

Dear Parents,

For my weekly bulletin this week I would like to do something a little different. Twelve months ago the school held a meeting with parents to explain that Wimborne Academy Trust (WAT) were being recommended as sponsors for Emmanuel. We used that opportunity to listen to the valid concerns many parents were expressing and we kept a record of the questions asked. Twelve months later there are so many positives I feel this is a good point to reflect on what has been achieved. To do this I will use the questions raised from the parental information evening.

Thank you for prompt responses to the parental Ofsted questionnaire. This in itself is hugely positive as it stands, and thank you for your additional comments. The deadline for returning these questionnaires is Monday 19th November.

Q. We've heard a lot about English and Maths, which is important, but the Ofsted report was not critical of these areas. Why have you not looked at Science? Pupils with SEN? Staffing is constantly changing.

Results at the end of key stage 2 were not good enough - the number of pupils achieving ARE (age related expectation) or Greater Depth or making enough progress from their Key Stage 1 (end of Year 2) totals was too low. This is why we have rightly had to focus heavily in these core areas. As a result of everyone's excellent work we expect our best ever results, by some margin, this year and this is backed up from our recent Mock SAT tests. That said we have in no way neglected other areas. The joy of a good middle school curriculum is that from Year 5 onwards all pupils benefit from the best primary practice as well as middle school enrichment involving all aspects of the curriculum.

In Science, the appointment of Mrs Etheridge has given the pupils the excitement and flair in a department that should provide the 'wow' factor. We also moved Mr Rangdale into the department and so the teaching has improved immeasurably. Alongside this Mrs Etheridge has completely re-written the curriculum to match knowledge and skills development; she wants to educate scientists and for me, seeing the excitement of our pupils, is the most satisfying change!

In addition to this, the PTFA funded approx. £1,000 for purchasing new material for the department and the pupils have risen to the challenge of working through a more demanding curriculum. This term we also invested in ExamPro, which provides material the department can use to test that the pupils have learnt and can apply their learning.

Outcomes for two vulnerable groups across the school had also been too low for a number of years. Mrs Ponchaud has been working closely with Mr Timmins, Mr Brenton and Mr Brennan identifying barriers to learning and putting together interventions to close the gap. By the end of this half-term we will be able to complete a 'plan - do - review' of these interventions.

In her role as Pupil Premium (PP) Champion, Mrs Anderson has set up a mentor system to engage with the pupils. Collecting anecdotal data at this stage we have seen the pupils more engaged in their education together with a feeling of greater interest and motivation to do well.

The appointments of Mrs Weir and Mrs Richardson into year 5 and the transition work with the First Schools has resulted in pupils settling quickly. This is down to the great work by Mrs Binning in her new role as Pastoral Support Worker. Mrs Weir, Mrs Richardson and Mr Brennan, alongside Mrs Prestage, form a formidable year 5 team. Moving Mrs Robertson and Mr Cotton into year 7 has strengthened the teaching of KS3 English, DT, Humanities and Wellbeing. This week we had an Ofsted trained inspector in school looking especially at Year 5 and KS3 and she found, as have other visitors, that the school is now operating at a good level in all these previous areas of weakness.

Q. I picked EMS for my children because of the way it feels and looks, but now I hear you have had 3 skips. It seems you are trying to make EMS different and I am concerned that the feel and ethos of the school is being lost.

# EMS WEEKLY BULLETIN

I have provided you with regular updates regarding the decorating of the school, both classrooms and corridors. Only this week at Parents Evening many of you commented on how sharp and professional the corridors looked. The clean decoration in addition to the high quality displays are really impressive. The art work on display continues to go from strength to strength under the close guidance of Mrs Thompson. There is also an increasing amount of pupils' writing on display.

Through a greater emphasis on our three core values as a Church school, our new House system, the establishment of the EMS Way and revamped reward system there is a real buzz in school. Change can feel threatening and create uncertainty but I know we have created a fantastic ethos and culture in school. This is based around the fundamental principle that has always been at the heart of the school - the care we show our pupils. We have just upped our game in the academic side to complement this.

Q. Homework has been erratic and in some cases non-existent.

This is always a 'sticky' point for every school, some parents say there is too much, some that there is not enough. I agree that in the past we have not 'done what we say we will do' and homework is part of this. The homework policy which includes the timetable is posted in the school website (under the Parents tab) and I when I have completed spot-checks they have always been consistent.

Q. Query over staffing. Regular staff have been missing. What can be done about it? My child's Year 7 class has not had their tutor all term and not had the same English and Maths teachers. My child has switched off and feels disaffected.

