

**Minutes of the SEND forum: Tuesday 29th March 2022**

The meeting began at 12.30pm with thanks to everyone who attended.

Mr Parker reiterated the purpose of the forum – to enhance communication between school and parents (and raise accountability) and to engage parents in talking together about their experiences and supporting each other.

Mr Parker and Mrs Helyar talked about the government’s SEN green paper, which is in the consultation phase. It can be found here and parents are encouraged to take a look:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-and-ap-green-paper-responding-to-the-consultation>

The meeting then took the form of going through actions of the first meeting and gauging improvements made. It was commented that children seemed more aware of the language used to describe challenges they might face and overcoming anxiety, etc. There has been a lot of dialogue in school, sharing feelings and offering positive messages, and this is having a positive impact on children’s mental health and wellbeing and their ability to reflect and regulate independently.

Mrs Helyar mentioned that she and Mr Parker had been on an SEN walk around the school that morning and had seen good practice throughout, seeing positive and calm learning environments that support pupils in accessing the curriculum. Staff have had further training on awareness of the needs of neuro-diverse children and it is clear to see that raised awareness impacting positively on pupils’ experiences. Mr Parker said that he would arrange an open afternoon where parents can see their children in their school learning environment. This will be arranged for after Easter.

The drop ins with Mrs Helyar were then discussed. She is more than happy to continue with these but it was largely agreed that allocating a slot was not an effective use of time and often didn’t fit with the needs of parents. Mrs Helyar stressed that she is always available, as is Mr Parker, for parents to call/arrange conversations about their children and their needs.

The website was then discussed and Mrs Helyar pointed out that there are numerous links to the referral process for the TASC pathway, ADHD referrals, etc. and there is a link to Trafford’s local offer.

The ‘sensory library’ that was proposed at the last meeting has been hugely successful. Looking around school, it is evident that resources such as weighted blankets, fiddle toys, ear defenders and wobble cushions are used to positive effect. It can be noted that both teachers and parents can request these for their children. If parents would like to try these at home, they can be loaned out. Just catch Mrs Helyar at j.helyar@urmstonprimaryschool.com.

It was discussed that an SEN parent Whatsapp group has been created and has grown into a space that is supportive and enables people to share their experiences, resources, and is just a nice place to vent...and to realise that there are many others facing challenges...you are not alone! The group’s admin have agreed that in order to encourage more parents to access the group, school can mention that parents can leave their name and number at the main office and it can be passed to the group’s admin to invite them. Mr Parker will mention this in the newsletter.

Mrs Helyar and Mr Parker commented that there remains a great deal of anxiety and social and emotional need amongst the children, far more so that before the pandemic. Indeed, the whole staff team, in particular Mrs Ball and Mrs Walker, are working hard to ensure children have the support that they need to feel safe and happy in school. Parents agreed that anxiety was prevalent and said that they would appreciate another workshop on anxiety – Carole Thistlewaite came in from SENDIASS and it was mentioned that Zoe Brook’s last anxiety workshop was very good and perhaps she could do another, next time linking in with DNA-V - an evidence-based model that promotes psychological strength. It was also commented that a workshop on self-esteem would be very welcome. Mrs Helyar said she’d be looking into this.

Normalising neurodiversity was discussed – as this was a key point from last time – and Neurodiversity Celebration Week, last week was talked about. Mr Parker said that rather than being a stepping stone as was proposed at the last meeting, because awareness had increased a great deal already, NDCW was a chance to talk about things more openly and specifically about what neurodiversity is and the different forms it takes. The week ended with a visit from Rob Martin, an author of the Joe and Dusty books, who was diagnosed with Autism in his 50s. He talked openly and eloquently to the children, who asked him some fantastic questions about how Autism had impacted his life, and the messages that he gave about celebrating unique strengths and differences were incredibly positive. The basis of the week was for staff to be open about the challenges that they face too and for children to share theirs, so that we could all agree that whilst we are on the same spectrum – a human being one(!) - we are also different, and that is to be celebrated. It was commented by a parent that part way through the week, their child was getting upset, saying why are they so different, but as the week progressed and the children talked, they all realised that they had some traits (we all do!) and they became much more comfortable in acknowledging their uniqueness and sharing that with others. It is hoped that this culture will be maintained and enhanced further. Mr Parker said that it would be fantastic to get in more role models who may share their experiences with the children. If any parents are aware of any others that they feel would be appropriate to come in, please do let us know.

The meeting ended just after 1.30pm.