

Governors Report to Parents

This is my last communication to the Russell community as chair of governors. After 3 years in the post and 8 years as a governor, it is time for me to hand over the reigns to a new chair, Richard Gallagher.

Although life now feels very different to the beginning of the year, it has been another year dominated by Covid. It is fair to say that the Russell community has been hit hard by several waves of Covid leading to high absences for both staff and children. This put immeasurable strain on staff but I think you will all agree, they always rallied round working relentlessly to ensure minimal impact on the children.

After 2 very disrupted and difficult years, this year's plan was to continue to implement a "recovery curriculum" for all our children and to prioritise the mental health of the whole school community. This strategy has been very successful and the children have made excellent progress with their learning. The reports to governors through out the year on the children's attainment and progress have been extremely positive. In line with the rest of the country, much work has been done around mental health and this will continue to be a priority going forward.

Behaviour around the school is excellent, demonstrating that the children feel safe, settled and happy. We have slowly been able to reintroduce visits and visitors into school which enrich the children's learning experience; most recently welcoming all parents and carers into school to enjoy our traditional Sports Day.

Schools are usually able to compare their results against national data. However, as a result of Covid this has not been possible. To ensure that standards remain high and that we continue to improve, Mrs Walker and her team have sought external validation from educational experts in several areas:

Early years provision; Curriculum; Needs of our disadvantaged children; SEND; Governance; Safeguarding; Health and Safety.

The reports have all been very positive and complimentary of both the work being done at Russell and the Russell team.

I want to thank Mrs Walker and her fantastic team for another exhausting but successful year. They could not have worked harder and I am sure are more than ready for the summer break!

I will be very sad to say goodbye to Russell, it has been part of my life for 10 years but I know I leave it in very capable hands. When I arrived at Russell, it was a much smaller school, even with some split year group classes. It is now a bustling and busy, 3 form entry school but the heart of the School, the Russell way, is very much the same and I am immensely proud of this.

Nicolette Ford
Chair of Governors

Finance and Resources Sub-Committee

2021/22 will end with the school being in a financially strong position which is testament to Mrs Walker and the rest of the team's great work in what has been an unpredictable, difficult and challenging year for everyone.

Importantly we have been able to support Mrs Walker's staffing strategy such that we enter 2022/23 with the strongest complement of teaching, support and admin staff we've ever had at Russell Lower. With the school now at its maximum number of pupils it is encouraging to know the finances work with the increased staffing being in place.

We have continued to improve the school in many ways including a significant amount of work with regard to making the school fully compliant. We've bought new ipads and 'clever touch' boards plus we've moved broadband provider and had a new digital phone system implemented along with new cladding for the outside of the school.

We predict the challenges will continue into the next school year as we look to ensure children can catch up on missed learning therefore many of the various interventions will continue with new initiatives such as Inspiring music being introduced. We are not immune to significant cost of living rises some of which we will need to pass on, however wherever possible we are keeping these to the minimum possible

Well-being for everyone continues to be a high priority going forward and we have supported a number of initiatives this year and will continue to do so next year as well.

Paul Birley
Chair of Finance and Resources Committee

Curriculum, Learning and Standards Sub-committee

This academic year has been another impacted by COVID; as a result, pupil and staff absence has continued to be a familiar challenge throughout. This would naturally have an effect on the children's learning and the delivery of the curriculum. While illness and self-isolation have been beyond anyone's control, taking rearranged holidays in term time has unfortunately been a common feature that has further affected Russell's attendance rate. The school has worked tirelessly on the recovery curriculum and is striving to give the pupils the best opportunity for academic progress and all round well-being in this unique period. For the children to be able to get the most out of this, it's imperative their attendance is as full as possible.

Despite the challenges that 2021/22 has brought, the assessment data presented to governors has been hugely impressive, displaying high levels of pupil progress, with targets being met or heading in very positive directions. All the staff, including Mrs Walker's 'Reading Army' have done an incredible job to enhance the children's learning across the curriculum. Curriculum developments, investment in technology and staff professional development have all contributed too.

The children moving on from Russell are well-placed to flourish in their next setting. And those continuing and joining in September have an extremely dedicated team of staff with carefully considered curriculum plans in place to take them even further next year.

Richard Gallagher
Chair of Curriculum, Learning and Standards Sub-committee