

GRAZEBROOK PRIMARY SCHOOL PARENT COUNCIL  
TUESDAY 29<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2016

DRAFT MINUTES

Present:

Diane Hamer , Chair, 2G

Andy Prentice (1G), Jenny McCoubrey (2B), Matthew Jeary (4B & Parent Governor), Kristen O'Sullivan (Yr6), Kate Davies (2G/4B), Sophie Sanctuary (Purple/2G/4G), Joslin Morrison (5G), Stefan Garcia (Reception Orange), Michel Scranz (Purple/3B), Nikki Blustin (PSA), Lucy Dowd (1G), Päivi Vahvelainen (Reception Orange), Abi Meats (4G), Mark Higham (1B).

Bev Dickinson, Jess Hutchison (Headteacher).

1. Apologies & Minutes of last meeting

It was agreed that as the last meeting was some time ago (February 2016) we would move straight on to this week's agenda.

Apologies from Teresa (Teo / Aber)

2. Special Opportunities (Yr 5)

On display at the meeting were photos and a short video of some of the fantastic opportunities available to children at Grazebrook – organised through the hard work of Bev Dickinson.

Yr 5 Question: A question was raised about how children are chosen for the many and varied opportunities that are available to them at Grazebrook. Examples cited were: Bike around the Borough; Stretch Academy; Brilliance Club (which included trip to Oxford); sporting opportunities and School Council.

Some concern was expressed at the way such opportunities were communicated to children as some upset had been caused to children who, on some occasions, were asking why they weren't selected. Parents expressed a desire to know more about the process so that they can help communicate it to their children. Example was given of Stretch Academy. In this case letters were handed out in class so children were very aware of who wasn't – as well as who was – selected. There was a request to consider the naming of these clubs – in the case of 'Brilliant' might make those who aren't part of it question whether they are brilliant or not?

Bev Dickinson (BD) talked about the many sporting opportunities. She said that the school was trying to be transparent and that a register of competitors for all sporting events had been set up. This was a way of tracking who got what opportunities throughout their school career.

She detailed some of the opportunities: Many competitions are arranged and organised by Young Hackney and Urswick College. Many events are weekly. These sporting events are always open to small groups of children. There are festivals, tournaments and competitions. The competitions are focused towards the more able sporting kids. Festivals aimed at 'amateur status'. Bev says that across the year – she's hoping that every child will have a chance to take part in one or other of these opportunities. For some events, the same group of children will be chosen for example the cycling events have been open to the after school cycling club and they happen over a period of weeks. Bikability – everyone gets a chance to do this in Yr 5. For Bike Around the Borough – this takes 5 year 5 kids. In some cases, children are selected through names out of a hat – there is an eye to gender balance and a balance across the classes. The school also encourages kids who wouldn't otherwise get a chance to try an activity. In the example of the swimming gala – there are more interested in taking part than spaces. Some will be chosen on ability as they have to be at a certain standard – mostly they will be chosen out of a hat. They might be chosen to encourage confidence.

Jess Hutchison (JH) set out the details of Brilliant Club and Stretch Academy:

'Brilliant' – in this case, the school is again looking at kids who might not have opportunity to think about higher education. It is focused on some of the more able children in this group. There is an opportunity to talk about philosophy, for example. In conjunction with the class teachers, the school looks for children who are interested and engaged and would benefit from the opportunity.

This club is linked with a university to encourage aspirations to go on to higher education. The hope is that if they are engaged at primary school they will retain that inspiration through secondary school towards a university education.

Stretch Academy – JH said this was not communicated as well as it could have been to all families and she apologised for that. Stretch offers additional support for children who might otherwise be tutored for common entrance exam.

Kristen (Yr6 Rep) – Pointed out that some who were selected for Stretch are being tutored already by external tutors. She said it had caused "a lot of hoo-ha." There was a call for a letter to go out to all parents to offer the opportunity. JH said that the school had increased the number of children that it accepted on to the Stretch program but that spaces were limited.

### 3. Reading journals – feedback from parents & other book-related questions

JH set out the idea behind the introduction of reading journals to Grazebrook.

She said the point of having reading journals is to encourage children to read and to read for pleasure.

The reading journals have been introduced alongside 'DEAR' time (Drop Everything and Read). In this time, class teachers have flexibility on how to use it – and ideas such as verbal recommendations of books by children to the class could be done in this time. Children can also write their journal entries during DEAR time if they didn't want to or aren't able to do it at home.

