



Governor Newsletter

SIR JOHN BARROW SCHOOL

March 2024

Succeeding, enjoying,  belonging for all SJB pupils!

Greetings, Parents and All!

Good news:- this term we have appointed a new Co-opted governor!

A very warm welcome (drum roll please) to Mr Richard Palmer, Richard lives locally and is a finance professional. Pupils and staff are looking forward to meeting Richard once the statutory appointment process is complete.

Read on to find out what else governors been up to this term....!

1. Confirmed success (national pupil performance data, 2022-2023 academic year)

Fantastic phonics and reading results!

Question: Do you know your f... from your ph... sounds? Your children do!!!

Governors are delighted with the phonics results in Key Stage 1, and improved reading attainment at the end of Key Stage 2, for all (and particularly disadvantaged) pupils.

A priority for last year was to improve phonics attainment for KS1 children, to address the impact of missed schooling during the CV-19 lockdown. The strong outcomes are testament not only to the hard work and commitment of staff, pupils and parents but also the focus and rigour that the Little Wandle Phonics programme provides. By committing to structured cycles of focused practice, intervention and more practice, we have seen tremendous progress by Early Years pupils, as reported [here](#).

Ongoing cycles of structured learning and practice, supported by staff intervention and guidance is made possible by *Pupil Premium funding*. Schools receive this from the government; the amount is based on the number of pupils who are recorded as eligible for free school meals, or have been recorded as eligible in the past 6 years. Governors are most pleased (we are so totally committed on delivering [SJB's vision and values](#) !) that the impact of SJB's strategy for the use of this funding has benefitted ALL pupil groups – ALL pupils have made progress. Well done everyone!

Please note: To find out more about eligibility for free school meals click [here](#). Discrete and confidential advice on the application process, if required, is available from school staff. Pupil Premium funding provides a top-up to the school's delegated budget. In these times of limited financial 'stretch', this additional money makes a huge difference to the school's teaching capacity and resources. If your child is eligible for free school meals (this also includes vouchers

for meals during the school holidays), they will remain eligible until they finish their primary school education. Well worth the application time for your family *and* all in school....?!

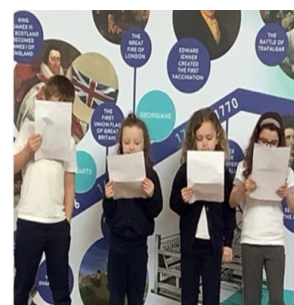
As Pupil Premium and English/Phonics Governor Lead, I was particularly impressed at seeing reading 'live', when I took on the role as one of the judges at the Reading Competition on 6th March (see picture and more on the [blog site](#)). Pupils from all year groups read extracts aloud to the whole school, and the support and excitement shown by the children reflected the focus that school have on reading! It was extremely difficult to choose the winner on the day - a big thank you to everyone for their help with the preparation and efforts on the day!

It is important that in an increasingly 'digital' world we maintain the benefits of reading. If in any doubt, click here for the [Book Trust, 2024](#)'s documented evidence that children who read are more likely to:

- Be happier, healthier and experience better mental wellbeing and self-esteem
- Do better at school and make more progress against the curriculum
- Develop empathy and creativity
- Have a significantly higher chance of economic success in their 30s

I end with the wonderful thought that the Easter break poses a great opportunity for all family members to read (and together) for pleasure!

Charlotte Wraith, Pupil Premium Governor & Chair of Provisions Committee



2. Barriers affecting success

Attendance and Persistent Absence

The Governing Body at Sir John Barrow, like those at many schools and indeed the Department for Education, are closely monitoring school attendance. Since the pandemic there have been concerns that school attendance has not recovered to the pre pandemic level and that as a result pupils are missing out. As governors, we are responsible for ensuring due regard and compliance with statutory school attendance at SJB.

The government's key measure of attendance is based on what is called 'persistent absence', this is when a child is absent for 10% or more of the school sessions to that point during the year, or 19 days of absence over the full academic year (September to end of summer term in July).

19 days may not seem a lot, but it is nearly three weeks (four school weeks) of missed school. So why does this matter? Although school seems to be such an important part of a child's life, if you actually break the time in school down over a full calendar year a child spends a little over 14% of the available hours in school, so losing any of that can be significant. There is lots of evidence that lower attendance is linked to lower levels of attainment and has even been shown to impact on children's behaviour.

Missing a block of three weeks can mean that pupils miss out on learning in entire areas of the curriculum. Regularly missing the odd day here and then means there are gaps in learning which may never be filled hindering the child's future learning in a particular area. So regular attendance matters and governors routinely oversee that the SJB [Attendance and Punctuality Policy](#) is consistently applied to ensure good attendance is maintained. Non-attendance is always followed-up by school as part of our safeguarding procedures. Governors commend the support and efforts made to overcome barriers/resolve any attendance difficulties. However, parents please note, if there is no improvement to persistent absence, the LA is now actively issuing fixed penalty notices (one per parent per child) and/or legal proceedings.

We all know that sometimes absence cannot be avoided because of illness, medical appointments and so forth. Parents are encouraged that if they would like to discuss any

aspect of their child(ren)'s attendance, it is definitely worth contacting school and talking to staff so that the impact of any necessary absence can be minimised and appropriate support put in place.

John Barrett, Chair of Governors.

3. Skills for future success

Emotional Wellbeing



Have your children been talking about bees this term? We hope so!

