to secondary?

A: There are well established procedures for pupil transitioning between primary and secondary schools. As well as factual information on pupil's achievements or special needs, there are often

meetings between the schools to understand additional information that might help the transition process. Please ask the school if you need more information about transition arrangements.

Q: Concern was expressed about the varied quantity and quality of feedback to parents regarding progress.

A: This will also be investigated by the communications team so that we have a consistent approach and policy for feedback, regardless of class or year group.

Q: Will we get feedback about our individual children and will we get more opportunity to speak with teachers?

A: Yes. This will be provided more formally at parents' evening, but any parent should be able to ask to see a teacher or make an appointment through the school office to talk about their child.

Resources

Q: What are we going to do to ensure retention of staff?

A: The staff are our most valuable resource and we will do everything we can to retain talented and committed staff. The current situation at Beechwood provides a great opportunity for staff to take on more responsibility and develop as the school improves. We hope that by providing staff with the opportunity to personally grow and develop, they will stay at Beechwood.

Q: Can we have more/better teachers?

A: We already have a great deal of talent, and the National Leader of Education has commented on the enormous potential amongst the Beechwood team.

As part of the IEBs work we will be evaluating the current staffing structure and drawing on experience from other schools to make sure that we have the right resources in the right place at the right time. The current funding restrictions mean that there is no additional funding available, but it is perfectly possible that we can find more effective ways of working.

Q: Is there funding available for resources such as books.

A: The IEB is responsible for the school's finances in the same way as a governing body. We'll be working with the school business manager to ensure that the money we have is targeted where it will have the greatest benefit for the children. We'll also consider the teaching team's requirements. If they identify the need for additional resources and can show a positive impact, the IEB will prioritise the expenditure.

The new financial year also starts in April and this will provide an opportunity to take another look at the allocation of funds to support teaching and learning.

Q: How much impact will the IEB have on funding?

A: The IEB doesn't come with any additional funds, but we do bring experience of managing finances and looking how the monies available can bring the greatest impact. A review of finances is already in hand.

Accountability

Q: Who will be held to account and how?

A: Accountability runs from top-to-bottom through the Education system.

The IEB has been appointed by the Secretary of State for Education, and so ultimately the IEB will be accountable to the DfE and the Regional Schools Commissioner, who acts for the DfE at a regional level.

The Local Authority also holds the IEB and school to account through its School Improvement Board, which meets every half-term.

On a day-to-day basis the IEB takes responsibility for progress at the school, holding senior leaders to account. The IEB, like a governing body, is responsible for performance management of the Headteacher, and for ensuring that a robust system is in place across the school. The IEB will be undertaking regular reviews with the Headteacher, as well as looking more broadly at the overall performance management regime across the school.

Q: Where does the Head sit in all this and will he be held to account?

The Headteacher is the day-to-day operational manager and leader of the school. As the lead professional in the school the IEB will be looking for ways to take non-essential responsibilities away from the Headteacher so that additional time can be spent supporting teachers in the raising of standards.

The IEB initially plans to meet every two weeks, starting on March 6, with a review of pupil progress. The Headteacher will be held to account at that meeting for progress across the school.