

# Aboyne Lodge School

## Governors' newsletter for 2017/18

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### *Introduction*

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The Aboyne governors are pleased to issue our summer newsletter, which also serves as our governors' report covering activities during the 2017/18 year.

This year has felt like a roller coaster - we've experienced some amazing highs and equally there have been lows. Priority one is always the children and importantly, we have secured some fantastic outcomes for our pupils. Firstly, a very successful Ofsted inspection, which again graded Aboyne 'Good' which we're very pleased about. I'm also delighted to announce the SATS results have been strong from EYFS through KS1 and KS2. Specifically, Y6 results are a vast improvement on last year, with SPAG at 90% (+27), Reading 80% (+3), Writing 77% (+4), and Maths 77% (+15). This was the result of priorities in the school development plan and much hard work. Congratulations to the teaching staff and children alike!

**On behalf of the governors of Aboyne Lodge School**

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### *Summary of key events for 2017/18*

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#### *Budget Impact*

Sadly, as you will be aware, the school has had an increasingly hard time balancing its budget in recent years. This has been caused by the combination of a per child real term reduction in funding by the government coupled with increases in costs through inflation, increasing staff costs and new costs being pushed into the school's responsibility and budget, including the apprenticeship levy.

The effect of this is that in 2018/19 our funds delegated by the local authority fell by some £40,000 whilst staffing costs increased by £75,000, meaning that our budget no longer balances. We are not the only school in this position and understand from

Hertfordshire County Council that approximately 25% of schools in the County are now in deficit with more likely to enter in the coming years. You will also be aware that other schools in this area are being affected similarly.

What this means in practice is that the school needs permission from the County Council to run a deficit budget. That permission only comes with an agreed remedial plan. This unfortunately has led to some incredibly tough decisions including a formal review of the number of Teaching Assistants within the school which remains ongoing at the time of writing. We will update you further when this process has been concluded.

Additionally, and as informed previously, Mrs Abley has agreed to take on the additional responsibility of becoming the interim, part-time, head of Templewood School in Welwyn. This action has served to lessen the impact of the budget cuts on staff and has only been possible because of the strong and supportive team that Mrs Abley has developed within the school.

If government policy remains unchanged, the school budget will remain a challenge.

#### *Fundraising*

However, we want you to be clear that we are not just focusing on cost cutting. In recent years we have increased school revenues through reviewing its approach to its commercial arrangements. We will be able to extend this further once the building project is complete.

We have also been helped by you through school donations via School Gateway and by setting up direct debits. Sadly, this is now vital. We will be writing to you at the start of the autumn about donations to help us support the school and teachers. We should then have the required charitable status to gift aid any donations to further benefit the school.

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### *Ofsted Inspection*

As already mentioned, despite difficult financial constraints we had a very successful Ofsted inspection which graded Aboyne a 'Good' school. Here are a few quotes from the Ofsted report in May;

'In 2017, the proportion of pupils at key stage 1 attaining greater depth was above national averages in reading, writing and mathematics. More pupils attained the higher standards in reading and writing compared to the national average as seen in the 2017 key stage 2 test results'

'Leaders and governors provide strong leadership and have a thorough understanding of what is required to ensure that the school continues to improve.'

'Governors are ambitious for the school. They have developed plans and use them effectively to make best use of their skills and expertise.'

'Leaders have ensured that procedures for safeguarding are fit for purpose. Governors regularly monitor the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures to ensure that records meet statutory requirements.'

'The overwhelming majority who responded to Parent View agreed that pupils are safe and well cared for at school.'

Within the body of the report next steps identified for Aboyne Lodge by the HMI inspector were as follows:

- new approaches to the teaching of mathematics are embedded so that pupils, especially the most able, are challenged and stretched in their thinking
- pupils apply their writing skills across the curriculum to the same standard as in their English books.

Plans are already in place to ensure that these next steps are built into the curriculum and importantly are measured.

### *Building Project*

As you know, our application to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (EFSA) to be assessed for the Priority School Building Programme (PSBP) was successful, and governors have attended several meetings this year to progress the project. The tendering process is now complete and the revised dates to begin the project are, subject to any further changes by the EFSA or appointed contractor, May 2019 for the nursery and Lodge Room and September 2019 for the main school building.

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### *Activities during 2017/18*

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The governors have continued their work overseeing the academic performance of the school.

Over and above full governing body and committee meetings a key part of the role of a governor is to carry out "governor visits". These are formal visits made to the school by individual governors to study a particular subject or theme. When governors make formal visits, they report back to the full governing body.

