

Governors' Newsletter

March 2019

As we look forward to our Easter celebrations, I would like to take this opportunity to raise the thorny issue of funding which is receiving an increasing amount of coverage in the national news. There are conflicting messages being received and I would like to clarify the position we find ourselves in at Bishop William Ward.

The fact is that even though funding to schools has increased, it has not increased anywhere near the rate as the increase in costs – many of which are outside of our control. Salary increases, pension provision and minimum wage are all factors which drive up the staffing costs of the school. Inevitably this puts a massive strain on the provision of other services and resources.

Mr Bull, with the full support of the Governing Body, has done a remarkable job of maintaining a balanced budget - i.e. costs kept at or below funding income. Our focus has been on maintaining the highest possible provision of teachers and teaching assistants as we believe that contact time with children is the most valuable way to spend our limited resources. However, this has meant that we have had to make the difficult decision to cut additional services such as reduced teaching assistant hours, restructuring the school office and cuts to play therapy, family support, counselling services, speech and language support and one-to-one tuition.

At some point in the not too distant future, there will be nothing left to cut and we will be faced with costs in excess of our income. This is why a change in the funding of schools is desperately needed.

Although it may not be visible, we are doing our best to lobby for increased funding. Mr Bull has taken part in a representation to parliament; Mr Embleton has attended a National Governors Association action day at Westminster; Sir Bernard Jenkin was invited to the school and Mr Bull and Mr Van Helfteren took the opportunity to highlight our concerns; I have met with the other Chairs of Governors within the North East Essex Partnership to develop a coordinated response and action plan to highlight the seriousness of the funding issues we are all facing.

I would urge you as parents and carers to help increase the momentum of this growing initiative. To this end, we have started a petition for Sir Bernard Jenkin to present at Westminster. This petition will be available in the school foyer until 30th April. Please, please, please take a moment to sign this petition - we need as many voices as possible in support of this and our contribution along with other schools in the Harwich and North Essex constituency can start to make a real difference.

I also hope to draft a letter for you to share with Sir Bernard in order to lobby for his support in helping us to secure increased funding. More on this to follow.

Frustratingly, despite the squeeze on what is called the “delegated fund” which pays for the on-going costs of the school, the government and Diocese do have pots of funding for sports and other capital projects. This is why you will have seen the new fence and, shortly, an exciting new all-purpose sports pitch. However, please do not think that this means we are awash with money! These capital budgets are “ring-fenced” and can only be spent on qualifying projects. To be brutally honest, I would much rather be spending money on additional teaching assistants and curriculum materials, but the fact is that we are simply not allowed to do this.

I hope we all manage to resist the urge to over indulge on Easter eggs whilst remembering the true reason for our Easter celebrations!

Kind regards,

Dave Kinzett
Chair of Governors

PS Please sign the petition!