

STRANMILLIS PRIMARY SCHOOL

Board of Governors' Annual Report to Parents 2020/21 Academic Year

It was a year like no other for Stranmillis Primary School! Whilst last year's governors' report concluded with hopes that 2020/21 would be a better year for us all, it proved to be far from it. Torn asunder by renewed Coronavirus spikes, new variants and rising death tolls, society suffered, school attendance was disrupted beyond belief, remote learning was again the mainstay of our children's education and school planning rendered almost impossible. Thank goodness for the Covid-19 Vaccination Programme and associated testing which have at least allowed our children and staff to return to school full-time, albeit for only a few months this year.

However, just when you think things can't get much worse, they do! Although in no way connected with the great many challenges of running a school during a pandemic, early in the year our Principal, Mr Wallace, announced his intention to retire from his post, with effect from 31 August 2021. What a blow for everyone, including the Board of Governors!

There is so much to say about Mr Wallace that I fear I shall not do him justice in this brief report. Although I wasn't personally present at his appointment some ten years ago, my own wide-ranging experience of education told me very quickly that he was the right person for the post. With his extensive background at senior level in a variety of primary schools in Northern Ireland, and his three years in the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), he had seen it all, excellent practice and what to avoid! Add to that experience a calm, steady head and a highly personable manner and we had a first-rate Principal in our midst.

Tony Bush, renowned within the field of educational leadership research, states that, "it has become received wisdom that the quality of the head[teacher] is the single most important variable in school effectiveness". This assertion is certainly borne out by Mr Wallace who took Stranmillis Primary from being a "good" school in ETI terms, to "outstanding" during his decade in charge.

Extending the argument further, Day et al suggest that effective principals empower their staff by placing a strong emphasis on teamwork and collaborative decision-making, and develop and improve their schools through professional development and an ethos of high expectations. This is also true of Mr Wallace who encourages all staff to be proactive, to participate in all areas of school life and to engage with the responsibilities of distributed leadership. His expectations, of staff and children alike, are always at the highest level!

His skills and talents have also extended beyond the gates of our own school. Through initiatives such as the Trusted Colleague Network and the Beyond Outstanding Programme, he has encouraged the sharing of good practice across a number of local schools, challenged teachers and established a true professional

learning community within south Belfast. His skills and experience were also deployed by the Education Authority in providing advice and guidance for another local primary school less fortunate than our own.

But it is for his love of the children that we shall remember him most. Always positive, always encouraging, he ensured that each and every child had full access to appropriate learning, that underachievement (not to be confused with low achievement!), even by the most able, was always addressed and that all children were always challenged to maximise their potential. The children will miss him and so will we all. However, we thank him sincerely for the massive contribution that he has made to Stranmillis Primary School, for his dedication and utmost commitment to the role of Principal and wish him a long, happy and healthy retirement.

Needless to say, the bulk of the governors' work this year has, therefore, been dedicated to the unenviable task of recruiting a worthy successor for Mr Wallace. The recruitment process was lengthy, difficult, interrupted by the third lockdown and diverted to Zoom! Nevertheless, every cloud has a silver lining, as they say, and it was with pleasure and delight that we finally appointed Mrs Wilson, currently our Vice-Principal of course, as Mr Wallace's replacement, at the end of February. We look forward to Mrs Wilson taking up her new post on 1 September and to working with her.

Never afraid of hard work, the governors then had to initiate another recruitment process to appoint Mrs Wilson's successor as Vice-Principal! This was duly completed last month, with our own Mr Arneill the successful candidate. Governors also wish him well in his new post.

Now that leaves a gap which used to be filled by Mr Arneill.....! Who'd be a governor?!?! With our first task for next year already apparent, I'd just like to close by thanking all of my colleagues on the Board of Governors for their intensely hard work, especially on the shortlisting and interviewing panels, and for all their help and support throughout the recruitment processes and the year generally. 2020-2021 has not been an easy year and, like last year, we can only hope that the next one is better!