A question was raised on quality of books in school.

JH said there was more scope for a wider range of books in the class. She said there are some books she'd like to see in classrooms that aren't currently there. That's why there's the drive with the PSA for the 'buy a new book' initiative.

JH said that money is tight in the school budget – there is less to buy books. JH appealed to Parent Council members to encourage more book recommendations from parents and kids. She said she had had a few of those back. But less than 50 slips have come back with recommendations out of a school of almost 500 children.

A parent asked about how they could check that they weren't doubling up –eg. The school must have many Roald Dahl books already.

JH said in the next few days a sheet would go up in class windows – saying 'this class would like these books' – please donate. Parents have also been bringing in high-quality books they don't need any more which was very welcome and that every class has a book box.

The rep for 1B (MH) said that he was pleased to hear about reading for pleasure. But that there is some concern from parents that kids that they are being pushed too early on reading – and that the language being used to reference reading (he took the example of "split diagraphs") meant that there was a real risk at Y1 age that kids would be put off. Other schools in Hackney have a different approach. Diane agreed that she'd had a similar experience.

JH – said that this was a national level debate. The 'split diagraphs' are often called 'special friends.' When talking to the children. But, she said, early reading is important and children take phonics tests at the end of year 1.

JH also added that the school hadn't got everything right with the reading journals. For example, allowing children to cover them – this has resulted in some being so decorated they are difficult to write in. Higher up the school – the idea was for children to add their own lines. That hasn't worked as well either.

A question was raised about comments in some journals about the neatness of entries.

JH said that if children are able to write cursively they should also be doing so in their journals. There is encouragement by teachers that they should be writing as neatly as they can.

She also reminded parents that children don't need to write a lot in their journals.

One parent (SS) said that the sticker with the focus question really helped.

A question was raised by a Year 1 rep – That some children read the words but the comprehension isn't there. They explained that Yr 1 children take a test for comprehension, which involves referring to the book and that it's a narrow set of questions on fact rather than wider comprehension. JH explained that the comprehension questions asked to children in KS1 would widen as they go through the year and the school and that the focus on Yr 1 is ensuring that all children are strong readers as well as developing comprehension skills.

JH said that in terms of reading for enjoyment in the earlier years, there is DEAR (mentioned earlier) and Read Write Inc. and higher up the school Accelerated Reader is introduced. The Different systems are focused on different year groups/abilities. For examples KS2 have focus questions in their reading journals.

In conclusion:

JH requested more recommendations and more donations.

There will be sheets up in classrooms listing books the school would like parents to get.

A parent request for quick push of information to parents on what the reading journal is for – JH agreed to do this.

#### School Library

A question was asked about whether there could be a School Library.

JH said no there won't be one – due to limits of space and money. She referred to the drive to get good quality books into all classrooms. She will think further about how best children can access a wide range of books in school.

#### Travelling Book Fair

BD also said a 'thank you' to parents for their support of the travelling book fair. She said she realised there weren't as many cheaply-priced books as last year. But she said that it allows the school to raise money for their own books – the school gets the difference between the wholesale price and the cover price. As a result of this year's sale, the school was given £500 and was able to purchase 70 books.

#### 4. Requests for term time absences

JH set out the process when a parent applies for an absence during term time:

When I receive a request I take every one into consideration on its own merits - because each situation is unique and context matters. But I can't allow absences

in term time unless under very exceptional circumstances – this is set out by Department For Education guidelines.

If I decline and ‘unauthorise’ it doesn’t mean that the authorities will take action. Sometimes in these circumstances a letter might be sent from the local authority – but parents aren’t fined unless there is a wider issue with the child’s attendance.

One parent sought clarification on a recent court case:  
JH said that the guidance has changed but law itself hasn’t changed; absences in term-time are still not to be authorised unless ‘exceptional circumstances’

## 5. Homework

DH brought this question up as Yr 2 rep:  
There is quite a volume of homework – maths, reading, spelling plus a termly project. She had met resistance from her child that was damaging their relationship and as such she had to make a decision as to how much to push her child to do homework.

JH said that the school can’t and won’t enforce home learning – but that the school would always encourage it. Homework offers a good opportunity to talk to your child and talk about things they’ve been working on in school.

