

Dear Parents and Carers,

Thank you for turning out in such record numbers for our start of term meeting, and for joining in so enthusiastically with the play activity. Mayowa, Steven and I were pleased to be able to share our vision for Soho Parish going forward. I know we gave you plenty to think about, so do feel free to share any views, questions or offers of help with any one of us. For those parents who were unable to attend, I summarise below the main points raised:

**School Values** (*changes in italics*)

<b>Imagination</b>	We dare to dream. <i>We think 'beyond the box'.</i>
<b>Challenge</b>	We believe that there are no limits to our potential. We persevere.
<b>Respect</b>	We listen to and value everyone's views. We treat everyone as we would like to be treated.
<b>Individuality</b>	We recognise we are all unique with individual needs. <i>We respect that every individual has equal rights.</i>
<b>Family</b>	<i>We are safe and cared for. We belong.</i> <i>We are part of a wider community and global family.</i>

These are the Soho Parish Values. They underpin everything we do. For me, these values sum up exactly what this school is all about and I think they are unlikely to change. However the additional explanations have changed a little this year. We have added 'We think beyond the box' to 'Imagination', to reflect our focus on growth mindset and thinking skills. We want our children to know there are no boundaries to what they can imagine and create.

We have also changed the wording of 'family', to recognise something that came through strongly from parents and children during Ofsted: a feeling of belonging. This sense of belonging is something we want to protect and nourish among pupils and parents. We also intend to further foster the children's notions of themselves as members of the community and global citizens. Although we consider our pupils to be considerate, tolerant individuals, we believe we can do more to develop children's understanding of equality and the rights, faiths and beliefs of others, which is why we've added the extra dimension to 'Individuality'. We are not only individual but equal.

**Assessment**

Soho Parish has usually performed well in external measures of progress such as the SATs. Since the introduction two years ago of the new National Curriculum and its accompanying tests, which are much more challenging than the previous Curriculum, nationally there has been a dip in results. At Soho Parish we have been similarly disappointed with our results for the last two years.

While we know we have sent out into the world confident, capable children with excellent thinking skills, the skills that we value so highly are not always reflected in these new SATs.

Our excellent students do well at secondary school and are independent-minded with good study skills. We know this because of the feedback we receive from secondary schools. However, we must also ensure that we maintain our high standards and that we ensure all children do their very best when assessed, as this type of assessment, whatever we/you think of it, will always be present in their lives. We have never, and never intend to 'teach to the tests', so in order to ensure our pupils meet the targets for their year group we have introduced a new assessment system.

For Reading, Writing and Maths, children will have two pages of assessment statements. These include everything they will be expected to achieve over the year. As they achieve them, these will be highlighted by staff. We hope that you will look at these statements when you visit your child's classroom so that you can keep an eye on their progress. We believe this new system will help parents to understand exactly what their child is learning. It was developed and improved over two years by another local school – St Vincent's, Marylebone – who have had very positive feedback from children and parents on how much more informed they now feel about their child's learning in the core subjects of English and Maths. It has hugely improved teachers' ability to assess accurately and set appropriate work to move each child towards the targets for her or his year.

## Homework

At Soho Parish we believe some of the best learning is done through play. This is how children learn social skills to help them flourish in adult life; they experience natural physics first hand, they develop their gross motor skills, then their fine motor skills (used for handwriting and craft work) and a whole host of other learning takes place when a child plays that cannot be replicated in a classroom.

We believe we stretch our pupils so much at school that (like any adult) they deserve some rest and relaxation when they get home. We consulted with parents, staff and children last term and this year we will be taking a different approach to homework.

Like the children, we agree that weekly deadlines and worksheets are stressful and pointless. Like parents, we agree that independent study builds lifelong learning habits. Therefore children will receive two types of homework on a daily basis. The first is their 'learning log', in which they record their reading and have the opportunity to respond to books. The second is a longer project, which children will plan over the holiday and first four weeks of term, finally bringing it in during week 4 each half term to present to their classmates.

We encourage you to support your child with this homework. Feel free to make it a family project or leave them to their independent study, but do a little of each over the year. Sharing your passions with your child can only be positive – imagine learning with your parent or seeing them learn. What a powerful impression that will make on your child.