Bees are the symbol we are using to think about Emotional Well Being (EWB) at SJB. The term started with pictures of bees all around school - with no explanation - to get the children curious. Since then there have been assemblies about feelings, and a 'feelings' picture competition over half term. Bee 'stickers' are also given out for behaviour that supports emotional wellbeing.

The picture competition was the idea of school council. I had the privilege of meeting with them to think about how we are going to help all children at SJB learn about feelings. We spent time discussing what 'feeling' words would be important to learn. These are being finalised now, with opportunities for all the children across the school to input into this....., so expect to hear more about this next term!

You may be wondering why we are doing all of this? Maybe it doesn't seem as important in school as learning English, maths, science etc? **We think that it is at least as important.** And the government agrees. For example if you are feeling upset, angry, confused etc., it is very hard to concentrate in school and learn anything. Also, if we help children to recognise and start to manage their feelings when they are young, these are skills that can help them throughout their lives.

After the last governor newsletter, we got another volunteer for our staff/parent EWB group which was brilliant. We would be really happy to have input from more parents, so let school know if you are interested. Whether you want to come to group meetings, or would be happy to reply to short surveys, or get involved in other ways, just let school know. The government's agenda for schools includes us sharing information with parents about well being too, and so it is really important that we get views from parents about what would be helpful.

We have lots more work to do on this agenda - this is just the very start. So watch this space and look out for the bees!

Liz Bolt, Mental Health Governor



4. EnJoying

School meals and lunch times

As a governing body we take a keen interest in the food our children eat at SJB. Our cooking team does an amazing job providing a range of tasty and nutritious food that allows the children to try new things, while having a fun lunchtime experience eating with their friends. As always, feedback allows for growth, so we want to encourage parents to share the feedback they receive on lunch times in school. We are interested to know if your child enjoys mealtimes at SJB; does your child enthuse or rage about the meal options and why; what are the specific reasons why some pupils opt out of taking school meals; could any changes be made to improve pupils' enjoyment of their lunch time experience; would parents/carers be interested in a taster session and join their child(ren) for lunch at SJB sometime in the future?

Initially, we like to take an informal approach – and **request as many parents as possible to just send me an email with the positive and negative (with possible resolutions to these, if possible -**

this would be most helpful) aspects of school meals/lunch times as voiced by their child(ren). My email address is below. Your responses (anonymised) will be discussed by the Resources Committee; I will report back outcomes in next term's governor newsletter.

Becky Williamson, Resources Committee member. Email: williamson@sjbarrow.cumbria.sch.uk

5.



Inclusion

The agenda for the Governing Body meeting on 05.03.2024 included items that focused on nurturing respectful relationships between staff, pupils, families and the community. Governors' objective is to embed an inclusive culture where everyone feels valued and accepted as individuals, and able to contribute to improved learning outcomes. For example, we discussed:

1. Approval of a 'refreshed' school Equality Policy, objectives and four-year action plan. These provide a framework to support our commitment to valuing diversity, tackling discrimination, promoting equality and fostering good relationships. They also ensure that we continue to tackle issues of disadvantage and underachievement. All will now become operational. Grateful thankyou to Mrs Fletcher for her dedication and commitment to progress this important work.
2. Progress with school priority improvement areas, including some refinements based on current success indicators. Governors are pleased that best teaching strategies and resources are shared across school and staff expertise is recognised and deployed to best outcome. This includes recognition by the Local Authority in seeking (on a temporary basis) Mr Maher's specialist knowledge to help improve maths teaching at a secondary school.
3. A survey recently completed by all staff, with relevant questions designed by the SJB Emotional Wellbeing Team that focused on their wellbeing and workload. In the past, surveys have been generic and time-consuming but not necessarily helpful in making a difference. The (anonymised) results will form the basis of the new school wellbeing policy; governors are keen to respond as proactively as possible to suggestions that positively support staff welfare.

Karen Little, Clerk to SJB Governing Body.

6. Challenges we face

Finance

Despite being keen to 'rise to a challenge', SJB governors (in line with others in schools nationally) are struggling to manage the school budget with the spiralling cost of living. Finances are now stretched so tight that difficult decisions have to be made to prioritise Investment between competing needs. We (parents, teachers and governors) all want the best outcomes for our pupils; we now all need to work together to minimise the impact of the recession on their education, school life experiences and future life choices.

In response to this, SJB Governing Body has appointed me as the lead for fund-raising initiatives and activities to generate new income. I would really welcome any suggestions, ideas or leads on how to achieve this. So, please to ask, with 'your thinking caps on' – I would be very grateful if you could send me your thoughts and/or offers of help; all welcome, no matter how much or 'wacky'! Maybe you have skills to organise events or a lot of experience in fund-raising, or you are able to provide raffle prizes or have time to help with the tasks involved.....do let me know, I look forward to hearing from you.

Louise Potts, Resources Committee member. Email: LPotts@sjbarrow.cumbria.sch.uk

Parents, friends, members of the community - please feel very welcome to get in touch at any time... all feedback is genuinely appreciated. We are particularly keen to hear from anyone with the skills, interest and commitment to join the Governing Body and be actively involved in the strategic leadership of the school. We continue to have vacant governor roles – just contact John Barrett (Chair of Governors) direct to discuss how you could get involved: Email: jbarrett@sjbarrow.cumbria.sch.uk

We wish everyone an enjoyable and restful Easter break. Do keep a lookout for bees - come April, as the first flowers start to bloom, the bees will start to come out to forage across Ulverston, but there will definitely be more



The SJB Governing Body