JH referred back to the reading journals – if they are not being done at home, they can do it in DEAR time. School is encouraging those kids who aren’t managing 3 a week to do the reading journals in their DEAR time. She stressed that reading journals can be about any book the child is reading, not just those provided by school.

A point was made by a Yr 2 parent (JMc) that children’s books weren’t being changed regularly.

JH said books should be changed weekly – if they aren’t talk to class teacher or phase leader. They are:

Ms Beecroft KS1.

Mr Kuhn for KS2.

JH made it clear that homework is discretionary. The idea behind the passport is to strike a balance between too much and not enough – as some parents feel there is too much and others say there isn’t enough. We try to provide enough for those who want lots, but have a dialogue with parents about how much is the right amount for each child.

JH also made the point that in Y5 & 6 – part of the aim is getting children ready for secondary school-level homework.

A parent with Y5 & 6 children (KO’S) said that on some of the passport work no marking or comments were made and this was discouraging.

JH said she would feed that back to class teachers.

## 6. School dinners

There was a discussion about the system of children eating with their Houses – in particular, do they all get equal opportunities to eat dinner first/last?

JH will think about how else this might be approached. She accepted that the system isn't working as smoothly as it might – so there may be a re-think.

JH made the point that she goes in last to eat her lunch so she knows what's left. She only knew of food running out in September – even then food was available, it's just that there weren't all options available.

A question was asked about whether portion sizes were large enough especially years 5-6.

JH said that there are government guidelines – detailed down to the gram. Ladles are specifically measured to give a particular portion which shouldn't be the same for each Key Stage and there is always a salad bar – which children can take as much as they like from. She said that usually it's a matter of kids throwing food away rather than asking for more.

JH also said that the children will discuss school dinners at school council – they can sit down with the school chef and give feedback from the children.

*(Note post meeting: Governor Matthew Jeary has also confirmed that he is going to talk to the Council to look at issues around school dinners from a child-centred perspective).*

JH has also requested that the kitchen list what is being left so it can be monitored.

It was asked about water cups and whether there were enough available. JH said that children can always ask.

There was also a reminder to parents of Come Dine with Me – every Wednesday parents are welcome to come into school to eat with their children

## 7. Playtime

A Y2 rep set out their concerns over playtime: When kids are out at playtime – they are being disciplined by having playtime taken away from them in 5m chunks. Also that there was an example of where a whole class was kept in because someone has misbehaved. And that by curtailing playtime this may be exacerbating the issue of behaviour in the classroom.

JH responded by making it clear 1 misbehaving child should never curtail the playtime of the whole class.

If there is any taking away of play time this should be for minutes at a time and rare. It would never be for a whole playtime or part of playtime.

If children are given 'time out' this would be for unsafe behaviour.

A Y2 rep asked about whether there was a uniform approach to discipline in the classroom and the playground. Were lunchtime staff too quick to put kids on blue in the playground? There was a request that this be fed back to staff.

JH pointed out that if there are particular concerns parents can always talk to the phase leader (named above) – who will have a key stage-wide or school-wide response. She also encouraged parents to raise their concerns with herself. She said parents don't need to wait until each term's Parent Council meeting to raise queries.

Also, to remind parents that any quick queries like this can come to her via Abi and can be passed on.

A question was asked about whether, when it rains, children can be given some access to the outside space. A suggestion was made to give classes 10 minute bursts outside – or to do exercise in the class room.

JH said it was hard with 500 children and 2 halls. The school has a difficult balance some kids may benefit from classroom physical activity, others get excited by it and may find it hard to wind back down for lesson time.

JH agreed that she would talk to the sports coaches to consider options.

She confirmed that when it drizzles the children do go out.

## 8. Art

A question was put on the agenda about how much art is done in school.

AM said that this issue came up at the last meeting – parents can refer back to the minutes of that meeting.

JH pointed out that lots of Art does happen – integrated into other projects. There are also Art Days - 2 days each half term; 2 days of DT other half term. But on top of that we do more: An art specialist teacher works across the federation working half a term with every class on a creative project. For example, they are now working around writing week.

AP (Yr1 Rep) asked whether there was the opportunity for parents to come into the school to offer workshops in areas like creative .

It was agreed that parents would be asked what skills they could offer to volunteer for a workshop. This call to parents will go in the newsletter - and a database will be made up.