Quite understandably this was very unsettling for our pupils last year and I thank you for your patience through this period. I am sure you will agree the team is, in my opinion, stronger than it has ever been in my time at EMS. In addition to this, the appointment of Mrs Williams and Mrs Thorn as Cover Supervisors means that we have capacity to cover short term illness and form CPD development without the pupils' learning suffering. We have not used agency staff this academic year.

Another key factor here is we have moved staff so that they are teaching their strength and in areas where they can have the greatest impact. It is not always about bringing in new people, equally important is providing people with the right conditions to thrive. We have delivered on this. For those who follow the updates of the School Action Plan you will see we have met our ambitious targets for teaching so far this year.

Q. I feel Year 8 have been left alone and ignored. My child is bored at school.

This was a real problem last year and the changes we made in staffing have been specifically designed to address this. In addition to moving good staff into KS3 we have slightly increased the time for English and Maths to ensure pupils are Upper School ready as without these core skills they cannot thrive in any subject. The teaching teams are strong and Mr Rangdale is based fully in KS3 providing strong and consistent leadership.

Our data shows pupils have made good progress from KS2 but we are aiming to ensure they match their KS1 platform. This is quite a challenge and much time this year has been focused on this. When I visit classrooms, our parental survey and our interview with students all tell me that the vast majority of pupils are enjoying school and experiencing challenge. The other clue is that we have had almost no concerns about pupil behaviour this year which is dramatically different to twelve months ago.

Q. The secondary school feel has gone, and the school now feels like a first school?

We are a middle school and the key to our success has to be the balance we provide to this unique age group. To achieve this we are working as close as we have ever done with the Upper Schools. This work is part of the work of WAT to collaborate towards an effective curriculum across all Key Stages.

The way in which we expect our Year 7 and 8 pupils to conduct themselves and their learning attitudes reflect the attitudes required at Upper school. Also, as already explained we have strengthened the specialist teaching in KS3 with Mr Cotton, Mr Rangdale and Mrs Robertson having more time to teach their specialist subjects. Furthermore, the recruitment of an excellent Secondary Science specialist in Mrs Etheridge, means that she has a very firm grasp on the foundations needed for later success.

# EMS WEEKLY BULLETIN

Q. It feels like Year 5 are being hit with English and Maths?

Pupils in KS2 are taught a full curriculum. On a weekly basis our pupils are receiving a broad curriculum; as I said earlier, the best of primary but with middle school enrichment too. As a parent of children in Primary schools I know EMS pupils get a good deal! One of the things that we have done in order to create an effective use of time is to timetable maths and English back to back which has given greater flexibility in the timetable - teachers don't have to stop a lesson because of a bell so can follow up misconceptions to avoid leaving anyone behind. Our results back this up.

Q. What are the relationships like with the First Schools and the Upper Schools?

As mentioned above relationships remain strong and we work closely with both sectors when developing our curriculum. We have worked even closer with our feeder First Schools this year and are excited that Verwood First and Hillside have begun the process of joining Wimborne Academy Trust creating an even tighter bond between our work. The other exciting change, which I alluded to earlier, is the appointment of Mrs Binning as Pastoral Worker; she spent the summer term working one morning a week in each First School getting to know the pupils and ensuring their transfer to middle was as smooth as possible. I would like to thank our colleague Heads for allowing this which has now become an example of best practice.

Q. What will the leadership structure look like? (also linked: will there be an Executive Headteacher and how much time will be spent at EMS)

At the time this was an area in development but we can now look back on nearly a year of effective working:

- \* CEO WAT - Mrs West
- \* Executive HT - Mr Jenkinson - 50% time spent at EMS
- \* Head of School - myself
- \* Assistant Headteacher - Mrs Ponchaud - 3 days a week.
- \* Continued support of Specialist Leaders in Education - Mrs Boyes, Mrs Freir

This is a strong team that meets weekly and has driven all the positive changes described in this bulletin.

Q. There has been lots of good information and a business like presentation. However how do you know how the children are feeling? (Have you had any feedback from the children on what has happened?)

We surveyed the children as we promised we would at that time. This will be repeated before the end of this term to explore what has changed.

What is clear is right now, from the parental survey and interviews with pupils, is that they enjoy school and they have become familiar with what we term 'The EMS Way'. That is not to say they love every aspect of some of this - blue pens, shirts tucked in etc, but what is clear is presentation in books and their own presentation is much improved. The higher expectations has seen a greater engagement in lessons. This is something I have referred to many times this term and has been commented on during visits from two different inspectors. The pupils enjoy being taught interesting lessons by a consistent and committed staff team. Moreover, I know they also enjoy the relationships they have with the EMS staff team.

Q. Is there extra funding available for the lead teachers etc that are required?

As a senior leader in school I have been fully supported to help move the school from where we were to where we are now. There is genuine improvement that is sustainable. I am proud of the fact we have built foundations that will allow all pupils at EMS to thrive.

