



St Mary's CE Infant School
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Dear Families

I hope that you all enjoyed the summer break and that you and your children are feeling happy and safe now routines of the Autumn term are well underway.

At the beginning of my second year serving St Mary's CE Infant and The Batt CE Primary Schools, I certainly feel a real connection when working with both communities and feel so much more engaged with and understanding of our families and their concerns.

As part of that it's been a pleasure to welcome children and parents into our reception class at each school and our new families joining Year 3 at The Batt. For them and all our children we hope this is a year packed with exciting learning opportunities.

Below, I have tried to be concise in summarising some of the more strategic activities taking place in school.

Best wishes

Deborah Secull
Executive Headteacher

School Development Planning

Whilst my overall remit as executive head continues to be the same:

1. Improving outcomes for children by addressing any weaknesses in teaching and learning and developing curriculum to ensure clarity of vision, coherent and progressively sequenced learning and consistency in implementation.
2. Ensuring improved partnership working between The Batt and St Mary's to support effective transition, equity of educational offer and sharing of expertise (as well as increasing partnership working within WPOS, ODST and beyond)
3. Improving operational efficiency - both to improve systems and processes and ensure value for money.

This year, in partnership with governors and leaders at both schools, I have taken the decision to look at the development of St Mary's Infants and The Batt as a combined project. This makes sense as the major strategic foci for both schools is the same:

- Curriculum alignment
- Improvements in teaching and learning
- Effective professional development for staff
- Improvements in provision for vulnerable learners
- Embedding school vision and values

It also allows us to pool resources and expertise to support changes in these areas as well as continuing to build the partnership as one team working across two schools – all of which will benefit children at both schools in the long run.

However, this doesn't mean that there won't be nuances to the development in each school or that some strategies will be more important for one school over the other.

You can find our schools Development Plan on the [St Mary's Infant School](#) website.

SEND Parent Forum

One of the threads of our SDP this year is to review and improve provision for our vulnerable learners including those that are disadvantaged and those with additional or special educational needs. As part of this we are holding a Parent Forum for those parents and carers whose children have special educational needs or disabilities.

At the forum we hope to collect your opinions on what works well and what frustrates you about our current SEND provision and to share what work we'll be undertaking in the coming year to further develop our support for your child. Senior leadership, SENCo and SEN Governors will be present at the meeting. I also hope that this will lead to an ongoing forum where we can discuss strategy towards SEND in school.

If your child is on the SEND register at either school you should have received a letter inviting you to this forum on Wednesday 18th October at 2pm at The Batt School. Please note that this is a change to the original date, as this clashed with a SEND Reform England protest happening in Oxford on the same day (you can find out more about that protest [here](#)).

Please email the school office to indicate that you'll be attending or if you would like to attend but didn't receive the original letter.

Parental Survey

Governors have already sent out a communication about the results of the parental survey conducted in July. If you missed this you can find it [here](#) on the school website.

No such survey was carried out at St Mary's in 2021-2022, but at The Batt where the same survey had been conducted in the previous year it was pleasing to note improved responses to the vast majority of the questions. I was, in particular, pleased to see an increasing confidence in school leadership and that the vast majority of parents feel their children make good progress at both schools.

As acknowledged by governors, communication and both schools' response to behavioural issues were raised as concerns, particularly within the written feedback, and we will look to address both of these over the coming months.

Communication

In an attempt to streamline communications last year – we made clear the best routes for communication for various issues coming into school and I repeat this again here:

Nature of Concern	Initial Point of Contact	Contact Details
Reporting Absence Queries around payments (uniform, school trips etc) Arrangements (clubs, school events etc)	School Office Mrs Sarah Costley	Tel: 01993 702387 Email: office@stmarysinfants.co.uk
Concerns about children's learning, homework, behaviour, daily occurrences etc	Class Teachers	Usually available at the beginning or end of the day or contactable through Seesaw or via the school office (see above)
Specific concerns around children's learning or support for children with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND)	Mrs Tracy Holme Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENDCo)	Email: tholme@stmarysinfants.co.uk
Nurture or family support	Mrs Sharon Cooper Family Support Lead	Email: scooper@smarysinfants.co.uk
Wider issues (or those already raised with class teachers or the office, where you require further support). Please note these will be escalated to the Executive Headteacher as appropriate	Miss Julie Atkinson Assistant Headteacher (responsible for day to day running of school)	Contact via School Office Tel: 01993 702387 Email: office@stmarysinfants.co.uk
Concerns you feel need to be shared with or addressed by the Executive Headteacher	Ms Deborah Seccull Executive Headteacher	Contact via School Office Tel: 01993 702387 Email: office@stmarysinfants.co.uk

However, while this has supported inward communication, I do appreciate that parents sometimes feel overwhelmed at the variety of different communications that they receive within a week from school (particularly at The Batt which uses multiple communication platforms inconsistently) and we are seeking to improve on that this year.