Where relevant, governors ensure their visits focus on how the school's development priorities are being addressed. For the 2017/18 year, these were to:

- Continue to develop the wellbeing of staff and pupils
- Support the building project
- Support Aboyne curriculum ensuring Aboyne pupils receive the very best, well rounded and stimulating education
- Improve communication

Several visits have taken place each month and these have covered the following subjects or topic areas:

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- Safeguarding
- Parents, staff & pupil surveys
- Building project meetings
- Sports Premium
- Pupil Premium
- Pupil progress
- SEND
- Budget
- Communications audit & proposal
- Maths mastery
- Arts Mark
- Health & safety

Governors have also attended regular training sessions through the year and for the first time been present at parents' evening and open evening.

Last year we reported on our options with regard to becoming an academy. The government has changed its position on this subject over the last 12 months. It seemed likely that the government would make it mandatory this time last year, whereas now the stance has softened somewhat. As financial pressure mounts we may decide that uniting with other like-minded schools may bring us benefits, however the potential benefits have, as yet, not been quantified. Aboyne will need to be financially a little more settled before potential academisation can be put on the agenda, however, in the interim we continue to investigate opportunities.

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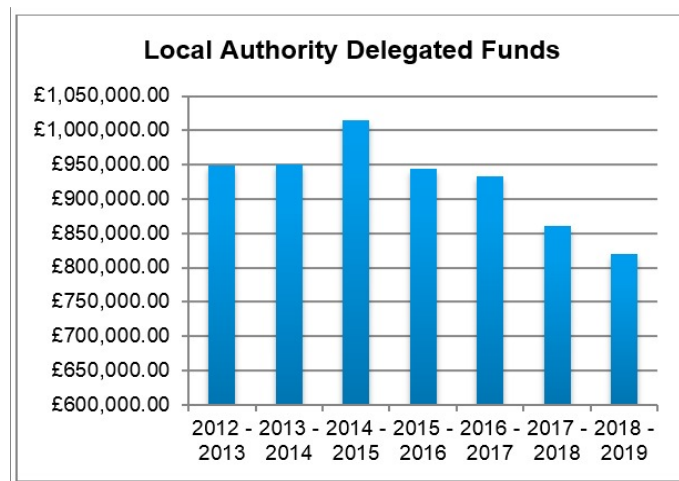
### *Resources*

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A second vital area of governor oversight covers the school budget, which runs from April to March and is monitored by the Resources Committee.

As noted above, the school's financial position has become increasingly difficult in recent years and for the 2016/2017 financial year, with donation from parents and additional funding from ALSA, the school managed to generate a small surplus.

However Local Authority Delegated Income has continued to reduce making it harder to achieve a balanced budget position, as detailed below:



As Local Authority funding has fallen, the underlying cost base has been increasing and this has been predominantly driven by Government legislation changes such as the Apprenticeship Levy, the Living Wage and pension changes, all of which are out of the schools direct control.

The result of the above meant that in March of this year the school was unable to prepare a balanced budget meaning that it has been necessary to make structural changes to the way in which the school operates in order to deliver the highest quality of education whilst reducing overhead costs.

Of course, the largest single cost to the school, being approximately 80% of total expenditure, are its staff and so it is here that attention has had to be focussed. The Governors have considered all options when looking at staffing which have included the splitting of Mrs Abley's time across two schools and also a review of non-teaching staff within the school. This review is on-going and we will of course update parents once the outcome is known.

The result is that for the time being the Governors believe that they can balance the budget in the medium term however this is reliant on the continued

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financial assistance of parents and carers, which we greatly appreciate.

Other ways in which you can assist the school is to contact the education representatives at Hertfordshire County Council and your local Member of Parliament to highlight the detrimental impact that Government cuts are having on schools like Aboyne Lodge.

contribution and we wish the new governors every success in their role.

It is good practice to list attendance at Full Governing Body (FGB) meetings, along with Resources Committee (RC) and School Improvement Committee (SIC) meetings where relevant for each governor.

Table 1 shows meetings attended by each governor who served during 2017-18.

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### *Governor details*

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The governing body has remained fairly stable during the course of this academic year, although there are inevitably a few changes.

Birgir Scheving stood down as a parent governor in June this year. Birgir had served Aboyne Lodge for several years and we'd like to thank him for his contribution.

Adam Grant resigned shortly after joining the governing body as his job was unexpectedly relocated abroad.

Deryn Grisenthwaite served her term as staff governor and has been replaced by Rachel Lockwood.

At the last full governing body meeting in July we welcomed Claire Sayce as a new parent governor and Emma Haller as a new co-opted governor.

Lastly our Chair, Christy Roach, will be standing down after 5 years on the board at Aboyne and the last academic year serving as Chair of Governors. As of 1<sup>st</sup> September, our longest serving governor, David Hope will be taking up the Chair position, ably assisted by Tom Irwin as Vice Chair.

