

**Minutes of the SEND forum: Thursday 9th December 2021**

The meeting began at 1pm with thanks to everyone who attended. Mr Parker introduced Mrs Helyar, Mrs Ball and Mrs Walker (who discussed their credentials and roles within school) before giving some context on the current climate in education and support for SEND, as well as the challenges that schools face. Mr Parker stressed that although the school tries to be as open as possible, there may be times when parents feel uncomfortable approaching about certain issues relating to their child’s needs. It was stressed that school fully acknowledges and expects parents to be the strongest of advocates for their children and so would urge them to approach school if they have any questions or concerns.

Mrs Helyar continued, discussing some of the processes and procedures that parents and schools need to go through for ASD, ADHD, Dyslexia, Occupational Therapy and other sensory needs, and how APDRs play a role, not only in supporting children but in evidencing what schools do as part of any future assessments and referrals that might be needed.

Mr Parker went on to discuss some of the things that school currently does to support all children as well as looking at what school can do better. He shared how school would be monitoring the impact of work done on neuro-diverse environments and that they would be using some non-negotiables for our school environments, both in class and outside it. A parent also shared some useful resources from autism.org. There were also some other useful links shared. It was suggested that to further open streams of communication, school could offer a drop in every three weeks or so to enable a definitive time where parents can ask questions, general or about their child. Mrs Helyar stressed that she is happy for anyone to email her for updates, etc, but that they can also ask the class teacher also, who will undoubtedly be willing to provide updates on how children are doing.

The slides can be found on the website.

It was then over to parents. There were some incredibly useful and informative comments and conversations had on the system and what we might do in school. One parent mentioned how useful a recent anxiety workshop through Just Psychology was that she attended, and how she can already see the positive impact and potential for real development in supporting her child. Another parent had some key messages and suggestions from others that couldn’t make it. Some of these are as follows:

* Although the sharing of the slide on processes was said to be useful, it was asked if parents can have access to some clear flow charts on the processes and procedures. Mrs Helyar said that she will provide a link where this information can be found.
* It was suggested that perhaps the SEN page on the website might be more user friendly and provide discreet tabs and links for the various areas of SEND as this would enable parents to find the information they need much more easily. Mr Parker said he would look into sorting this.
* A sensory library was suggested, where children can try a variety of resources (wobble cushions, weighted blankets, fidget toys, etc) to see if they work for them, which is a lovely suggestion. Mrs Helyar has since said that she can acquire any resources that children and parents might find useful and is happy to loan these out – so please do just get in touch.
* Perhaps there can be a means for parents to share their resources, knowledge and expertise, by means of a website link or a blog, that can be accessed by parents and add to a supportive community. This will also be looked into.
* It was commented that it is extremely important that all staff have access to training for awareness of our children’s sensory needs, including support staff and lunch staff, and even awareness for visitors on how our children learn and experience life in different ways. The importance of a real whole school approach was acknowledged.

A parent shared a name of someone at SENDIASS who would be willing to come in and do a workshop with parents. Mr Parker said that he would be on this straight away to arrange this. It was mentioned that Mrs Helyar had a number of workshops in the pipeline before the pandemic and it is important to get these up and running to support parents. A parent suggested that there are a number of Blue Sky venues across the borough that could host such events if school could not.

The matter of a need for diagnoses was significantly discussed and one parent commented that the formality and legality of a diagnosis ensures more definitive support. Some parents commented that they didn’t feel a diagnosis is necessarily needed if strategies are in place for children to support themselves moving forward with an awareness of how they are unique and how the challenges they face can be approached. Again, the challenges in getting a diagnosis, especially in the current climate, were highlighted by all.

Discussion ensued on normalising neuro-divergence through getting in visitors and guest speakers who are neuro-diverse, perhaps even former pupils and even our own pupils talking about this and sharing their experiences; role-modelling, etc. and raising awareness of famous figures who have excelled, in part because of their neuro-diversity, Steve Jobs and Greta Thunburg, one of the school’s class names, being examples of this were discussed. It was agreed that this could really help celebrate and reinforce our uniqueness, as could a greater focus on neuro-diversity in books.

The raising of awareness of neuro-diversity was discussed at length and that although a specific day could be used as a stimulus for awareness and celebration, it is essential that this becomes simply part of daily life – in both school and across society – where everyone’s uniqueness and similarities are celebrated.

It was discussed that Neuro diversity celebration week is on the week beginning the 14th March and Autism awareness week, the week beginning 28th March. Perhaps during these dates could be a good time for the next meeting. Mr Parker said that school would be in touch about this.

The meeting closed just before 3pm. It was extremely positive that so many people in the school community are willing to come together to do the best for our children.