

NEWSLETTER for Blackwell First School



Blackwell First School,
St. Catherine's Rd.,
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B60 1BN
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Dear Families,

Purple Class learning about the False Wall at the British Museum- February 2017

Here we are half way through the year already! It is a good time to reflect on our work this year. As a school we work hard to continually improve the school both in terms of experiences for the children and learning outcomes. OFSTED no longer routinely inspects schools that have been judged Outstanding unless there are significant changes in data or safeguarding. We do not feel that it is supportive to us as a school to be left without external scrutiny, and we therefore request external reviews each year. Our most recent one took place at the beginning of February and, in line with our school development priorities for this year, the focus was on the areas listed below:

- Progress of lower attaining pupils to help them close the gap between their learning attainment and their peers;
- Reading progress across the curriculum in line with new higher national expectations and
- Quality of teaching and learning across the school over time.

We are delighted that the evidence collected by the team reviewing the work of the school, considered that **all evidence available on the day clearly supported an outstanding judgement for the school**. A suggestion for improvement was made:

- Continued focus on progression in mental maths for some lower attaining learners, using models and images to support at all ages.

Below are some of the judgements and comments from the lead inspector:

...adults are highly skilled and have high expectations... ...there are excellent routines so that no learning time is lost... ...as a result of interesting and exciting activities, children are enthusiastic and very well engaged...

...standards are high, with high quality work in children's books. Progress is very good for both more- and less-able, because all children are well-challenged... ...the highly effective, strategic leaders of the school have devised well-targeted strategies for maximising pupils' progress...

...independence is very well-promoted across the school... ...relationships are a particular strength... ...marking and feedback are strong, with very good 'closing the gap' comment which help pupils to know how to improve their work...

...there is exceptionally good use of open-ended questions, encouraging open-ended thinking and reasoning to deepen learning. There is excellent use of learning vocabulary in discussion...

...learning is carefully personalised and, because pupils are known very well, there is excellent individual support for pupils at risk of underachieving... ...teaching assistants are very well-deployed. They provide good quality teaching and make a significant impact on the progress of the groups and individual pupils they support...

We continue to work to improve the quality of education and will focus on our area for improvement after half term.

Parent Consultations - keeping you informed

As we move into the fourth half term of the year, we can reflect on the children's progress so far this year. It is time for Parent Consultation meetings and letters will be sent home after half term for you to book appointments. These times are opportunities for routine appointments to consider the children's progress so far this year, share information regarding their social and emotional development and any other relevant information that the teachers or families find useful to share. If you have specific issues that will require further discussion, the classteachers may advise you to book a separate appointment so that they do not keep other parents waiting unnecessarily. School termly reports will also be sent home following this consultation and these are designed to keep you informed of your child's individual progress and targets.

As a school we aim to keep you informed about how to support your child and also about their progress through:

- School newsletters that keep you up to date with school events as well as educational news;
- Class newsletters and homework sheets that share the learning in each class so that you are aware of learning in all curriculum areas each half term;
- Early Years workshops;
- Termly reports (2 short and 1 long) that provide information on your child's progress in line with the assessments teachers complete in school and
- Termly parent consultations.

We know that a small minority of parents feel that they would like further information on their child's progress and we urge parents to make appointments with teachers if this is felt necessary outside of regular meetings (see feedback from parent questionnaires below).

SPORT AND ARTS

Sporting Success for our 'Green Class Wake and Shake Champions'. They won the half termly intra school competition today. Well done.

Purple Classes 'Tinkle Tinkle Tree' has been nominated to be sent to Worcester Cathedral as part of the annual 'Voices and Visions' event.



COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

After half term we will be focussing on Caring and Friendship, with a focus on anti-bullying. We will use pieces of art to demonstrate these values and discuss how people make a difference through their behaviours.

London trip

What a pleasure it was to take the children to London this week. The three classes behaved extremely well, worked hard whilst in the museum and had a super time asking and answering lots of questions. It was hard to believe that we were seeing ancient artefacts from over 5,000 years ago. The children were so engaged by seeing the mummies and finding out more about the different stages of mummification. Rather than falling asleep on the way back, they talked constantly about what they had seen and learned.

Well done to Purple Class for their super family assembly as a highlight of the topic on Egypt. Your singing, music, dancing and explaining was fascinating and showed how much you have enjoyed the topic.