We're very grateful to the hours that the governors put in over the course of the year, they are all unpaid volunteers who work very hard on behalf of the school. We'd like to thank everyone for their

<b>Table 1: Governor attendance</b>	<b>Full Governing Body</b>	<b>Resources Committee</b>	<b>School Improvement Committee</b>
Amanda Abley	6/6	4/4	3/3
Birgir Scheving	3/5	2/3	---
Cecilia Fenech Brincat	3/6	---	1/3
Christy Roach	5/6	1/1	3/3
David Hope	5/6	4/4	---
Rachel Lockwood	3/5	---	1/2
Deryn Grisenthwaite	1/1	0/1	---
Emma Fitzgibbons	4/4	1/2	---
Rob Blok	4/6	4/4	---
Sal Cameron-Griffiths	6/6	1/1	1/3
Tina Shaw	6/6	---	3/3
Tom Irwin	5/6	1/1	3/3

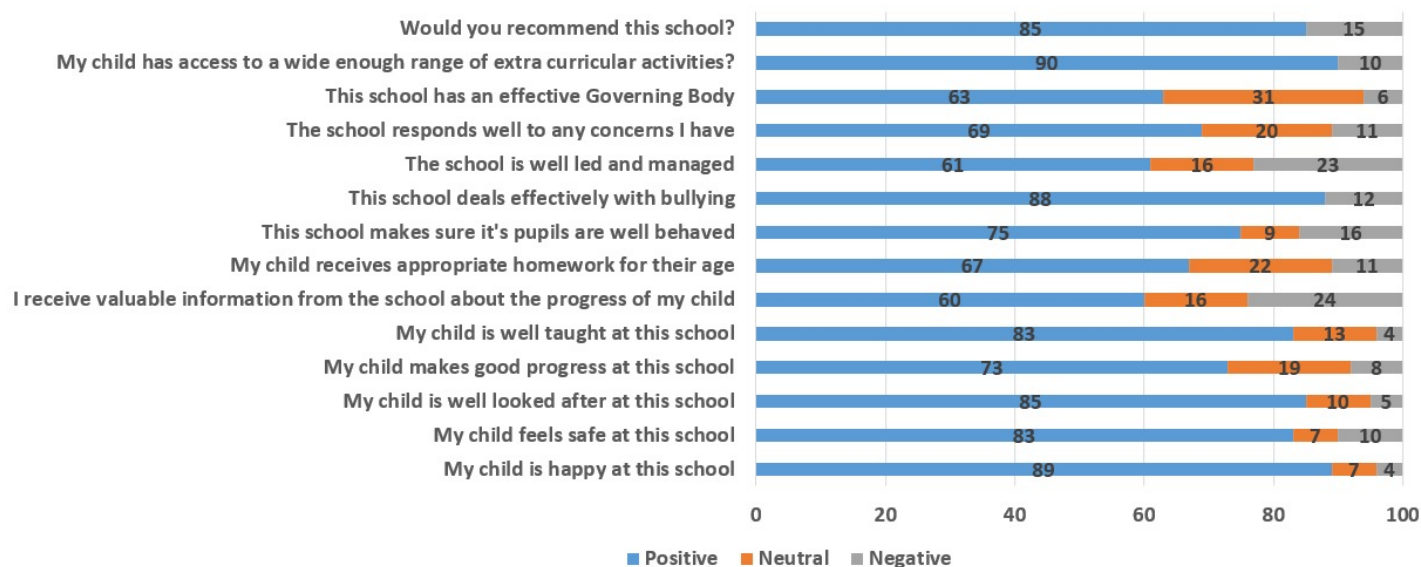
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### Parent survey

Thank you to all of those parents and carers who responded to the parent survey this year. We swapped paper for an online survey and in so doing achieved a record number of participants at 128 compared with 31 last year. The results of each question are shown below in Figure 3.

**Figure 3: ParentSurvey 2018 - Summary**



The survey included some additional questions this year and in addition much more scope for additional parent comments. Whilst it took much longer to analyse the returned surveys the information was much more informative. One of the identified priorities for governors this year was improving communication and a large proportion of the verbatims supported this. A communications audit has been completed this year by the governing body and a plan for improvement has been discussed with the senior leadership team.

It is pleasing to see that the question on bullying has improved year on year, this could be simply down to a larger sample size, however it's a positive message. Aboyne continues to take safeguarding and bullying extremely seriously. To obtain an independent view we asked our Hertfordshire Improvement Partner (HIP) to come and assess the school for a day. Her report was very positive regarding safeguarding and she spoke with a good number of children during her visit to establish that they were happy and felt safe. Equally, the Ofsted inspector found a very caring and nurturing environment and was pleased with parents' comments both in the playground and via the Parent Voice survey and was also pleased with the feedback from the children.