

## Notes from USH Parent Action Group meeting on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> October 2014

Present: at least 25 parents (6 new) plus Julie Prince (Business Manager) and Taz Curtis (Assistant Head). 28 pupils were represented across all year groups, see table below.

	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11
Boys(21)	3	4	2	0	3
Girls(20)	4	2	3	2	1
Total	7	6	5	2	4

Kate Stone chaired the meeting. She gave a brief introduction to new members and a reminder about the function of the group as a forum for school improvement. A copy of the draft Parent Engagement strategy was distributed for parents to read and comment on. The points have been organised under the same headings as used in the strategy document.

### Information Gathering

- Use Survey Monkey or similar to do quick online surveys, or e-mail questionnaires on specific questions.
- More use of e-mail to gather opinions about specific topics
- Some parents feel school website should be the focal point for communication but others are concerned for parents without easy computer/internet access – use of texts.

### Parent Involvement and Engagement

- It was noted that the action plan seemed very long and complex. Julie Prince explained that although she was responsible for overseeing implementation of the plan it was divided into many tasks that would be undertaken by various people.
- Parents (especially new ones) want clearer guidelines about who to contact regarding concerns about their child (Tutor, Year Leader, Subject Teacher, Subject Leader, Senior Leaders). They would like to know how quickly to expect an initial response, what to reasonably expect in terms of action and timescale and who to contact next if the issue is not resolved.
- There was a feeling that the Complaints Procedure needs a friendlier name to encourage home –school interaction about concerns/worries rather than just complaints. An issue only becomes a complaint if not dealt with adequately. [Julie Prince told the meeting that a new Complaints Protocol is going to the governing body and it will go on the website once approved]
- There were mixed feelings about Ask Shirley, some love it, some dislike the anonymity, some didn't know it existed, some can't always find it.
- It was explained that staff e-mail addresses are not available on the website because of problems with spam e-mails which nearly crippled the system in the past. It was suggested that teacher's e-mail addresses could be sent home in a letter so that parents have them. What about putting e-mail addresses in planners?

TIP Staff e-mail addresses always follow the same pattern [firstname.lastname@ushschool.org](mailto:firstname.lastname@ushschool.org) names as they appear on website.

- Parents' evenings – Parents were keen for more and stressed the importance of timing them early enough in the year that any issues raised can be tackled.
- Idea of morning drop in sessions – some felt not inclusive as working parents would not be able to attend, (would however suit shift workers); some thought it might be an embarrassment to children.
- Parents would like more notice of PAG meetings and advance notice of what will be on the agenda. If there are to be documents to read could they be sent out in advance so that people can do some preparation.
- Add a new section to the PAG page explaining the function of the group and making it clear that no commitment is necessary.
- Communicating through children can be a bit hit and miss, some children simply do not pass on information and lose letters from school.

### Celebrations

- Keen to have postcards back as not all children bother to tell their parents about awards/certificates etc.
- Rewards- still not transparent enough some people think awards/rewards demotivating
- Staff must be encouraged to be consistent in their use of the SIMS reward points.

### New Parent Induction

- Planners – still a feeling that planners could be used more effectively. How do parents know if they are being looked at as there is now nowhere for tutors to sign? How about staff initialling a parent comment to show it has been read and vice versa. Parents observe that the use of planners decreases as pupils progress through each year.

### Assessment and Reporting

- Homework is still a hot topic of conversation. Parents want to be able to help their child get their homework done but feel they do not always have the necessary information. They want to know what has been set, when it is due, and see the teacher feedback. Many parents still find planners are not being used to record homework accurately/in sufficient detail. There was a sense that not much has changed on homework since our PAG meeting which focussed on homework.
- Julie informed the meeting that Richard Corser is looking at the whole issue of Homework, she suggested that he bring his new strategy to a PAG meeting for us to see and discuss.
- Parents have found Sims Learning Gateway (SLG) useful but are very keen to start using the homework function. Julie Prince informed the meeting that SLG would be launched to all parents after half term. The homework facility would be gradually populated and should be complete after Christmas.

### Transition

- A parent commented on how good he felt the transition process had been.
- Add details of PAG to Year 6 info packs.
- Some parents thought more communication in the early days of Year 7 would be useful.

- Year 7 Parents have established a facebook page to share practical information, for example, what are they cooking? what is their homework? They find it very useful, although some concerns were raised as to what else might be shared and whether any sort of moderation takes place. We learnt that Shirley Infant School has a more formal arrangement with a page for each year group established by the PTA and moderated by a member of staff (although she very rarely intervenes). As the cohort 's have progressed to Junior school the facebook pages have been updated ( who moderates now?)

### Hard to reach parents

- Accept that many parents are basically happy with the school and just want to trust the school to get on with the job and feel no need for engagement – until they perceive a problem.
- PAG will not suit everyone and can only be one opportunity that is available. School needs to be responsible for finding other means of engaging with parents.
- Recognise that many hard to reach parents had bad experiences of school themselves. In some cases engagement needs to be about building positive relationship building and gaining the trust of the family.
- Build on good relationships established by previous schools. Identify potentially hard to reach families and make special efforts with them at transition time and beyond. Try to make sure that school-home contact starts on a positive note.
- Staff must always be open and friendly so that less confident parents feel able to engage.
- Hold more social events with friendly relaxed atmosphere at which staff can circulate and engage with parents.
- Perhaps have meetings off site, eg St James Park Cafe.
- Find a way to tempt parents into school, eg the Art Show; visiting the allotment; refreshments.
- One parent described a strategy they used at her Primary school where many parents were proving hard to engage with. All parents attending parents' evening could be entered into a draw for an e-reader with the result that attendance increased hugely.
- An infant school used to enter all questionnaire respondents into a prize draw.
- Produce easy to read versions of documents.
- Needs analysis- find out what the barriers to engagement are so that they can be addressed. For example, would meetings with translators be useful or women only meetings?
- Personally invite specific groups of parents to meetings with a focus, eg dyslexia, nurture group.
- Pre-book parent evening appointments for parents that staff are keen to meet.