

## **St Mary's C of E Primary School, Timsbury**

### **Ofsted Inspection Outcome September 2019 Information from the Parent Meeting held on 21 November 2019**

#### **Panel Attendees:**

Ruth Balch, Acting Co-Chair IGB (RB)  
Claire Hudson, Acting Co-Chair IGB (CH)  
Emma Sage, IGB Member (ES)  
Toby Simon, IGB Member (TS)  
Stephen Luke, Senior School Improvement Adviser, B&NES (SL)  
Alun Williams, National Leader of Education, CEO Midsomer Norton Schools Partnership (AW)  
David Williams, Assistant Director of Education, Diocese of Bath & Wells (DW)  
Claire Brewer, Deputy Head Teacher (CB)  
Mark Cox, Deputy Head Teacher (fixed term appointment) (MC)  
Dave Finlay, Assistant Head Teacher (DF)

Margaret Simmons-Bird, Director of Education Transformation, B&NES, sent her apologies.

The meeting was clerked by Binky Clark, an independent Governance Professional.

The meeting was attended by about 70 parents and staff.

#### **Opening prayer**

The Revd Martin Blewett opened the meeting with a prayer.

#### **Introduction**

The co-chairs gave welcome and introductions. It was explained that Tom Morrison, from the LA, who been working with the school, has successfully moved on to a new role, and that he has been replaced by SL. The meeting was clerked independently to enable Claire Ford, the clerk to governors to attend the meeting as a parent.

#### **Meeting Purpose**

The purpose of the meeting was to give parents/carers the opportunity to ask any questions they may have following the Ofsted report. The co-chairs acknowledged and thanked parents for their commitment and support since the inspection, as well as their patience as it has been a long wait since the inspection in September, the Ofsted timescales meaning that the report was not issued to parents until 7 November, and then this meeting not taking place for a further two weeks.

The co-chairs also thanked those members of the community who have taken the time to write to the school commending the actions of the Senior Leaders since the inspection and the IGB expressed their gratitude to CB, MC and DF for leading an amazing staff response to the inspection and determined commitment to making things better for our children.

RB explained that the pre-submitted questions had been grouped as many were similar, so these would be answered in the whole. We had structured questions into two areas: the report and immediate actions taken, then looking ahead. RB/CH confirmed that the aim of the meeting was

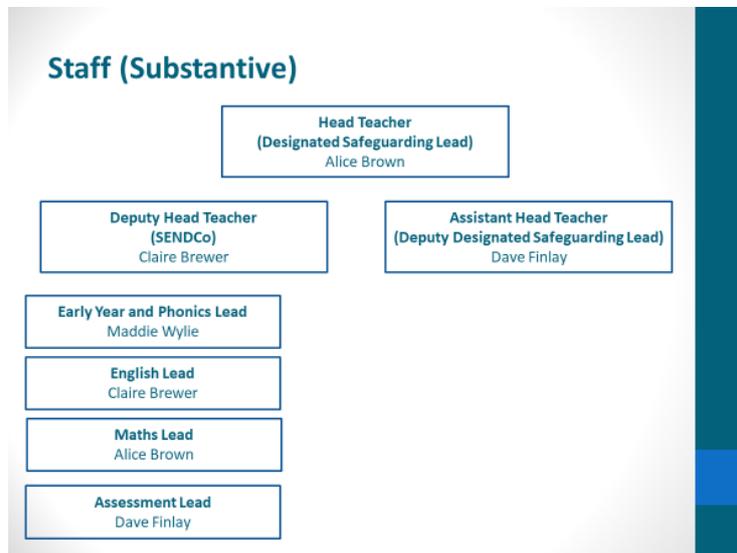
to ensure all questions were heard, so they would be trying to ensure questions weren't repeated.

CH noted that a number of questions were received regarding Miss Brown's role as Head Teacher at the school. Adhering to standard practice regarding professional confidentiality, all that is able to be said at this stage is that Miss Brown is currently on sick leave and that the IGB could not provide any further information, so no questions on this issue would be answered. Parents were asked to be understanding of this position.