Wishing you a relaxing summer break and stay safe!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Maureen Thatcher". The signature is written in a cursive style and is placed on a light blue rectangular background.

Dr Maureen Thatcher (Chair of Governors)

Membership of the Board: 2020 – 2021

EA Representatives	Dr Maureen Thatcher (chair) Dr Andrew Charles
Parents' Representatives	Mrs Jane Moriarty Mr John Murray
Teacher Representative	Mrs Deirdre Hill
Transferor Representatives	Miss Denise Elliott Dr Rachel Campbell Mrs Dawn Brown Mr Darren Feely
Honorary Secretary	Mr Jackie Wallace

School Development Days (Exceptional Closures):

As for all schools, we closed for five exceptional closures during the past year. These days were used in the development of the following areas:

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| i. | Training on a Virtual Learning platform | One day |
| ii. | Parent communication | One day |
| iii. | Remote Learning | } Two days |
| iv. | Self-evaluation and data analysis | |

Financial report:

	Financial Year		
	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Initial Budget	1,395,290	1,387,350	1,389,996
Carry Over from previous year	23,966	48,278	83,174
Total Budget	1,419,256	1,435,628	1,473,170
expenditure	-1,370,977	-1,352,454	-1,367,701
year end surplus/ - deficit	48,279	83,174	105,469
% surplus/ - deficit	3.4%	5.8%	7.2%

Additionally:

- the current PTA 'Elevate' project is seeking to raise £25,000 (over three years) to fund a suite of 86 iPads;
- £20,000 has been set aside for purchase of iPads resources for WAU and the outdoor classroom;
- the Educational Trust Fund, consisting of voluntary donations from parents, provides an additional £4,000 for Reading and Accelerated Reader Books.

Special Educational Needs and Inclusion:

As a school committed to developing all our pupils in a holistic manner, we recognise that all pupils are unique and develop at varying rates. We aim to cater for all these individuals, including the most able and those who are experiencing learning difficulties. We have high expectations of all our pupils and a determination that each child will achieve to his / her full potential, and that any barriers to learning will be identified and overcome. The arrangements for addressing special educational needs are set out in our Special Needs Policy. In particular:

- We aim to identify as early as possible, children who are experiencing difficulties with their learning. Such early identification of need will be achieved through a mix of teacher judgement and diagnostic assessment.
- We recognise that all teachers have a collective responsibility for the special needs of our pupils.
- The SENCO will liaise with and support the class teachers in the development and implementation of Individual Education Plans and to ensure that each child follows an agreed programme of work designed to address his or her educational needs.
- The support provided will be matched to the needs of the child and will be focused on tackling any barriers to learning that have been identified.
- The Principal, SENCO and SLT will ensure the provision of appropriate staff training and professional development in order to raise staff capacity to meet the needs of the children.

Currently SEN provision includes:

- the development of IEPs and group EPs;
- differentiation of work within the class;
- targeted support through Lexia and Mathletics websites / programs.
- withdrawal support for targeted children, provided by our SENCO and an experienced teacher;
- withdrawal support for children with increased emotional issues or gaps in learning due to the pandemic.
- withdrawal support provided by specialist peripatetic and outreach teachers
- Reading Partnerships, provided by trained classroom assistants; and
- the identification of and support for those children deemed to be under-achieving.


Security:

At Stranmillis the safety and security of all the children remains our prime responsibility. Accordingly, all the entrances to the school, including the nursery and mobiles, are secured by magnetic locks, with quick release switches to allow easy exit from the building as required. Any visitor seeking to gain access to the building must be screened by the school secretary or other member of staff before being permitted entry. The perimeter fencing has recently been replaced, further enhancing the security of the site.

Attendance:

Excellent pupil attendance is strongly promoted at Stranmillis. In the 2020/21 academic year, the attendance percentage for the school was 98%.

Warm Regards,



Dr Maureen Thatcher (Chair of Governors)