As a start to this work we have moved to one consistent platform at both schools, Seesaw, for sharing work and communications between class and home and hope that you are finding this useful.

Behaviour

Both schools review Behaviour, Anti-Bullying and Suspension and Permanent Exclusion Policies regularly and these can be found on the [school website](#). In both schools we seek to ensure that our management of behaviour is positive and rooted in the school's visions and values.

We also seek to understand behaviour as communication and work with restorative approaches to make sure children can move back to positive engagement with learning and in relationships as soon as possible.

Where necessary children with high level behavioral needs are supported through individual behaviour plans and through partnership with parents and external agencies.

As parents, I understand that you do not necessarily have the time to read dense school policy, nor are actions taken in school in response to behaviour always visible. To this end I have asked Mrs Harding Jones and Miss Atkinson to condense policies around behaviour and anti-bullying to 'Behaviour Essentials' so parents can be more easily aware of what managing behaviour looks like in school. We will let you know when these documents are available.

Both schools are also focusing on behaviour over this Autumn term to ensure our expectations are clear to children and well established in the classroom. We have also committed to reporting more frequently on repeated lower level behaviours to parents and trust that you will support us in ensuring a safe and productive learning environment.

Support Staffing and New Appointments

We feel very fortunate to have Mrs Brodie at St Mary's as our Year 1 teacher and know many of you have already taken time to welcome her to our community. It has been a delight to observe her building relationships with her new class over the last few weeks.

I, and other members of the leadership team, have had several discussions with parents at both schools about support staffing levels, particularly within our infant classes. It is necessary to point out that funding and recruitment issues, as is common to schools across the country at the moment, mean making quality appointments is a challenge. I therefore feel lucky that we have been able to appoint Mrs Kaban and Mrs Prince to our team and both will be working across the St Mary's and The Batt reception classes from this week.

As in many schools, the funding available means we do have to consider carefully how we best deploy support staff, with our first priority having to be in support of children with the highest level needs. However, we continue to look for ways in which we can optimise support - for example by developing an intervention base as we are trialing at The Batt.

Parent Volunteers

As part of these conversations around support staffing, parents have been keen to offer their help as volunteers. In discussion with staff at both schools staff would welcome parents who could commit to regular afternoons – and might be able to lead an activity to a small group of children – this might include gardening, cooking, art etc.

If you are interested then please speak to Mrs Harding Jones or Miss Atkinson.

Please note that in order to help in this way it will be necessary for us to complete a DBS check and for you to undertake some training in line with safeguarding procedures in school before taking up a voluntary role.

Transition to Year 3

It's been of great interest to me to observe the movement of children I know from St Mary's into Year 3 at the Batt and to witness first-hand the transition that these children and their families make to a new environment, where other families in the same cohort are already established – a fairly unique experience and one that I hope has been supported by last summer's transition programme.

As these parents will be aware we have asked for feedback from parents and children on this and will share the results once they've been compiled. This feedback will then help us in designing a programme for next summer.

In capturing pupil voice as part of this it has been a delight to hear children in both Year 3 classes talk so positively about their experiences so far in Year 3 and to feel that new friendships are already developing.

School Site Improvements

The Batt saw significant refurbishment of the oldest part of the building over the summer with re-flooring and redecoration of three corridors and three classrooms. This means that Hedgehogs and Red Squirrels have seen much needed redecoration to their classrooms and that we have begun re-purposing the old IT/Music Room as an intervention base. We also have better subject storage and clearer corridors as a result. The astroturf was also cleaned and refurbished.

There will be further refurbishment/replacement of the remaining old windows in the main block during half-term.

At St Mary's we saw refurbishment of the hall floor over the summer. We are currently also making improvements to layout and resourcing in the Reception classroom and across the school's outdoor spaces to allow for more continuous provision throughout school – helping to develop independent learning and more opportunities for children to practice key learning and personal, social and emotional development through play.

Parent Partnership and Feedback

As I hope you'll have appreciated, we are working to ensure that parents have regular opportunities to give feedback in school and recognise that effective partnerships with parents are essential to our children's success. School leaders are very appreciative of those of you who

respond when we ask for feedback via surveys etc. However, I do appreciate that sometime parents have specific concerns and feedback and would like to remind you that senior leadership at both schools are always happy to discuss any specific concerns or feedback you may have.