

St Matthew's primary school PTA meeting

12th February 2020 at 8pm

The Community Room at school

Present

Committee: Seb Wills (co-chair, chairing this meeting), Birgit Grothe (treasurer), Kat Parks (secretary)

Wider committee: -

Staff: Mr Davies (head)

Trustees: Georgina Scott

Parents: Rosie Williams, Ben Cijffers, Katie Porrer, Jelena Jovanovic, Donna Ferguson

1. Recent PTA events

a. Festive Fair

This raised a good amount of money despite the bad weather.

Discussion of whether this could take place on a Saturday. Mr Davies was not in favour of this as he is concerned to protect staff time. He doubted whether any more money would be made by holding it on a Saturday – on the Friday there is a captive audience as people can stay after school.

Seb has heard other schools raise money in the region of £10k by holding fairs on a Saturday. It may be worth speaking to other schools to find out how they do it. Kat to try to revive the initial links made with other PTAs.

b. Cake sales

The new PTA card reader was used at both the recent cake sales (year 1 and year 2). It didn't get a huge amount of uptake, but at the year 2 cake sale it was used to give one or two additional donations.

2. Financial overview

- a. The PTA is getting rather low on money. Jelena asked why the teachers don't just ask the parents for money? Mr Davies said the school already do ask parents for contributions for trips, but he also needs to be aware of the families that don't have the money.

- b. Ben suggested adding a section to the trip forms asking if you would like to pay more to fund another child. You could tick the box and pay more money. Mr Davies agreed this would be worth trying. Katie also suggested allowing parents to round up if the requested amount is not a round figure. She is put off doing this at the moment due to not wanting to cause admin headaches for the school office.
- c. Discussion of the inequalities in Cambridge, which is one of the most unequal cities in the UK and the third most expensive to live in. Around 12-13% of St Matthew's pupils qualify for pupil premium, though this varies significantly between years (5-20).
- d. Ben mentioned that only one Cambridge college pays the Living Wage to all its staff and the University does not. In addition Cambridge has the problem that there are lots of very low-paid jobs available in the NHS and colleges, which will mean families are on tight budgets even though they don't qualify for pupil premium.

3. Upcoming events

a. Spring disco

There was an email appeal for help to create a "disco team". One parent got in touch to say she would be interested in doing balloon modelling at the discos in aid of the PTA. Kat replied positively but mentioned it would be good if the balloons could be biodegradable. As no-one else has come forward Kat and Laura are likely to organise the disco.

4. School funding update

Mr Davies gave an update on the school funding situation.

Key points:

- a. The national minimum funding per pupil is being increased, so St Matthew's will receive the new minimum of £3,750 per pupil, an extra £250 per child. Mr Davies expects most of this money to go in increased costs. The year after the school is meant to receive £4,000 per child.
- b. The Cambridgeshire Local Authority made an application to the Department of Education for permission to lower the minimum per child to £3,700 per pupil, as they wanted to transfer the extra money to the higher needs budget. St Matthew's opposed this as it would have taken over £30,000 from the school budget. Mr Davies has recently heard that the Secretary of State has turned down the Local Authority's request.
- c. There is still uncertainty, even now around 6 weeks before the start of a new budget. Mr Davies expects the school to just about break even or be around £10,000 in deficit next year.
- d. The school policy is to keep staffing levels etc as constant as possible.

- e. It's likely the Local Authority will start charging schools for things that until now they've had for free. They could take around 10-20k of the school's budget in this way and existing pockets of funding would disappear. Mr Davies is focused on making sure schools are involved in this decision-making.
- f. The bottom line is that education in Cambridgeshire is still in dire straits. Recently the educational psychologist service has been suspended for 6 weeks; the educational psychologist is going on maternity leave and is not being replaced.
- g. The government has spent some of the education budget on a new website that apparently shows how much money each school has received. In Mr Davies' view this is a lie – it shows what the Local Authorities receive, but not what reaches individual schools.
- h. A decision will need to be made about the funding gap campaign when the year ends. Seb's feeling was that the message will need to be changed in some way. Mr Davies mentioned that the school is about to invest in a new suite of computers and software, leasing them for £7k per year. This might be something to mention in the funding campaign? Seb will talk to others involved in the funding campaign.
- i. Mr Davies expressed his gratitude for the money raised by the funding shortfall campaign, which has been a lifesaver in terms of allowing the school to continue to offer the support pupils need. It is as a result of this money that the school is expecting to roughly break even this financial year.

5. Ofsted

- a. Jelena asked when the school is expected to have another Ofsted inspection. Mr Davies said that as the school was rated outstanding at its last inspection Ofsted do a "desktop survey" every year to see if they think another inspection is needed. They check for things like management changes, SATs results, complaints from parents. Apparently so far they have not felt the need to inspect again.
- b. Mr Davies feels the school is better now than when Ofsted last came.
- c. Mr Davies said the school has never wanted to chase amazing SATs results at the expense of other things they feel are important.

6. School playground improvements

- a. The jungle area is now in place (no PTA funding was needed for this).
- b. The area outside the year 1 classrooms is also nearly done.
- c. Mr Davies met with the school council today to talk about replacements for the monkey bars. The children will look into this.
- d. The plan for the canopy area is still a key priority but has been delayed by the prospect of the cage redevelopment.

- e. Discussion of the £10k the PTA has ringfenced for the playground. Mr Davies' feeling was that in view of the above quite a lot of this could be said to have been spent. The meeting was generally in favour of allocating the year 1 outdoor learning area funding already approved by the PTA to the ringfenced £10k, which would in turn free up some money for the PTA to spend on other things.