MH (Yr 1) – Set out concerns about the amount of art at Grazebrook. He said some parents think GB has art at a low level as compared to other schools. He said creativity is important to do regularly not as a one-off. 2 days per term doesn't seem like much. He added there are benefits of drawing regularly, for example. He hears from teachers they'd like to do more but are bound by the focus on 'three Rs'.

NB (PSA) – asked whether there could be more opportunities to write creatively or compose poems integrated into the curriculum.

JH Responded: She would argue that there is creativity in the classroom – but that Grazebrook doesn't always shout about it. Eg. Yr 6 are currently writing and filming and producing their own adverts. She said she would include details of art in the newsletter.

JH said that schools have to do well in the 3 Rs. There is pressure on schools – and it's a difficult balance. She would love to do lots of creative sessions but the school also have to reach standards set down by Government for core subjects.

#### 9. Bulge class

MJ (Governor) Made clear there were no current plans at GB for a bulge class. JH said that there was currently no need for extra places at primary level in Hackney as there were new schools which were under subscribed.

#### 10. Toilets – reports they were dirty and children messed around in the toilet block.

JH said the toilets were checked regularly and cleaned. She is also doing assemblies around etiquette in the toilets.

#### 11. Trips – why are parents no longer allowed on trips?

JH said the DBS process which is necessary is expensive for the school. It's also time consuming and potentially intrusive. There are enough staff to manage school trips. JH has also experienced parents at previous schools who have had to cancel at short notice – that then has an impact on numbers.

She said parents are welcomed into the school for many events eg. Roald Dahl Day, assemblies, DT days, Come Dine with Me.

For parents who act as volunteers (eg as above) – they would need to fill in a form. As long as always supervised by school staff member and it's not regular there would be no need for full DBS under these circumstances.

#### 12. Sports Day – can it be held in Clissold Park?



JH said Sports Day wouldn't be held in Clissold Park as the facilities aren't adequate. Sports Day will continue to happen at the specialist facilities of Finsbury Park.

### 13. Communication with parents

JH said the school was developing new website – with added features including the ability to synch with phones.

Information on important days were always in bulletin – JH agreed the school would ask parents if they want to be emailed.

KO'S (Yr 6) said the newsletter is printed in too small type and pictures were hard to see. She suggested on an email it might be easier to zoom in. She also worries about amount of paper used by the school.

JH – said the school was thinking about how teachers can save paper through the use of ipads for example. She can see a move towards paperless communication but that the two systems to run side by side for the moment.

Bev did point out that some parents might not have access to computers, other parents have requested that they are not contacted digitally.

### 14. PSA Recruiting Volunteers

NB (PSA) asked whether class reps could collect email lists for class – so that there would be a big pool for the PSA to contact.

### 15. Interactive learning diaries.

Some Y2 Reps said they'd received emails about the ILDs and were they in use still?

JH said only Reception and Nursery use them. Emails would have come from the company that provide the platform and not from the school. A parent was asked to forward an example of this email and she will find out why this was sent out.

### 16. Use of the World Garden

A question was asked about whether enough children are getting access because of the health and safety risk. Could that area be looked at or tweaked to allow everyone to go everywhere in the playground? To allow for freedom rather than such controlled playground zones.

JH said she wants to see if there are ways for children to do lots of things in the playground eg. Set up a reading area.

The World Garden is a possible health and safety issue and the school can't let that be a free for all as it wouldn't be safe. But there is scope for kids to have more access to the grass areas around the playground. She said the school is in 'loco parentus' and as such has to look after health and safety elements for each and every child.

MH (Yr1 Rep) asked whether there were opportunities for outdoor or 'active' learning – to incorporate World Garden as part of lessons – daily event?

JH said that outdoor learning often happens – for example Y2 were out making Andy Goldsworthy type sculptures. iMovies were being filmed out there too. So it does get used a lot. Daily – would be lovely but difficult to manage.

*Post meeting addition: Abi made the point that the World Garden was put on restriction after a couple of children broke their arms there.*

#### 17. AOB

MH (Yr1) asked whether the PC could come back to question of a library.

JH – said the school can't reinstate a school library.

NB (PSA) asked about whether more pen grips could be made available.

JH – said they are around in the lower school.

KD (Yr2) suggested the PSA could fundraise for specific things for the school.

At 7.20 the meeting ended.