

## Minutes of Parents' Forum Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> January 2011.

- **Chair:** Dave Wood-Griffiths
- **Minute Taker:** Sarah Shortt.

**Speakers:** Mr Whiteford – Head Teacher, Mr Steen – Deputy Head, Mr Boys – Assistant Head, Mrs Davis – Assistant Head.

On display were the plans for the new science and technology block.

Dave Wood -Griffiths, the Parents' Forum Chair, introduced the speakers and welcomed some new parents, then spoke about the mission statement and the progress made against the objectives of this group, set by parents two years ago.

These were to

- support the school in getting out of Special Measures and raising standards further.
- support the school in improving the school environment for students and staff
- rebuild a sense of pride in the school in the students and wider community
- improve communication with parents
- make Denefield a welcoming and caring place for parents/carers
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- A mission statement was written 'to make Denefield first choice for students and parents'.

Mr Wood-Griffiths stated that he believes that these objectives have been mostly achieved and thanked parents for their support.

Mr Whiteford reported to parents that the school environment has vastly improved over the last couple of year, standards have improved and the students seem happy and more engaged than before. He emphasised that the school also wishes to be 'first choice' for parents and students and that the school's aim is to serve the local community. He explained that up until now Ofsted has obviously driven the school's agenda but that he is keen that parents are more involved in the direction of the school. He explained that the cuts in local government are causing major challenges to all schools – for example in funding, the school's Devolved Capital Formula will be cut by something in the region of 85%. Out of this Mr Whiteford explained that the school will still need to continue maintain the school buildings and that this process will need to be well managed.

Mr Whiteford went on to talk about the last Ofsted visit in December, which he was delighted to report was a full Inspection and the school was deemed to be satisfactory, with some good features. The Inspector reported that she believed the school's capacity to sustain and continue to improve was good throughout all areas of management, including governance. The school has an action plan in place which will continue these improvements. The Inspector highlighted only one key issue – to further improve standards of teaching and learning and drive up standards further. A parent asked about why the report commented that the more able students are not making as much progress as their peers. Mr Whiteford explained that there are both short term responses and long term plans in place for this group of students. The school has concentrated on improving its use of data. These students are now being identified earlier, even using information from their former Primary schools and a Gifted & Talented programme is in place. Teaching across the school has improved and that will impact on this group of students. Data is monitored about all sub groups of students in the school to enable the school to effectively track their progress and address any variations in this.

The Ofsted report can be read in full via a link from the school website <http://www.denefield.org.uk/> Attendance has improved substantially and this has had a positive impact on results. Mr Whiteford explained to the parents that the effective use of data to enable the school to monitor and assess the

students and the school's ability to self-assess its performance is key. When Ofsted talk about student behaviour they are talking about 'behaviour for learning' i.e. the students participating fully in lessons and being ready and keen to learn. Mr Whiteford explained that the school is working towards a 'learning culture' where the students are more independent. There is better teaching and more engaging lesson planning. The students were asked for their feedback at the beginning of this year and said they really enjoy practical lessons. This has been taken into consideration in planning lessons and the new science and technology block will have a good space for practical work and demonstrations.

The future.

Year 9 students are in the process of choosing their GCSE Options and Mr Whiteford outlined the government's plans for the new English Baccalaureate. He began by explaining that the government will now be using the number of students passing the English Baccalaureate (E Bacc) as a measure for judging schools. In order to gain the E Bacc. students require a Grade C in the following subjects: English, Maths, Double Science, History or Geography and a Modern Foreign Language. At present nationally only about 18% of Year 11 students would have achieved the E Bacc. Mr Whiteford explained that in the future some Universities may take the E Bacc. into account when offering places and so, in order not to disadvantage the students, this range of subjects will be offered to as many students as possible. Mr Whiteford explained that this could have an impact on the curriculum further down the school as at the moment we also have to provide time to lessons such as PHSE and IT. We are waiting for a report on the vocational subjects and subjects like technology and expressive arts and Mr Whiteford re-iterated that he believes vocational and practical education is still vital. Taking the E Bacc. still leaves students with two other option choices, so they will still be able to pick an arts or technology subject if they wish. The average student will do 9 subjects, but is important that lower ability students continue to study Life Skills, literacy, numeracy and social and emotional skills. The aim of the school is for **every** student to be successful and to be on a path that leads to a successful further career.

Academies.

Mr Whiteford explained that many Reading schools are already in the process of converting to Academies. He explained academy status will be discussed and parents will be consulted. He gave a quick explanation of some of the benefits of becoming an academy, which included making schools more competitive. He also explained how the importance of a school's ability to accurately evaluate its progress as the Local Authority is getting rid of their School Improvement Partners and Advisors this year.

Mr Whiteford finished by thanking parents for coming and for their continued support.