I know parents will have a range of opinions on homework, which is why we consulted with you last year. Some parents asked about maths homework during the meeting. This will not routinely be set, however some problem-solving activities will be given during the year. We hope that some of your projects will incorporate real-life maths. We may also set times tables to learn and spellings as necessary.

At present we are looking into online maths learning, which children will enjoy and which they will be able to work through at their own pace, but (see money, below) this may require some fundraising.

## **Learning Environment**

Mayowa spoke about our approach to the Learning Environment. We intend to remove unnecessary clutter and decoration throughout the school as research has shown that this needless 'noise' around the room can have negative effects on learning and behavior. We have 'pared back' our walls, so that only a few display boards remain. We have also introduced plants and natural materials into the environment as these produce a sense of calm and boost oxygen in the classroom, which is very helpful for concentration.

We have only begun on our journey to create 'communication-friendly' classrooms, but we will keep you posted along the way. Redecoration throughout the school is needed and we have high hopes for the creation of a sensory room to enhance this work.

## **Play**

Steven got us all thinking about how we played ourselves as a child, teenager and adult, and the invaluable social, physical, emotional and cognitive skills we learnt from each type of play. This year we wish to give children the most exciting and free play experiences we can manage. Play is essential for learning all the things that can't be taught in a classroom, so we see it as essential to the child's development and will no longer be removing play as a sanction.

Steven is always on the lookout for interesting things to pop in the playground, so do let him know if you have anything (see list attached).

## **Money**

Like many other schools we have a large deficit (over £100,000), in the form of loans from the Local Authority. Budgets get smaller, in real terms, each year while costs, such as staffing, increase. Many schools are making severe cutbacks in their staff, but this is not something we want to do. Without the right staff and a good enough ratio of staff to pupils, we can't continue to offer the same quality of education which Ofsted rightly recognised as outstanding.

As I explained to parents, this deficit is something the school intends to manage. We have applied to Westminster for 'growth funding', as our numbers have risen steeply over the last few years and we have only just begun to receive the extra money which extra pupils bring. We will also draw up a repayment plan for any outstanding amount.

However, to ensure this doesn't happen again we will need to redouble our fundraising efforts. The Food Feast money last year went towards our staffing budget, leaving us with nothing for nice extras such as it has provided in years gone by (like the playground). This year we need more and every little helps.

To reassure parents, we do not intend to spend fundraised money on our deficit, unless it is specifically donated for that purpose. In other words, we will spend what we raise on improving your child's school and education as well as ensuring there is no increase to the deficit going forward. The main items we need to fund are:

- Redecoration (and refurbishment) of the whole school to improve children's learning environment
- Refurbishment of the downstairs kitchen into a teaching space and sensory room
- 1.5 Additional teachers to provide extra learning support

We do hope to have all hands on deck for this effort, and if you're wondering where to go to volunteer, look no further than:

### **The PSA**

Lorraine (mother of Raif and Tacita, and Niamh who recently went out into the world of secondary school to do us proud) is Chair of the PSA. She explained that all parents and carers are automatically members of this fantastic club! There is a committee that meets to plan fundraising and fun for the year and anyone wishing to join this committee should let Lorraine / SLT know in advance of the next AGM. There will be a variety of occasions and events throughout the year and Lorraine asked if we could please have as many volunteers as possible. Anyone with a particular expertise or time to share should see Lorraine or any member of the Senior Leadership Team and we will endeavour to put your skills and enthusiasm to good use.

The PSA also gratefully accept donations. As they are a charity the money can be given with gift aid. All donations will be fund matched by a generous anonymous donor, so if you can please do give generously.

### **Documents**

We gave out our 2017-18 'Guide for Parents', which should tell you everything you need to know and a little bit more about Soho Parish! We also gave out Cookie's letter, with menus, and a very important note about pupil premium funding. I attach these documents.

All parents will receive a paper copy of the Guide. Inside it you will find our promises documents. These are the promises that school, parent and child make to each other at the start of the year. Please do sign and return the parent promises and ask your child to sign their promises sheet (on the other side). If you signed already, we will ask your child to do so in class.

### **Congratulations...**



...if you reached the end of this letter! Thank you for your continuing support. I look forward to an exciting year keeping what we do well and improving where we can to ensure the very best experience for your child.

Best wishes,

Louise Ritchie  
**Headteacher**