7. Cage redevelopment plan

- a. The £100k is a high estimate. It's hoped the layer under the pitch won't need to be replaced, but we won't know that until the surface has been removed.
- b. The idea is the FA will give 75% and the school 25%. Mr Davies has the impression the FA are willing to go ahead if the school can find the 25%.
- c. Mr Davies found out today that the school has been unsuccessful in its "Rewards for All" lottery application for £10k.
- d. Discussion of ways to raise the £25k, which is needed by this coming Easter.
 - i. Ben suggested offering advance purchase discounts for the teams who already use it. Mr Davies said they already do this, eg paying for a year costs less.
 - ii. There has been s.106 money available locally but we are too late for this. The Mill Road depot development s.106 money has gone to St Phillip's, even though the development is in the St Matthew's catchment. Katie is a councillor and sits on the planning committee.
 - iii. Might it be worth approaching ARU? Though they don't have much money at the moment. Katie works at ARU and could speak to Martin, the person in charge of sport(?). It may also be worth speaking to the ARU Student Union to offer them time using the cage in exchange for money upfront? Mr Davies felt we need to be careful not to give away too much of the available time in the cage for free, as it's a very good money-earner for the school.
 - iv. Donna volunteered to fill in the charity forms at the supermarkets, which could make a bit of money. She felt we need to be ambitious and try to raise the full £25k.
 - v. Donna suggested asking the FA if they have any contacts. Though Mr Davies felt that if they had any they would probably have mentioned them already.
 - vi. The FA wanted the project to go ahead last Easter (being unrealistic about closing the cage area in term time), failing that last summer. They are struggling to find a good facility in central Cambridge.
 - vii. Seb's feeling was that most parents don't know this project is even a possibility. Could we tell the parents about it, especially as they may work for companies that could help financially?

- viii. Mr Davies felt the next step is to approach the big companies. Ben offered to call Mick George; Donna could ask ARM. Perhaps we could offer companies some form of advertising (within reason).
- ix. Elaine and Nancy had a meeting with Adrian (the school's business manager). Elaine is drafting a letter seeking sponsorship from companies and has asked Adrian for some further details on the project.
- x. The meeting felt that a fact sheet summarising the project would be a useful tool for the various fundraising possibilities. Mr Davies agreed to organise this with Adrian. He confirmed there are pictures and designs of what the project would look like.
- xi. Donna asked for the factsheet to include information about the impact on the community: why is it needed and who will it help? We could involve the local press and launch a crowdfunding campaign (ideally when we have already raised some money from local companies, to reduce the target figure).

8. Roof terrace

- a. Ben (a professional garden designer) explained his thoughts on the possibility of improving the roof terrace:
 - i. He is willing to spend 2.5-3 days creating a design for free, provided he is briefed on the aims and purposes of the space. Although he is willing to give his time for free, to do so he would want there to be a realistic willingness to see the project through.
 - ii. After he has produced the plans, either they could be put out to tender, or he could offer his and his team's time at cost price and they could do the work with a small team of volunteers.
 - iii. Ben uses CAD software and computer renders to create visuals that would be helpful in fundraising.
 - iv. Ben is currently available until 16th March, when he will start work outdoors again. This means he would need to know by the end of half term whether he should do the plans or not. It may be more realistic to wait until next winter.
- b. The school has a vision for an outdoor classroom, perhaps with the ability to sit a whole class in the round, maybe also separate tables. Some plants would be nice, if it is possible to keep them alive. The area is windy, so any furniture would need to be fixed. It also gets very exposed to the sun, so ideally shade would be nice.
- c. Access to water has previously been an issue, but Mr Davies thinks it would be possible to get water to the roof terrace. This might mean there could be some kind of irrigation system for any plants.

- d. Jelena wondered if plants could contribute to improving air quality, but Ben felt it would be too windy to make a difference.
- e. As a former fundraiser, Ben's feeling was that the roof terrace would be one of the easier things to fundraise for. There would be visuals, a learning objective and a buttoned-down cost assessment. Donna's view was that it is hard to raise more when it seems as though the existing playground money has not been spent. It could actually be easier to fundraise when parents have seen some spending.
- f. Ben mentioned possible aims: to make a space that's very different to the children's usual experience, helping with learning in the area of biology and science particularly. There could be herbs growing, solar panels, wind turbines. He would need to understand the learning objectives as far as the school is concerned.
- g. Donna suggested Ben could initially spend 2-3 hours putting together a basic plan, with different stages that could be completed at different times. Ben thought this could be possible.
- h. Ben mentioned a possible fundraising scheme he would be willing to run, in which he would offer a range of plants for parents to buy. He would buy them at cost price and they would be sold to parents for a little more, with the profits going to the PTA. This idea was well received.
- i. Donna said she believes the RHS (Royal Horticultural Society) has grants for schools.
- j. Mr Davies and Ben agreed to talk further and arrange a time for Ben to see the roof terrace, which he has not yet seen.

9. Norfolk Street traffic

- a. Seb has been in touch with Rosa and Ricardo, the governors who are most concerned with the pollution situation around the school. A no-idling zone and pollution monitoring are possibilities. We are still waiting to find out if the car-free zone pilot scheme discussed at the previous meeting will go ahead but should know this in a month or two.
- b. Could the school newsletter include a request to parents not to leave the engine running?
- c. Discussion of possible ways to measure pollution levels. Katie has seen the figures for East Road and they are not good. Mr Davies has had a conversation with someone on the council and types of pollution monitors and has the impression that you need to pay quite a lot of money to get one of good quality. Ben wondered if it would be possible to lease one.
- d. Jelena referred to the pollution survey sent out by the governors. She is also aware of a Swedish company that makes air purifiers, which ended up installing them for free in a London school after measuring pollution figures. She said she would find out more about it.
- e. **Thank you**

Mr Davies thanked everyone.
