

St Andrew's Parent Partnership Questions January 2017

Action points from our last meeting:

Year 1 and Year 2 - questions about homework. See questions asked below

Year 6

1. Can you let us know where the school is investing in equipment so we know where your priorities are?

We are updating the reading scheme (which is on-going),

In addition we have purchased;

- a book binding machine for classes to publish their own work
- playground equipment for both key stages
- listening stations for Reception and Year 1
- Art and craft equipment for all classes.

We will be discussing the next set of priorities with PTA chair soon once we have confirmed funds.

Our main priority is the update of the school laptops, three years ago we replaced the batteries, and however we now need to purchase new laptops.

2. Previous questions have sometimes been answered with a 'will look into' or 'will be in place for next term' etc. Would you be able to follow up on these questions so we know if they have been followed through?

We endeavour to follow up all questions where we can (this was seen in the last set of partnership questions at the top of the page). Some questions have been carried over to this terms meeting.

Year 5

1. What's happening with regards to e-safety week in Feb 2017? More specifically educating children about safeguarding issues on messaging, social media, musically, snap chat, Instagram, filming on school premises and posting on you-tube and Facebook. Is it possible to have E-safety sessions for parents?

E safety week is planned for w/c 06.02.17 which incorporates safer internet day on the 07.02.17

Social media usage will be incorporated into lessons.

E safety is also part of the PSHE curriculum.

We are currently investigating a company who can provide sessions for parents at a cost to the school/parents.

This may not occur during e safety week, as we are still waiting to hear back from them and e-safety week is a very popular time for them!

The NSPCC website provides lots of useful information for parents in this area.

The school website has useful information for parents. It can be located under 'key information'.

Filters on our school server do not allow for social media sites to access and we do not allow children to upload material in school time.

All pupil mobile phones are stored securely during the school day.

We urge parents to be aware of everything their child accesses online, and remind parents that some of these sites/apps have age restrictions to using them, e.g. Facebook requests everyone to be at least 13 years old before they can create an account.

2. Looking at the children's books at parents evening, it is clear that marking at the school has vastly improved and it's great to see the comments and further work the children do as a 'next step'. It is

*however disappointing not only for me but for my children who put in a lot of work at the weekend to complete homework (which regularly takes hours!) to only receive a tick. In fact, this term my children have been discouraged from doing their best work at home and have even included some deliberate spelling mistakes to see if they are picked up by the marking teacher!
Why the school marking policy can't be extended to homework to recognise the commitment that the children and families make to completing homework?*

It's lovely to hear the positive feedback from parents evening about the frequency and quality of the marking in pupils books. Class teachers spend many hours carefully planning, resourcing and marking the lessons taught to pupils, with most class teachers already working a 10-12 hour day, including weekends.

We're surprised to read of some pupils purposely making spelling errors in their homework as all of our pupils know that we don't correct every spelling in their work each time they make them. We're concerned that some pupils are spending hours doing homework tasks - this should not be happening and we obviously need to review what homework is being sent home.

Year 4

1. Homework - is there a school-wide policy for homework marking? The children have detailed marking in all their school books, linking to their LOs, with suggestions for improvement etc. While I appreciate that marking homework takes a lot of the teachers' time, it would still be very useful to have a little constructive criticism for the topic tasks (if only for the creative writing/fact-finding tasks) - especially as these tasks take a lot of time and effort at home to complete.

Please see above answer.

*2. How much time in a week is spent on outdoor activities, during play time and PE lessons? Do girls have space to run around or is the playground taken by boys playing football?
If agreed by the PTA to sponsor, will the school allow for a Yoga/Pilates teacher to come and teach the children about breathing, posture, importance of being active etc.*

Each class has a minimum of 2 hours of timetabled PE lessons per week, where skills are taught and practised.

During playtimes the playground is 'zoned' so that there are a variety of different games and activities taking place for both boys and girls.

Pupil sports leaders lead a variety of activities on a rota basis.

The school provides a specialist gymnastic/dance teacher for all pupils (year2-6) on a weekly basis.

We are rightly proud of the provision as we have just been awarded by the Department for Sport and Culture The School Games Silver Mark Award for our commitment to sport and physical activity (see January's newsletter).

Year 3

1. Homework - Maybe the topic homework involving art work could be set for the holidays when families have more time to source the materials and then supervise their children completing it?

Each parent has their own ideas of what type of homework they prefer, and so teachers try to set a variety of tasks for pupils to choose from and the order in which they wish to complete them, especially in topic tasks.

