

Belleville Primary School Governors' Newsletter

June 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

My name is Emma Stace and I am writing to you as Chair of the Local Governing Body (LGB) at Belleville School.



I hope that you, your families, children and loved ones have remained safe and well during this time. As a working mother of three school aged children (16, 12 and 8 years old) I can empathise with the strain we have all been under as parents during this time, and the effects that COVID-19 has had on our children's mental health wellbeing as well as concerns about loss of learning and a widening of attainment gaps for some of our most vulnerable members of the community.

As a governing body we have been supporting the school leadership at Belleville in the following ways:

- We now meet online every two weeks in order to assess the existing situation and respond to the changes in advice and guidance from government
- In these meetings our local parent/carer governors are feeding back what they are hearing from parents and providing helpful support and challenge to the school leadership

As Chair, I also have been meeting fortnightly with the Headteachers Sarah Atherton and Mary-Lyne Latour for an informal discussion to ensure I keep in touch with the issues and so that I can offer some much needed support during these extraordinary times.

As a governing body we appreciate that many of us are frustrated with the government's policy at this time and the decision not to allow all children to return to school. Our decision from the outset has been to carefully follow government advice and guidance, particularly with regards to safety - which means in the context of children returning to school - the school has children returning in Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 as well as continuing to offer provision for critical workers and vulnerable children.

In continuing to follow government guidance the school is operating under the following constraints:

- Keeping children in bubbles (groups) of 15 and in separate spaces
- Minimising contact and mixing of children between bubbles
- Minimising contact and mixing of teaching staff between bubbles
- Adhering to government guidance which explicitly advises not to plan on a rota system or to offer part time provision to children normally entitled to full time.

The positive outcome for those parents whose children have returned is that everyone who wanted a place in the priority year groups has been offered one. At Belleville the take up of places has been very high, with

an average of 77% of children per year. This is well above what many other local schools are reporting and significantly higher than the London average of 33%.

This does mean that Belleville is at almost maximum capacity and our ability to offer additional provision for those year groups who are not prioritised by the government is very limited.

However, the Headteachers, staff and the Local Governing Body are concerned to do more for children and this week there is an ongoing dialogue about meeting the needs of all our children and what the school can do now to extend or improve provision for children at home.

We also continue to keep a firm eye on government guidance, which as we all know, has been changing very rapidly and could continue to do so; as well as begin the planning for return to school in September. I would like to end by saying that for every parent who believes that Belleville should depart from government advice, as other schools may have chosen to do, there are those parents who have significant concerns and are only sending their children back because Belleville is following government guidance and in doing so, providing as safe an environment as we can for all of our community.

We are looking to appoint new Local Governing Body members.

As the Local Governing Body, we are continuously reviewing our membership. We are proud to have a number of parent governors as well as members from our school leaders. This term two of our valued parent/carer governors are stepping down after fulfilling their term of office.

Tino Davatzis who has served as a parent/carer governor for the past three years has relocated with his family to Surrey and Sarita Tamber who has served as our safeguarding governor for the past three years will both be stepping down. We thank them for the time and attention they have lent the school and our community and I am sure you will join me in wishing them the very best for the future. We are therefore seeking to appoint new governors within the parent/carer community across the Webb's and Meteor sites to the Belleville Local Governing Body.

We would like to encourage greater diversity of our governing body.

In particular, we would like to encourage those parents who represent our black, asian and ethnic minority community to consider joining the LGB and those parents who have experience of a child with special educational needs and disabilities.

We are also keen to improve the school's communication and marketing skills, and so we would appreciate those who have expertise in this field, to also consider joining.

Applying to be a governor

More information on the role of a parent/carer governor on the LGB can be found on the school website. If you are uncertain whether to apply or would like to ask questions about the role, we are holding two 'Meet the Governors' drop-in sessions on Zoom on Thursday 25th June at 12:45 and 18:45. Details are as follows:

Thursday 25th June at 12:45: [Meeting ID: 944 4053 4752 & Password: 053611]

Thursday 25th June at 18:45: [Meeting ID: 920 2304 1093 & Password: 310368]

Please do take this opportunity to come and discuss governance at Belleville and ask any questions you have about becoming a parent/carer governor.

If you would like to apply for the role of parent/carer governor you should complete a nomination form. These are available at the school office, attached to this *ParentMail* or can be found at the school website. For those parents who are not on *ParentMail*, we will be sending them postal copies of this letter and form to ensure that we are inclusive to all parents.

These forms should be returned by **09.00 on Friday 3rd July 2020** to Alexandra Turnbull at: alexandra.turnbull@bellevilleschool.org or direct to the office at either Webb's or Meteor.

If we have more applications than positions available, an election will be held allowing all current parents/carers the opportunity to vote for their preferred candidates. Governors are elected for a maximum term of four years. In addition, governors can be co-opted onto the LGB if they have a skill that is not currently represented on the LGB. We are looking to appoint three new governors, one of whom we can co-opt and two of whom will be elected by parents/carers should applications exceed positions available.

What's it like to be a school governor and what time commitment does it require?



I have been a governor at the school for the past 3 years. I was elected to the Local Governing Body in 2017 as a parent/carer governor where I agreed to take the role of safeguarding governor. I have really enjoyed the role and have learnt a lot. I like being involved with the school, watching and learning how it deals with and solves problems and making a contribution to ensure the safety of children in school whilst providing an excellent learning space. It was a steep learning curve getting up to speed with the policies and jargon, but there is training available for new governors and for the special roles each governor takes. We meet as a board every half term; meetings usually take place in the evenings and we do our best to finish before 9pm. I have also been asked to take part in additional school meetings for separate committees, but I have enjoyed being a vital support to the school when needed. Safeguarding governor is an essential role in the LGB. I have to keep up to date with government safeguarding guidance and legislation, check the school is compliant with statutory guidance consistently across the whole school and make sure there are effective systems in place to keep vulnerable children safe. I am in school for additional meetings about twice a term to meet with the safeguarding team and carry out checks at both sites. This is a great opportunity to see the school at its best, when children are learning and at play.

Governors do not run the school. They rather provide an oversight, support and challenge role to ensure that the school leadership delivers for all our pupils. There can be a lot of reading to keep up to speed with the ever-changing government guidance and to make sure our policies are up to date, but all this helps me to contribute to each meeting and provide effective challenges where appropriate.

Essentially, we are here to be a critical friend and ensure accountability. Whilst a parent/carer governor isn't there to represent all views, we are responsible for ensuring the parent/carer voice is taken into account and that all pupil voices are represented, including vulnerable children and children with additional needs.

Being a governor can be challenging and does require a good time commitment, but it gives you a unique insight into the running of the school and a great opportunity to work with the LGB, teachers, senior leadership team and children.

Please look out for further details next week for those of you who would consider becoming an LGB member.

Best,

Emma Stace - Chair of the Local Governing Body