



Federation News

February 2025

Dear Parents and Carers,

Welcome back to Term 4 and another instalment of the Federation News. I will keep you up-to-date with any key information for both schools, celebrate achievements and highlight some of the challenges we are currently facing, not just in our schools but in most cases, education generally in our area. It will also contain a governor section so that you can hear about their work and findings about both schools. This time it's a response to the Parent Questionnaire they sent out - you can read about this at the end.

Attendance

Attendance at both schools has been below the National Average for large amounts of this academic year.

Q. What does this mean and why are you telling me?

A. This means that compared to other schools across the country, we are below where we should be. As a result, this creates gaps in learning, which if not caught up, lead to lower pupil outcomes and achievement. We also know that regular school attendance brings other benefits including, personal wellbeing, and social development. Attending school helps build essential life skills, setting children up for a successful future.

There has been a lot of genuine illness; among pupils and staff. I am not suggesting that you cannot be ill or should be in school if you are really poorly – we want your children to rest and recover appropriately. With things like sickness, for example, we want children to have at least a clear day of not being sick before returning to school. Historically, at Monkton CEP School, the expectation has always been that there should be a clear 48 hours from the last episode of V&D before returning to school. At Minster CEP School, we operate a 'clear day' policy. This allows children to return a little earlier, providing they are well enough, meaning they miss less schools and working parents can get back to work. We have not seen any evidence at Minster that this increases the spread and so will now be applying this policy to Monkton CEP School as well, with immediate effect.

Unnecessary absence is the area we need to address. These include the following:

- Holidays – you are not allowed to take children on a holiday during term time. This will always be unauthorised and may result in a fine.
- Appointments – please make these outside of school hours where possible.
- Minor illness e.g. runny nose. Children that are well enough to be in school but may need some Calpol or a tissue should be in and learning.

- Poorly brother or sister – a child that is well enough to be in school, should be in school regardless of a sick sibling.
- Family Occasions/Celebrations – this includes birthdays, family visiting , special days out, new pets etc.
- Parental appointments.
- Lateness – we understand that road closures and traffic can be challenging. However, please consider this when planning your school run in the morning as lateness contributes to absence, as well as causing disruption to the morning class.
- If a child is sent home poorly their unaffected siblings cannot go as well.
- Children should never be collected to go home early unless this is pre-arranged with the office and for a legitimate reason.

Should you be struggling with any of the above issues and need support from school, please let us know. We are always happy to work with families to enable better attendance for our pupils.

Pupil Premium Funding (Free School Meals)

This is a plea and also some information on how it's spent to support pupils learning.

Q. What is Pupil Premium and why do we have it?

A. This is funding for schools to utilise to support children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Statistically children from disadvantaged backgrounds perform lower academically and as a result, have reduced life chances for future employment. This funding is used to help close the educational gap. Schools utilise the funding in many ways – how each school uses the funding is detailed in their Pupil Premium Strategy on the website.

<https://www.minster-ramsgate.kent.sch.uk/pupil-premium/>

<https://www.monkton.kent.sch.uk/our-school/key-information/pupil-premium>

Please note: PP funding is not a personal pot of money that you can draw on for your child to pay for things. If you are in financial hardship, please speak to our Heads of School, presenting the appropriate evidence. We may be able to offer some support or signpost you to someone who can help.

If your child is eligible for PP funding then please sign up - this doesn't mean your child has to have free school meals. If your child is in EYFS, Y1 or Y2 your child already gets a free dinner if they want it – this is different however to PP and you can still secure the PP funding for the school if you meet the criteria. The office at both schools will help here if you give them a ring. Please follow this link to check eligibility: <https://www.gov.uk/apply-free-school-meals>

High Needs Funding and School Budgets

Schools have never been well off, but are now being expected to operate on decreasing budgets in real terms going forward. This puts additional, unwanted pressures on schools meaning we have to be increasingly careful with our future spending. Local heads have been discussing how challenging it is to expect us to cater for the current/increasing pupil needs across all mainstream schools on a diminishing budget.

Q. Why is this happening?

A. Partly this is down to funding for children with higher special education needs. This is set to reduce dramatically for the next academic year and to continue to fall over the subsequent years.

It's my job to navigate this for both schools and we have already action planned for next year as we set the budget in April.

Your support going forward is essential but you don't need to do anything extra, please just support when asked. Things like school trips will not be able to happen if we don't get enough voluntary payments from parents to cover the costs. This is a simple example of how both schools can save thousands of pounds. There are many more examples – we only ask for money when it is needed. I would much rather be spending this money on your children's education.

Working in Partnership – Home and School

We are all working towards the same goal – the best outcomes for your children. Having looked at the data for every pupil across both schools it is very obvious to see the positive link between pupil achievement and the small amount of essential homework that we send out. Generally, children who read regularly (5x a week) at home, achieve better than those who don't. As reading is an essential life skill and at the heart of everything we teach in the curriculum, it is essential that children reach their full potential in reading. Children who regularly engage in the maths homework platforms at both schools generally achieve better with their maths. Very obvious statements, backed up by our data and very easy to implement with your support.