Following parent questions being sent in, our staff meeting this week is to look at what homework tasks were set last term and this term to see if there are opportunities to make it easier for parents to understand and therefore support their child. We will send this information out to parents in the next couple of weeks, rather than waiting for the next parent partnership meeting.

2. I noticed at the Xmas assembly parents on their phones and talking throughout, I couldn't hear the children. Could you send a reminder to all parents please?

We really appreciate parents making time to attend school events like this and pupils enjoy this too. It is, however disappointing when a few parents do not set a good example. It is important for all to remember that events led by Rev. Tim are an act of Collective Worship. At times such as these we ask that parents are respectful and keep their mobile phones out of sight. In addition we encourage parents to join with us in the prayers and songs.

Year 2

1. Please may the boys have a cooler alternative jumper for the spring summer and autumn months such as a V-neck navy jumper or navy cardigan? The girls already have the alternative of a navy cardigan so would be fair if the boys had this too.

If parents can source a boys navy cardigan the school has no objection to this.

2. Has there been any success as yet regarding sourcing a more cost effective Polo shirt?

Yes, we have found an alternative supplier of polo shirts and school jumpers with the logo stitched in. Our school business manager is arranging the final details before the new company is given the opportunity to come into school to meet with parents to make their orders. We hope to build the opportunity for parents to buy school uniform items directly from school via the Parentpay system. All of this information will be given to parents later this term and in plenty of time before the end of the school year when the school fully moves over to the revised uniform.

3. Is Year Two the last year the children have a nativity? Do they do anything for Christmas in Year Three?

Yes, the junior children contribute to the carol service and if they are members of the choir then they sing at various external events during December.
The pupils in years 3 and 4 perform at the Easter Service.

4. When are the Y2 SATs and do we have to do anything with our child to prepare for them?

The end of key stage assessments take place during May and June. The actual tests are administered in small groups and form a part of the overall teaching assessment for the year. All we ask parents to do is reassure their children that there is nothing to worry about and it is part of on-going assessment.

5. We are struggling a bit with homework, how much should my child be doing independently? Can you recommend suitable websites for each topic to find information? Thanks

Please see earlier answers about homework. We will also ask class teachers to recommend any pertinent websites for particular topics if applicable.

Year 1

1. Would the school or reps be able to mention this service, in view of getting a session at school sometime? It looks helpful with the online security with kids and general understanding for parents. <http://techmums.co/about/>

If parents find this site useful then it would be great to share it via the class WhatsApp group.

2. When events like cake sales happen to raise money for the school, is it possible on the last day to ask for money, instead of cakes?

This may work better for parents that want to contribute but don't have the time to bake or buy cakes. Also there might already be so many things to sell and this could avoid waste.

We are always extremely grateful for all donations to the school. The decision to hold a cake sale is usually made by the pupils via their School Parliament.

We appreciate that not all parents are able to provide home-made or bought cakes and a cash donation would be very welcome instead.

3. To raise money for the school, normally sweet or cake sales are arranged, for an idea, what about a pamper evening?

A pamper evening is a lovely idea, please speak to the PTA to see if it can be arranged or incorporated into another event.

4. Can there be any school signs put up along the road, such as 'school' or '20' signs?

A few mums, including myself missed an accident at drop off one morning. We crossed the road to get the bus and watched while green staff quickly spread grass over where blood spilt. I have explained this needs to be approved and can be a process, many things are denied too.

There are currently 2 school road warning signs as you approach the school from either side on Totteridge Lane. After consulting with the London Borough of Barnet, the school can request additional signage however, as we are situated in a conservation area, the Borough would need to consult and receive permission from Totteridge Manor Association, who own much of the land in the area.

5. Parent mail is very efficient and great for reminders, it makes it less for the reps to do, thank you. However the school emails are sometimes very late, for example on that morning after school drop off about infant sports day?

Emails are sent to parents via the ParentPay System as soon as possible. When communication is sent relating to an activity happening on the same day, this is usually a reminder e.g. 'Remember school finishes today at 2pm.'

Decisions about whether to hold a sports day or other outdoor events are solely based upon weather and ground conditions and the well-being of the pupils. We endeavour to let parents know as early as possible but cancelling an event based on weather forecasts, as you can imagine, is extremely difficult to manage. We appreciate the patience and understanding of parents when this happens.

6. Can the monthly newsletter be put in the notice boards outside for parents to read?

Yes absolutely.