### Response to Pre-submitted Questions

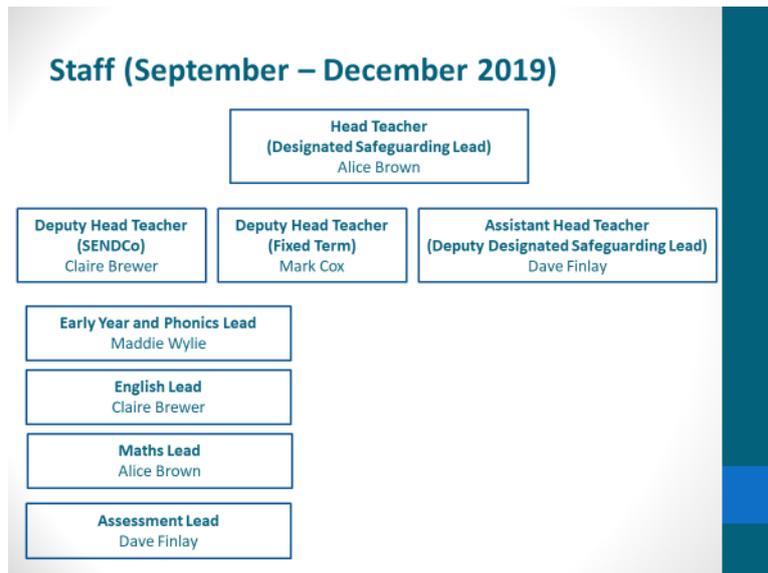
#### Staff

In response to questions relating to staff structure, role and responsibilities and MC's contract length, the slide below was shown to clarify the substantive leadership structure of the school.



RB added that each experienced class teacher will have a subject leadership role (e.g., Science, Art) and that DF and Janice Purnell act as Deputy Designated Safeguarding Leads.

The following slide was shared to confirm how MC's role had been added for September – December 2019, funded by the LA.



RB confirmed that MC's role was to ensure leadership capacity was strengthened, which allowed CB to focus on developing leadership of English; MC also provides strong mentoring and support to our newer members of staff.

RB noted that with AB being on sick leave, our two Deputy Heads (MC and CB) share the role of deputising in AB's absence, as would happen in any school. DF is also covering leadership of Maths while AB is absent. CH advised that the IGB and LA has worked together to ensure funds have been made available to extend MC's contract at St Mary's until the end of the academic year, to ensure continuity for the school community which the audience welcomed.

RB clarified that all parents/carers are encouraged to speak with their child's class teacher about any issue in the first instance who, if they cannot help, will put you in touch with the relevant leader.

### Governance

RB noted it is the role of the IGB to hold the leaders of the school to account. Since taking on the role of co-chairs at the start of term 5 last year, CH/RB committed to truly getting to know what was happening at St Mary's. The IGB members looked at all the evidence they could to develop the understanding that leads to true accountability. Despite the hours spent, it was not possible to look at and strengthen accountability in all areas of governance at St Mary's in the 2½ terms before the inspection. The IGB were open with the inspection team about that. The IGB were pleased however that the report recognises that they were able to accurately reflect their knowledge of the school in the areas on which they had focussed.

Regarding a specific question about the comment in the report that the inspectors reached the judgement that the IGB didn't have all the information needed, following conversations with Ofsted about how to interpret the new-style report, it is not believed the judgement is that there were specific pieces of information missing that should or shouldn't have been specifically requested, but rather a reflection on the limited timescale the IGB had had for information gathering.

Going forward the IGB will continue to work closely with the SLT and is delighted with how they have stepped up. The next IGB meeting is next week, and, once the post Ofsted action plan has been agreed, will be monitoring its delivery closely.

### School improvement

Questions were submitted about past interventions regarding school improvement, in particular, how the LA had not ensured improvements were made and secured. SL explained that he had reviewed this, and evidence available indicated that between the second and third 'Requires improvement' judgements that the school was performing as a good school. However, with hindsight the LA have acknowledged they had not been accurate in that overall judgement, but that is not to say that no improvements have been made. The KS2 results last year were the third highest in the authority, and the work put into maths teaching has been really effective and now just needs embedding.