Both schools will be focusing on developing positive partnerships with parents to ensure this happens. Children these days are very busy socially, but it is so important that we fit these relatively short tasks in as well, on a regular basis.

OPAL

This is not the most glamorous time of year on our playgrounds and quite often in the past children would be reluctant to go out in the cold/wet. With the introduction of OPAL we have seen a significant shift in attitude, which is brilliant. It is much healthier to be out in the fresh air and get some much-needed exercise so that children are ready to focus on their afternoon lessons. At this point can I thank parents for your support with wet weather clothing. This was always going to be the most challenging bit of OPAL but your support has

made this much easier to manage. We have developed systems in school to make this as smooth as possible ensuring maximum enjoyment for the pupils.



As



Amazing new sandpit and boat at Monkton!

Amazing new pallet stage and dressing up clothes at Minster!

you can imagine, providing opportunities for OPAL is not cheap and with diminishing budgets at both schools your contributions and donations have been a massive help. I have pictured some of the things that have been donated so if anybody can further support either school please get in touch!

EKC Trust

As discussed in my last instalment, working with EKC has offered lots of CPD (training) opportunities for staff at all levels. Currently, all leaders at both schools have been on leadership training to enhance practice further. There has been a noticeable impact from these events which can only lead to better outcomes for your children.

I have been involved in network Headteacher meetings that have enabled the Federation to be ahead of the game in many areas and provide essential information for future planning, especially in the area of SEND where there are many changes taking place at KCC level.



Both schools recently attended a Trust event at Canterbury College – a musical concert with an invitation to be part of future events going forward. We look forward to many more enrichment activities in the future.



A selection of our governors have also attended the EKC governor conference making networking with a broader spectrum of governors possible.

THRIVE

When we talk about our educational impact on our pupils we talk about them 'As a Person' and 'As a Learner'. Both are equally important in ensuring children are at the right stage for their age and also prepared for their next phase of education at secondary school. Our school development plans are focused on enhancing these two areas, ensuring we are always striving to be the very best we can be for your children.

A main driver for our 'As a Person' Plan is Thrive. Thrive continues to grow and develop the practice in both schools. 'Thrive Time' for developing against whole class targets is working well and ensuring that great foundations are in place to ensure good learning in the classroom. This fits really well against our Christian Foundations and the role of Collective Worship in developing children as global citizens. We are also knitting our RSE curriculum into this approach to ensure it is part of everyday practice not just a bolt-on.

One of the key policies in both schools is the behaviour policy. We are currently working on developing this policy utilising the Thrive approach with two key drivers at its heart – **'Everybody has the Right to Feel Safe'** and **'Everybody has the Right to Learn'**. We know children's behaviour is never going to be perfect, which is why we have to have a behaviour policy. Going forward there will be a stronger emphasis on logical consequences and also on the 'reflect and repair' process. The aim of any situation in school is for pupils to learn and develop from their mistakes and this approach provides a robust framework for moving this forward.

Governor Survey

Governors reply to parent questionnaire 2024/2025

Thank you to all parents and carers who took part in this year's questionnaire. It is a fantastic opportunity for us, as Governors, to see what you think about the schools and where you think each school is doing well, but also areas you feel could do with enhancement. We have been through the questionnaires with both Heads of Schools and the Executive Head. Having analysed the responses it is extremely pleasing to see so many positive comments.

Within the overarching umbrella of the Federation, both schools manage to stay distinctly different. However, together they both benefit from the support and knowledge that the staff at each school can provide. As church schools, they both share in a child-centred approach but have different visions and values based on different parables. These values are evident throughout both schools and deeply embedded throughout Minster and Monkton school culture and curriculum.

Last year was a challenging year. Paul McCarthy had to not only work in his new role as Executive Head Teacher across the Federation but also had to cover as Head of School at Minster until Richard Russell started in September 2024. Despite all of these challenges it has not had a detrimental effect on either school, quite the opposite in fact!

Both schools have continued to strengthen and grow and this is a credit to the amazing staff at both schools. During this time Monkton also had Ofsted and SIAMS inspections, both of which had amazing outcomes. In the past year, we feel that the pupils and staff at both schools have risen to these challenges, and this is evident during our monitoring visits, and our Governing Board meetings, where we challenge and hold the staff to account.

As governors, It is good to see how your parent comments have been heard, and already some areas raised within the questionnaire are being addressed within both schools.

Thank you – The Governing Body

And finally.....

That's it for this instalment. I will be in touch with further Federation developments as they happen. In the meantime, don't forget to use Parent Link to add your positive input for future school and Federation development.

Warmest regards,

P. McCarthy

Paul McCarthy

Executive Headteacher