7. May the St Andrews playgroup held in St Andrews church have a couple of fliers displayed in the notice boards? They are struggling with numbers and hopes it would appeal to parents with younger siblings?

Yes, please hand them into the office.

8. Can we have on the school calendar or some calendar system with different lunchtime/after

school clubs activities and also showing when begin & finish dates are please?

We will ask the office to update the school calendar when they receive the information from each of the club leaders. Some of our club leaders are faster at giving us this information than others!

Reception

1. Communication for Reception Parents- As most of the parents are first timers at school, communication is very important for the parents to understand what is going on, what is important for the kids, and how can the parents help most- some of the parents feel that the communication is not clear enough, and is not given enough in advance, this brings a bit of stress between the parents who rely on other parents to explain things better (for example, the whole process of switching to ParentPay- it was too close to the switch, and not enough explanation was given on how to do it- but emails about deadline kept on coming in.)

The school previously used Parentmail as our communication tool, who promised a whole host of improvements to their service. As parents who are not new to the school will verify, these promises never progressed any further, and before the end of the summer term, we had begun to look for another communication provider. When our new School Business Manager started, she took up the cause of complaining and holding Parentmail to account. They did not wish to make the changes they had previously promised and wished us to sign a new agreement with them. We were not happy to do this (having already decided to make the move to a new and more efficient service) and needed to commence our contract with Parentpay earlier than we planned. This is the reason why there was a short deadline for parents to sign up. We're sure parents understand this was a difficult situation for us to manage.

2. Parents would like to receive more communication over Tapestry, regarding the kid's activities or challenges, especially on the beginning of the week, and maybe ideas of how the parents can assist with those challenges.

Tapestry is a retrospective reporting and assessment tool that St Andrew's has chosen to invest money in. It is not statutory across all Reception classes but we see the value of it as a communication tool between home and school for each pupil. Speaking with Mrs Witton, she has requested that more parents get involved in replying/responding to observations that are posted online. Currently there are only 4-5 parents who make comments while only 1 parent shares observations from home. It's really helpful for Reception staff to know what a child is doing/can do at home. Please don't hesitate to ask Mr Hicks if you don't receive the weekly details of challenges for the week ahead (usually sent on a Friday for the following week).

3. Any update from previous meeting about joining the kids for lunch? Or tasting the kid's food- it is a mystery for many parents if their kids actually eat, and how much do they eat. Other schools around the area invite the parents at reception class to come in once in a while and read the kids a story- is that option available for St Andrew's Reception class?

Our current provider for school lunches is ISS who took over the contract from Barnet Catering in April 2016. As reported in previous partnership meetings, we have asked for opportunities for parents to taste school meals. Our cook, Rebecca, was happy to do this but ISS would not commit to this, despite several requests to do so. The school have some reservations about the systems ISS use and feel that there are better providers available who are more willing to work with schools and parents. We have therefore served notice to ISS that we will terminate our contract with them at the end of March and have shortlisted other catering companies down to three providers who will soon be meeting with a selection of pupils, staff, parents and governors to enable us to witness their

pitches.

We always endeavour to use parents to assist us in delivering our curriculum, please see the Reception staff if you feel you can contribute to a topic they are learning about. Any parents who regularly volunteer are required to apply for a DBS check as part of safeguarding procedures.

4. There is a constant mix-up with the kid's uniform, most of the time people find their missing items but a lot of the time not- it is a big headache for all parents, is there a better way to control that?

In Reception the pupils are encouraged to place any uniform items they remove into their individual trays so that they are easy to find at the end of the day. We also ask for **all** items to be labelled (including socks, gloves, hats etc.) so that when pupils forget to place it into their tray, staff can easily give it back to its owner. We will also ask Reception staff to place the Reception Lost Property box by their exit so that parents can have a check through it when collecting their child at the end of the day.

5. What are the rules regarding television at school, we are aware that it does happen, but understood it should mainly be for educational purposes, even that kids have reported watching plain TV or films- we understand that, but would like some clarification on how much, when, and age appropriate programs (a kid got scared from Shaun the sheep....)

Any film or tv programme shown to Reception is always rated a U which is age appropriate. We don't regularly show films or tv to pupils but will sometimes show clips or excerpts to pupils to assist them in their learning e.g. phonics sessions might have a clip demonstrating the sound used. It would be an unrealistic and inappropriate expectation for a Reception age child to sit for more than 15 minutes at a time!