SL noted that maintaining staff commitment and parental support at the level it is currently at would give much potential for the school to now improve quickly. SL noted his extensive experience of improving schools and his confidence that St Mary's is in a good position to improve rapidly building on the actions taken by the SLT since the inspection, particularly in taking a strategic approach to whole school improvement.

### Communications / Parental Engagement

A number of observations were made by parents about recent improvements to communications, as well as suggestions about how parents could become more involved in their child's learning. MC and CB talked in more detail about what has been done and the plans moving forward, and this is summarised below:

- **Communication / Engagement**

MC noted that changes already made have been welcomed by the community, which include a 'new look' newsletter, Parentmails home when your child has achieved a learning star and a Parentmail towards the end of term to inform you if your child will be receiving certificate in awards ceremony. The staff and IGB are really pleased with the positive feedback that has been received in response to these changes.

MC noted the importance of parent support and involvement in the future success of the school and set out some events planned for 2020:

- Parent workshops on maths, looking first at the calculation policy then moving through the structure and way we plan and teach maths at St Mary's.
- Parent workshops with an English focus will be set up following some staff development which will better support children in their writing.
- There will be open days where family members are invited to come and spend the morning with the children in class and in the afternoon are asked to form a workforce to enable improvements to buildings and grounds.
- Early on in the New Year parents will be sent a skills audit asking them what careers and skills they have. Information gathered will be used to invite parents in to take part in a careers day, where they can share information about their jobs with the children.

- Questions relating to learning

CB reflected that questions had been received about Reading, how it is assessed and the book bandings in school. She explained that a new phonics teaching scheme (Sounds Write) had been introduced to the lower school in September. Alongside the daily phonics lessons in EYFS, Year 1 and Year 2, there are Sounds Write books which are being sent home with the children, which are designed to be fully decodable (i.e., they will only contain sounds that the children have learnt and therefore the child should be able to be really successful with these). Children then also continue to have a picture book or a 'banded' book to be read with an adult which would require some support with sounds they might not have learnt yet.

In KS2, the children will continue to bring home books from the book bands. Teachers, teaching assistants and adult helpers listen to children read throughout the week, and ensure this is recorded in school. Children have guided reading sessions in class every day, twice a week as a whole class, and three times working in groups or on individual tasks. Children from Year 2 upwards are formally tested on reading twice a year through the use of NFER assessments, just before Christmas and in the summer (SATs tests are used instead for children in Y2 and Y6). Data from these tests is used to ensure that children are on the correct book bands. The school is moving to ensuring each class has 'Drop everything and Read' times in the week, when all, including the adults in the class, will stop and read a book. The children are encouraged to talk about the books they're reading and share recommendations.

In addition to the above a Literature spine or a 'Book Quest' has been developed for each year group composed of a list of 49 recommended reads for each age. The intention is to ensure children are exposed to a range of high quality and inspiring texts, to help foster a real enjoyment of reading, recognising that reading is vital to both academic success and wellbeing. We used £1000 from PTA funds to help resource this, although further resourcing is still required. Each child in the school has a 'Book Quest' sheet where they can record which books they've read, which will build up over their time at St Mary's. If parents have a question regarding their child's reading, they should ask the class teacher in the first instance.

CB also advised the meeting that questions were received around homework, regarding appropriateness or level of task, how it links to work in class and the possibility of additional guidance for parents. CB reminded parents about the Home Learning Policy that is on the website, and picked out the following relevant points as a refresher:

- The nature and type of homework changes throughout a pupil's school career.
- The amount and frequency should increase as a pupil gets older.
- Homework tasks should be appropriate to the child's stage of learning.
- Homework should not cause undue stress on the pupil, family or teacher.
- Activities should primarily be task based and aimed at consolidating learning that has been going on in class, rather than being something completely new. However, on occasions, a research based activity for an upcoming topic may be appropriate.
- There should be clear and easily understood explanations and instructions.

