



St John's Highbury Vale CE Primary School

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Governors' Bulletin: March 2023

Dear Parents and Carers,

This month we had our annual Governors' Day which allowed us to meet with staff and pupils and observe the school community in action. It was good to gain greater depth in our understanding of the curriculum and a joy to see the enthusiasm and focus of the pupils in the classes we visited. Despite the disruptions of the term (noted below) it is good to see that progress is being maintained, with pupils on target to fulfil their predicted levels at the end of the year.

And there have been disruptions! High levels of illness have affected both pupils and staff but thank you for continuing to get your child to school as often as they are able. Good school attendance really does make a difference to your child's attainment. And then there were the teacher strikes, which by their nature are meant to be disruptive. Can I reiterate Mrs Hodgson's words in her own letters to you – we have brilliant, hard-working teachers who are fully committed to the school and none of them undertook the industrial action lightly. We must thank Mrs Hodgson and all the staff for the redeployment that allowed as many classes to stay open as possible to ensure minimal disruption to pupils and parents.

You may have seen in the news that the unions are urging teacher members to reject a new pay offer from the government and we will learn the outcome of the ballot next week, so this disruption may well run into next term. Whilst this is hard news, I would like to stress some points for you to consider. As well as asking for above-inflation increases, the unions are demanding extra money to ensure any pay rises do not come from schools' existing budgets as, if the offer is not being completely funded by government, it would mean schools having to make cuts elsewhere. This is a stark truth. When a pay increase is given it has a huge impact on our budget, as we recently found when we needed to find around £50,000 to provide the pay increase awarded to support staff. I believe completely that all our hard-working staff deserve decent pay and I want the school to be able to attract new staff and retain the (more expensive) experienced staff, but with no extra money given to support this, the school will struggle. At a recent meeting of Chairs of Governors and the Local Authority, it was dispiriting to hear how many schools are being pushed into deficit this year.

You may also have read of the crisis facing many London schools as their numbers fall, and indeed, our two partnership schools will be merging next year for this reason. The main amount a school receives is set by the number of children enrolled at that school on a certain day in October. Whether a class has 13 or 30 children in it, a teacher has to be paid to teach them. We are fortunate that, so far, our numbers are healthy, with many classes having waiting lists and a full Reception Class due in September.

But St Johns is certainly not immune to either of the pressures above. Through prudent financial management we have some stability at the moment, but I have to be honest that the future is uncertain. Thank you for all the ways you have supported the school financially in the past and helped with fund-raising events. I hope you will continue to do so, whilst we will continue to work our utmost to find the money to fund all that is needed to continue to provide the excellent education and wide-ranging opportunities that our children enjoy and deserve.

Please bear all this in mind should we be beset with the frustration of further disruption next term.

On a happier note, I know Mrs Hodgson and the staff have planned many wonderful events for the children next term and Year 6 will soon have their SATS out of the way. We wish them every success. I hope you have received my letter announcing the appointment of Ms Khan as Head of School in September. We look forward to welcoming her to St Johns as she visits in preparation for her role... and to making it the best term possible for Mrs Hodgson before she leaves us.

I hope that as the days lengthen, the flowers and blossom brighten our parks and gardens and the leaves begin to unfurl the coming holiday will be a time of relaxation and refreshment for everyone.

Have a happy Easter.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sarah Hinton', written in a cursive style.

Sarah Hinton

Chair of Governors