



Great Whelnetham CE Primary School

Stanningfield Road, Great Whelnetham, Bury St Edmunds, IP30 0UA

(01284) 386203

Executive Head Teacher – Mrs. Claire Flatman

Head of School – Ms. Imogen Wallis

office@greatwhelnetham.co.uk

26th February 2021

Dear parents,

Further to our last Whole Governing Body Meeting in December it was agreed that we should communicate with parents the progress the school is making. I volunteered to draft the letter!

My name is Paul Kirkwood and I have been a parent governor at the school for over three years. I have seen my daughter move up to secondary school, whilst my son Roan is in the current Year 6 Swans class. The purpose of our Governing Body is to work together to provide independent oversight of the management and operation of the school. Our main aim is to help improve the quality of education provided - and where possible, raise standards.

During the time I have been a Governor I have lived through the highs and lows of what goes on behind closed doors when running a school. We have seen an incredible amount of change and continue to face many challenges across the board – not least in the current grip of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Speaking candidly, the unflattering Ofsted Report back in January 2019 really brought home the stark reality of how the school was viewed by the office for standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. Although we all knew things needed improving, the report clearly defined exactly what needed to change – and fast. This was a wake-up call for everyone associated with the school and we all dealt with it in our own ways.

As a parent I was confused and disappointed, whilst as a Governor I felt somehow responsible and frustrated. But...the rapid improvement we needed really started in earnest when our school joined the All Saints Schools Trust in September 2019.

Although it was yet another change (faced with scepticism and uncertainty), we were suddenly part of something bigger, something successful – with professionals not only respected in the education system - but leading it. We had a real voice for the first time and felt we were being listened to. We had other leaders and primary schools to learn from that had 'seen it and got the t-shirt' - and were already providing a first-class learning experience for the most important people within the Trust – the children.

In the midst of COVID and the very unique situation we find ourselves in today I wanted to highlight some of the positives that have been achieved within our school, thanks to the herculean efforts going on behind the scenes. We are not there yet, and it's so easy to criticise or finger point, but I can honestly say that we are on the right path. I am proud to play my small part in getting Great Whelnetham Primary School back to where it belongs - in the community and beyond.

- **Leadership:** There are now multiple levels of leadership guiding the school to a better place, working with a real sense of unity and purpose. Melanie Barrow as CEO continues to play a pivotal role in integrating our school with the wider Trust and its culture, whilst Claire Flatman as Executive Head Teacher and Imogen Wallis as Head of School are dedicated to continuous improvement and effective management at local level. Most significantly is how the teachers have responded to the challenges thrown at them from all angles, and their personal contributions and sacrifices have been immense – and hugely appreciated.
- **Our new curriculum:** Staff have created detailed long-term plans and are mapping out each key area of the curriculum. The plans put our children at the heart of everything, with the core objective of challenging and developing our children regardless of their starting point or personal situation. We want to nurture their creativity and ambition, so they thrive and love being at school.

Great Whelnetham Church of England Primary School is part of the All Saints Schools Trust.

A charitable company limited by guarantee.

Registered in England and Wales. Company Number: 11216388



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- **One team:** One of the fundamental strengths of our school are the children that attend it. They continue to be absolutely brilliant. When John Atkinson (an experienced external advisor) visited the school in November last year he recognised our children as delightful, hard-working, motivated and engaged. This is a credit to all parents, alongside the refreshed and high quality teaching the children are receiving. It proves we are collectively doing something right – child, parent, teacher, community, church and Trust.

But don't take my word for this. Check out a few of the comments from parents on Facebook recently...

- The teaching staff at the school are incredible.
- I would certainly recommend Great Whelnetham.
- I don't think anyone will disagree that the school has had issues, (but) the school is vastly improving.
- The staff are fabulous.
- I have a daughter at the school, and she is accelerating academically, but most importantly is super happy.
- The teachers are amazing – they really go above and beyond.
- I am the local County Councillor and I think Great Whelnetham is a really good school, the head is excellent, as are the teachers.
- My children have never been happier.

We have a brilliant school, in a beautiful setting, with all the elements in place to make it thrive. We need Ofsted to officially come in and confirm that we are now the school our children really deserve, which will directly address the 'perception' of us on paper. We are making progress at all levels, and attainment will catch up as our curriculum kicks in. We need to shout about our successes and promote the school to others. We need more kids to come to our school and learn from our fantastic educators. We could actually do with a few more governors as well to ensure all systems are running smoothly...but I'll leave that for another day. We need to forge further links within the community and the wider Trust and to really lead by example and be all we can be.

Hopefully this resonates with you as parents and, like me, you realise that what we have at Great Whelnetham is really very special. And the future – with everything else going on and all things considered – is looking pretty good.

Paul Kirkwood

Parent Governor and Chair of Learning and Achievement Committee

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