Well done to Miss Steele, Miss Kuriger and Miss Townsend for planning such a splendid day.

Feedback from parent questionnaires

Thank you to all of those families that filled in our annual questionnaires (55%). This was an increase on last year which is great.

We are very grateful for your positive comments as they ensure that we continue to focus on what we do well. From the responses we received, the following aspects were considered as strengths of the school.

Strengths (98% or more agree/ *=100% agree)

- My child is happy*
- My child feels safe*
- My child makes good progress at Blackwell
- My child is well looked after at Blackwell*
- My child is taught well at Blackwell
- My child receives appropriate homework for their age
- Blackwell makes sure its pupils are well behaved*
- Blackwell deals effectively with bullying*
- Blackwell is well led and managed*
- Blackwell responds well to any concerns I raise
- I receive valuable information from the school about my child's progress
- Would you recommend this school to another parent*

Area for development

Although all areas had over 98% of parents agreeing with the statements (and of these over 90% were strongly agree), there was a slightly lower percentage of strongly agree for the following areas:

- My child receives appropriate homework for their age
- I receive valuable information from the school about my child's progress

We have been particularly pleased that a large percentage increase in satisfaction regarding homework has been achieved as we have focussed on this area over the past three/four years. We now consider that we offer a wide range of **options**, from reading, work on all curriculum subjects, work that can be completed independently, work on the School Wall (older children), worksheets for those who want children to work on homework without support and projects to complete with families. Often the process of talking to your children about their learning is more valuable than anything else and the homework sheets are a great way for you to know what is being taught in school for that half term. It is important to remember that we value reading practise most for the younger children and that all other homework is **entirely optional**. It is this flexible approach that we believe offers all needs something. When some parents respond saying that we don't offer enough homework and others say there is too much, then you can imagine it is not an easy aspect to develop to suit all needs. This is why we have created a flexible approach that is optional until Year 4 when we have compulsory homework in order to prepare the children for middle school.

Sometimes there are individual issues that arise from questionnaires, that are not typical school issues, and I always urge parents to speak with me directly so that any particular issues can be addressed throughout the year.

Our area for development will be about the information we share with you regarding your child's progress. This had never been an action for us in previous years until last year and as a result we adapted our 'Home reading' to suit and I plan on meeting with some parents as part of an 'Information Sharing' working party and asking them their opinion of home/school learning links in order to further improve our links. Your suggestions will be considered (as long as they are realistic for teachers who spend all day with thirty little people!).

As this was never previously an issue and the families of children in our older classes overwhelmingly agree that we provide valuable information, (100% in both Yellow and Blue Classes) it appears that, as our systems have not changed, we feel that expectations have changed amongst a few families at the younger end of the school. We have been made aware of the significant changes in Nursery information shared through the use of online assessment tools that inform parents. This is not an avenue we will pursue as, having investigated its use and visiting schools and settings where it is used, we feel that the use of such assessment and feedback to parents, significantly detracts from the time spent teaching and interacting with the children in the classrooms. It is the skilful adult child interaction that leads to the most progress for children in school.

Currently we meet parents each term to discuss progress and send home termly reports. We also send home class newsletters and homework sheets (Years 1-4) that help you understand what is being taught in school for a particular few weeks. On the school website there is a wealth of information regarding the school curriculum and day. We look forward to finding any improvements that we are able to offer that are valuable.

If you have any further comments to add to the home/school learning link discussion please send them to the school office, marked for the attention of Mrs Moss.

Thank you to all of you who were able to fill in the questionnaire.

Music lessons

A number of children receive recorder, flute and piano lessons through Worcestershire Youth Music. Please remember that children need to practise at home, just like with their reading. If parents decide not to continue with lessons, a full term's notice must be given as we pay for a term's worth of lessons in advance.

After Easter, recorder and flute lessons will continue with Miss Foster, violin lessons will continue with Mrs Grainger and piano lessons will be taught by Mrs Moss for the summer term.

Letters will be sent home confirming costs for the summer term next half term.

Concert

A joint concert between recorder, flute and the choir will take place on the last day of term, 7th April at 8.45am. Families of those children who sing in choir or receive music lessons can come along and listen.

If children arrive after the main gate has closed and there is not a member of staff on the gate, please sign them in to the main office and they will access the building via the main office. This is for safety reasons.



British Museum-
February 2017

