



St. Nicolas' CE Combined School Taplow

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Dear parents, carers and the wider school community,

22nd September 2023

Welcome back to the new school term and a particularly warm welcome to all of those who have newly joined the St Nicolas' community this year. As governors, we are excited for all that is to come during this academic year and we look forward to working with the school with renewed focus on our priorities.

I am writing with an update on a few fronts; Ofsted, new investments and our work as governors.

Ofsted report – St Nicolas' continues to be a good school

Following the inspection in June, Ofsted has now published its report, available [here](#). We are very pleased that the inspection confirmed what we all believed to be true, that St Nicolas' continues to be a good school.

As governors we wanted to recognise this significant achievement. The school is not run solely to perform well in inspections – this outcome is the result of continuous improvement, hard work and dedication – but it was a pleasure to see the huge team effort from the entire school staff and the children who played their part during the inspection.

There has been much recent comment on the oversimplification of the Ofsted assessment of a school to a single word. It is clear that these reports follow a standardised format and use of wording which struggles to convey the specific context of an individual school. However, having met with the lead inspector during the process and for feedback, it was clear that Mr Hemmings built a good understanding of our school:

- There was clear recognition of the excellent behaviour standards and a clarity and understanding of the school's vision that was evident throughout the inspection.
- It was particularly pleasing to see the results of the great amount of work that has taken place to ensure that the curriculum across the school is structured, linked and phased to ensure systematic progression throughout the years. In addition to their own class responsibilities our teaching staff also take on subject leadership roles – as governors we have seen strong coherence in the curriculum mapping and the resultant effect of pupil achievement first hand.
- Providing the best opportunities for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND has been a strategic focus for the school and an area for further investment as we seek to do the very best for each pupil. It was good to see that reflected in the feedback so prominently and it remains a firm priority.
- We would expect safeguarding conclusions to be robust as we challenge and audit this as governors. The policies and systems that are in place reinforced by training at every level are effective, but collectively we are never complacent in this critical area.

We could continue with many more examples but more importantly there are areas for improvement that we recognise and are embedded in the school's improvement plan for the coming year, notably ensuring that all subjects mirror the strength of teaching and progression already exhibited in the core subjects.

Continued investments in the school



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In recent years the Board of Trustees has supported the school's accelerated investment programme focused on three core areas: (i) Modernisation of the school premises, (ii) Investing in our people and (iii) Ensuring equal chances for all children. Some of these investments are unglamorous and/or not visible, but we wanted to bring a few developments to your attention:

- A new multi-purpose building built and installed over the summer on the right as you look at the front of school. The main school building doesn't cater well for modern small group working or individual interventions to support pastoral and SEND needs. We now have two additional, fully accessible rooms that are already being used for phonics, small group learning, pastoral and SEND focused activities and meetings.
- Energy efficiency and sustainability. The school already had a plan to improve its energy consumption ahead of the spikes in energy costs we experienced last year. This drove the installation of the solar panel array on the roof of the building which is generating more than the school's daytime usage over the summer. This summer three Tesla Powerwall batteries were installed to capture excess generation to be used overnight or at times of lower solar output. Whilst we did not envisage it at the time, this investment has saved huge sums in electricity cost and we expect a relatively short payback time. This has further enabled us to begin to install air conditioning units in classrooms, starting with Years 5 and 6, using our own electricity generation. We have become a case study school in this area and it has been great to hear of the curriculum links into science, climate and sustainability.
- Technology investments. There is more to do in this area but so far this has included a new full class set of iPads and replacement of all of the smart boards in each classroom to the latest versions. When funding allows next on our list is a refresh of the equipment in the computer room.

It is important to stress that these investments are only possible because of rigorous management of the school annual income and targeted spending from our reserves balances which have accrued over time. As with all schools there is limited surplus income remaining each year, but we have an on-going commitment to reinvesting as much as is possible. We prudently retain a healthy reserve balance for a school of our size and nature.

Strengthening our Governance

The Board of Trustees has been working over the last two years to improve how we govern the school, simplify the structure and build a skill set around the school that can be as helpful as possible. This included an external review of how we govern and how we can improve. These changes will continue this year.

We have a governor vacancy. We are looking for people who can positively influence our discussions and who share an energy and ambition for the school. Interest, ideas and enquiries are very welcome – please get in touch directly or via school.

We hope you all have a great half-term and look forward to meeting new parents and carers soon.

All the best,



Paul Tracey

Chair of Governors on behalf of the Governing Body

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