

July 2021

Dear Parent,

A group of governors recently met with pupils from Y1, Y3 and Y6 (separately, maintaining 'bubbles') as part of our annual visit to the school. We have done something similar for several years to allow us to obtain pupils' thoughts on their education. We paid particular attention this year to their learning experiences during and after lockdown – in each group there was a mix of those who attended school and those who learned at home. The feedback we got was that:

- Younger pupils coped with learning from home better than older ones.
- The use of Google Classroom and the greater feedback from teachers on submitted work during the second lockdown was really beneficial to those learning from home.
- Older pupils spoke eloquently about the practical challenges of learning at home, but also about the strong support they had received from parents/ carers.
- Those who attended school during lockdown felt safe due to the measures put in place.
- There was a spectrum of opinion on the amount of work set during lockdowns, with some thinking it was too little, others that it was too much, but many feeling it was about right.
- All missed being able to mix normally with their friends.
- Those who learned from home were pleased to return to school after Easter.

In addition, Y6 pupils expressed concern about the education they have missed out on, and its possible impact as they transition to secondary school. We did our best to assure them – and I know Mrs King has also done so – that Y6 pupils throughout the country are in a similar position, and secondary schools are well-prepared to manage any shortfall. Importantly, the mock-SATS which they took a few weeks ago show that our Y6 is, in fact, in a strong position educationally.

The issue of missed education will likely be on the minds of parents in other year groups too. It is a clear focus for the school currently, and will remain so in the coming academic year. I hope you will be reassured by the following:

- Our curriculum is structured in such a way that topics are re-visited in subsequent years (at greater depth), so any gaps in understanding will be addressed by your child's next teacher.
- The transition discussions between current and next class teacher – which are always strong – will be in even greater detail this year, so pupils' strengths and areas for focus will be clear to their new teacher.
- We are fortunate to have very experienced teachers and TAs who will spot any areas of misunderstanding and address them.
- Teachers have indicated that in maths and English, accelerated progress compared with normal has been made since pupils returned after Easter.
- The school is making good use of the additional funding received to tackle any gaps.
- Governors will review progress carefully, and challenge the school if necessary.

My belief is that making up for the schooling that has been missed is a marathon, not a sprint. I am pleased that the school is not trying to 'hot-house' the children – that would likely add even more stress to what they have had to deal with over the past 16 months. Wellbeing is rightly a focus for us all; children learn most effectively when they are happy.

The whole school community – staff, pupils, parents and governors – has done a fantastic job in minimising infection risks, and as a result, and without wanting to tempt fate in this final week of term, we have avoided having to send classes home (apart from one year group for a few days at the beginning of January). I would like to offer my thanks to you for your diligence in this.

I mentioned earlier that the pupils we spoke with talked about the issues they faced with home learning. Those of us who no longer have children of school age will be aware of some of these challenges, but it was useful to hear about them first-hand. The pupils mentioned the impressive support that you gave them with their work and how you juggled your own work and other commitments. I know none of you was given much choice due to the circumstances we found ourselves in, but it's impressive nonetheless; I'm not sure I would have managed it as well as you.

Everyone has been through an unimaginably hard time, with levels of stress well beyond what is normal. Your children have shown remarkable resilience, for which much credit rests with you. I hope you manage some downtime over the summer – it's clearly well deserved.

Best wishes,

Miles Maxwell,
Chair of Governors, Ickleford Primary School