# EMS WEEKLY BULLETIN

A few highlights include -

- \* Specialist Leader in Education Support for English and Maths
- \* 'Inclusion Experts' have been contracted by WAT and are supporting our SEN and PP provision. They are also providing extensive online training for our Teaching Assistants.
- \* Education Challenge Partner visits from an Ofsted trained person that provides the external challenge and rigour required to move the school rapidly from special measures.
- \* New subject leaders in Maths and Science were given lighter timetable loads to allow them to implement changes required.

Q. I understand that you are not having wellbeing lessons anymore? Are the children being cared for?

This is a similar question regarding the amount of English and Maths delivered. The holistic, social, spiritual and cultural development of our pupils is still a priority. We still place a high emphasis on developing our pupils as confident, young people who can contribute to society. Next year the Church of England will be sending an inspector in to school to look at what we have achieved in this area.

Our ethos, including the Christian foundations, is supported through discreet subjects such as Wellbeing but it is also present in all subjects and everything we stand for at EMS. In KS2, time is found for this during afternoon registration which has been extended this year. The KS3 curriculum time is unchanged. We also continue to have days where the timetable is collapsed and pupils spend a day on personal development. This is mainly funded by the support of the PTFA.

Q. One of the key issues has been the lack of information. Communication has not been great. How will this be addressed?

It was completely understandable that the uncertainty generated after our Ofsted inspection created anxiety over what EMS was to become. The changes in Leadership and appointment of a sponsor made the period from March 2017 through to January 2018 difficult for everyone.

I know my team here and I hope as parents you feel we have established a new 'norm'. Even this term, as we encounter things for the first time, we are less hectic and reactive. We are a settled team and as a result the pupils are achieving well.

I enjoy my weekly bulletin. It is a fantastic wellbeing exercise for me to reflect on all the amazing things that go on at EMS and the opportunities for our pupils to grow. Our twitter feed is growing with regular contributions from Mrs Thompson and Mrs Anderson.

ParentMail, despite the recent setback trying to use it for parents evening bookings, has been an effective communication tool and made it so much easier to send information through.

It is our continued aim to provide you with as much information as possible in plenty of time for you to plan. Although this doesn't always work, we thank you for your patience.

You will see Mr Jenkinson and myself on the school gate at the end of the day and this has proved a very effective way to communicate on many occasions. I continue to make myself available as much as possible. I have a teaching commitment this year that I didn't have last year, but with Mr Jenkinson and Mrs Ponchaud alongside, there should always be someone who can respond quickly.

On a personal note, I appreciate your feedback and honesty and ask that this remains. There have been numerous occasions where a quick tip-off has allowed me to sort things before they become something more complex.

Q. Should you do pupil questionnaires now so that you have a benchmark to go forward from?

# EMS WEEKLY BULLETIN

I have already answered this above but I am delighted to share with you the early results from our parental survey, with the previous results (2017) in brackets.

My child is happy at school - 97% (87%)

My child makes good progress at school - 95% (73%)

My child is well taught at school - 93% (66%)

The school makes sure pupils are well behaved - 88% with 8% stating they don't know and only 4% disagreed (69% agreed, 12% didn't know and 19% disagreed)

The school is well led and managed - 90% (56%)

Would you recommend this school? 95% (66%)

I would also like to acknowledge the constructive comments made such as - cleanliness of toilets, responding to you quickly and efficiently and providing you with reports you feel are useful.

In addition to this feedback, as I have already referred to, we have received three external visits this term. The first two I have fed back through bulletins earlier this term. For me the most significant took place on Wednesday this week. Our Ofsted trained Education Challenge Partner joined us to review interventions, check monitoring and development of teaching and learning and validate our lesson judgements. We visited 10 lessons in the morning and our judgements were validated and all teaching was at least good. The majority of the lessons were KS3 foundation lessons and then maths teaching in year 5. I am proud of my team and the development of our teaching over the past 12 months. I am also thrilled she noted how engaged and hard working the pupils are. The book scrutiny we conducted highlighted how well the pupils present their work, develop their ideas and respond to their teachers.

EMS is an exciting place to be right now, I am extremely proud of the school and everyone - pupils and staff - who make this such a vibrant and happy place for us all to grow and learn.

I hope you have a great weekend and well done for reading this bulletin in its entirety!

Rob Christopher

## A WEEK IN PICTURES



Thank you to everyone who sent in Christmas Shoeboxes for the Rotary Appeal. They were collected this morning and through your very generous donations, 49 boxes are being sent to disadvantaged children in Albania, Montenegro, Moldova and Romania.



Some of our pupils in their odd/silly socks supporting Children in Need today.