

Governors look back at the school year 2012-13

The role of the governing body is to be a 'critical friend', that is both to support and challenge the head teacher and staff to ensure we provide the very best education for our pupils in a safe and nurturing environment.

We had hardly had time to settle in to the new school year when a phone call from Ofsted, announced they would be arriving the next day, 18th September. The inspectors observed lessons, looked through data, children's work and teachers planning files as well as talking to Mrs Magiera, Mrs Parr, staff, children and governors. We were delighted that they concluded that we were a 'good' school, what a fantastic start to the school year.

Further recognition of the good practice at our school followed with news that we had been awarded the 'Basic Skills' Quality mark for our school's commitment to ensuring all our children are provided with opportunities and experiences to allow them to make good progress in literacy and numeracy.

In March we were delighted to hear that, working alongside a group of outstanding schools in Cheshire West, we had been awarded the status of 'National Teaching School', the first group of schools in Cheshire West to earn this accolade. Our 'Teaching School' role means we will be involved in delivering training and professional development for teachers and leaders at all stages in their career.

In April we also received our 'Family Learning Kite Mark', the first school in Cheshire West to do so.

Progress and attainment

As recognised by Ofsted, on average children start our school below National Age related expectations in most areas, but they are particularly low in speech, language and maths. However due to the good progress our children make in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, National Standard Assessments tests at the end of Key Stage 1 showed that the children are broadly in line with the levels expected at this age. Please refer to our Ofsted Report for further details.

At Key Stage 2 after significant improvement in the 2012 Standard Assessment Tests (SATs), we have seen a predicted decline in the number of children attaining the nationally expected levels in the 2013 SATs. The fuller picture provided by teacher assessment shows a higher attaining picture than that evidenced in the Government's performance data which will be published in December.

Our predicted attainment and progress levels for the end of Key Stage 2 over the next three years are on an upward trend as a result of the improvements in our school over the last three years.

The impact of improvements continues to 'narrow the gap' for vulnerable groups compared to their peers.

A world of opportunities

Governors visit school on a regular basis. Feedback on curriculum areas is provided by governors who have specific links to the different subjects.

The children follow their creative learning journey each half term with staff providing creative and inspirational 'Wow days' to start each journey and enthuse the children about the topic they are to focus on. In the 2012-13 school year children made a wide variety of visits from a year 5/6 trip to the Imperial War Museum North to find out about World War 2, to a year 3/4 trip to Chester Zoo as part of their Rainforest topic. Key Stage 1 children visited the seaside whilst reception and nursery had a trip to Knowsley Safari Park. Our school also welcomed a host of visitors who enhanced our children's learning experiences, including Rhema Theatre Company, a storyteller, Dogs Trust, Guinea Pig Rescue, 'Pets at home' and a Viking who visited year 5!

Many other opportunities have been grasped to ensure our children have chance to take part in a host of enriching activities. One of the highlights was the involvement of our Young Voices choir in a concert at the Manchester Echo Arena, with thousands of children singing in full voice it was a tremendous experience for children, staff and the parents who enjoyed the concert.

All year 6 children continue to have the opportunity to learn how to play violin or cello, with the chance to show what they have learned in the Junior Music concert at the University of Chester Academy Northwich (UCAN) at the end of the summer term.

The School Environment:

The Reflective Garden was built over the summer and autumn of 2012, this lovely quiet area encompasses features which represent our school values and our strong link with St Helens Church. The grand opening on 2nd November saw Reverend Alison cutting the ribbon, whilst children helped release white doves into the air. The opening made the front page of the Northwich Guardian.

With the help of some funding from our PTA, a dedicated Forest Schools area was set up next to the wildlife garden. Mr Green completed the special training so that he is now qualified to lead this outdoor learning experience which we hope to extend to a greater range of year groups.

Maintenance and improvement projects are ongoing to keep our buildings and outdoor environment in good condition ensuring our school continues to be a comfortable and attractive environment for our children's learning. Corridor areas were repainted and as well as foundation stage classrooms and nursery. New flooring was installed in these classrooms as well as the community room so that the areas could be cleaned more easily.

The office area was also reworked and improved in January to create more workspace for Mrs Foulkes and the office staff.

Making sure our children are safe and healthy

The safety and well-being of our children is paramount. As a school we are constantly looking at procedures to ensure we are following best practice in keeping our children safe, with our safeguarding policies reviewed at least annually. Mrs Parr, our safeguarding lead teacher is now qualified to lead training for staff and governors in this vital area.

Our Family Support Worker, Jackie Ellison, is available to help any of our families who need support liaising with our Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator, Mrs Johnson and other agencies when required.

Mrs Parr established a link with the 'Cheshire Young Carers project' so that we ensure that children in school who have the extra responsibility of caring for a parent or sibling at home are supported in the best way.

Bikeability and Swimming lessons are a vital way to help promote our children's health and safety. We also welcomed a theatre company into school who performed a workshop on Internet safety for Key Stage 2 children called 'Gripping Yarns'.

An increasing number of inter-school sports matches and events took place as well as 'Healthy Eating' and 'Walk to school' weeks which featured in the school calendar once again.

Making a difference

Our school has always taken part in events and activities which help others in our community or around the world including 'Red Nose Day'. Last year this work was given a new focus with the launch of the 'Make a Difference' project in January, led by teaching assistant Mr Mike Holden. Our whole school community was invited to think about how we could all make a positive difference to the people and world around us. Individual families helped in a variety of ways from one family organizing a collection of food for the Mid Cheshire Food Bank in January to a group of children entering and gaining sponsorship for the Junior Great North Run which took place earlier this term, all money raised on this occasion going to the Dogs Trust.

Each class also had their own 'Make a Difference' focus. Mrs Parr's class thought about the people in our community who give up their own time to help others, resulting in a walk around Northwich giving small thankyou gifts to those working in the local charity shops. Miss Merchant's class picked up litter in the church yard and Reception classes used recycled glass jars to make a present for their mums.

Family learning opportunities continued to develop, with more parents taking advantage of the variety of courses on offer in school, maths, science and internet safety were the themes of information evenings for parents.

Church and school working together

Our vicar, Reverend Alison is a regular visitor to school. Every Wednesday morning there is a collective worship assembly which is led by Reverend Alison or Graham Sheen, one of our foundation governors. Children and staff walk up to church for a special church service on the first Wednesday of every half term, continuing to build the strong relationship between church and school. Parents and carers are very welcome to attend these services and join members of the church for refreshments after the service. Many special events in the Christian calendar are celebrated by our school in St Helen's Church too, Easter, Harvest and Christingle services were very successful and attended by many parents.

The strength of Religious Education teaching and the core Christian Values of our school were recognized when we were awarded the silver RE award.