CB reminded parents that any concerns regarding homework should be brought to the attention of the class teacher as a first port of call so that school and home can work

together to resolve any issues. CB also advised that the Home Learning Policy is due to be renewed in the Spring, and parents/carers will be consulted as part of this process.

Finally, MC reflected that a question had been asked about what the children of the school had been told about the judgement. He explained that they have been assured that they, themselves, did really well. The SLT feel it is important that the children maintain their sense of pride in the school and confidence in themselves, and did not want to confuse this by going into the detail of the report. MC also noted that when children ask where Miss Brown is, they are told she is unwell at the moment but is, of course, still the Head Teacher of the school.

#### Impact of education needing long term improvement

AW was able to assure the meeting that children from St Mary's are not being overly disadvantaged by their experience at the school. He explained that from the data he has access to from Mendip Studio School, Writhlington, Norton Hill and Somervale, Timsbury children make progress in-line with similar schools generally. Over the last 8 years they are pretty much national average for progress and attainment in secondary achievement figures. Generally year 6 pupils have had national or better attainment data at Timsbury, so one would expect them to be about in line with national at the end of year 11. There are some examples of very high performance at secondary and equally, some low performers, which reflects the range of children at this school. There is no evidence to suggest that having attended St Mary's has disadvantaged children. Interestingly, more Timsbury children enter sixth forms than national average. This may be the result of the aspiration and experiences of the community of Timsbury.

AW further advised that staff in schools that need improving (as well as in those that are not judged to) will receive planned CPD and in-school support to ensure they are helped to improve. The future Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) will provide opportunity for Timsbury teachers and children to feel part of a bigger team and therefore have a reduced burden. For example, the MAT produces centrally, lots of resources and planning for teachers which is high quality. This helps raise outcomes with minimal stress, as it means teachers can use good quality planning without always having to produce it for themselves. In turn, children do well as they are engaging in better planned lessons with better resources. There are other examples too which can be discussed if required.

#### **Further questions from the audience**

- *Can parents be confident in the judgements teachers are making about their children?*  
All results are moderated with other schools as part of the mandatory LA programme. DF explained that the new assessment system INSIGHT has been brought in (as our previous system is being withdrawn) and this has been set up to support teachers in making those secure judgements; Insight is easier to tailor to the needs of the school and to mark out key objectives. The school uses NFER tests which are standardised and the results compared nationally so results will be robust. Teachers never make their judgements of children in isolation, all are questioned, checked or moderated through professional conversations with leaders and colleagues.
- *What support is being provided for leaders?*  
MC noted some middle leaders are being funded for national professional development qualifications for their role and that MC is also coaching CB and DF using his experience as a Head Teacher in other schools. RB added that since the inspection MNSP has also asked

experienced MAT staff (a head teacher and EYFS lead) to visit the school which was welcomed by leaders and hugely productive. RB noted again the IGB's real delight in how the SLT have responded to this process.

### **Next steps**

#### School Improvement

Going forward, SL advised that the LA is required to submit an Action Plan to Ofsted, which is being developed with the school; once Ofsted has agreed this it can be shared with parents. SL confirmed he will be working at St Mary's on a weekly basis to support leaders in addition to the LA joint funding the extension to MC's contract. SL reported that there is a shared understanding of how to address the issues raised in the Ofsted report. SL will support the SLT in delivering the action plan and making sure that the changes are properly followed through, embedded and effective

#### Conversion to Academy status

CH recapped the journey so far, noting that the IGB had openly said they felt joining a MAT would accelerate school improvement at St Mary's prior to the inspection. CH revisited the conversations from our parent meeting in the summer and advised that the IGB had explored all the possible MAT partners, narrowing the field down to two just before the inspection. However, the Ofsted judgement means that the school no longer has a choice – it will be directed to join a specific MAT by the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC).

However, the RSC will consider the views of the school, LA and Diocese. All of these groups has indicated their opinion that the Midsomer Norton Schools Partnership (MNSP) would be the best MAT for St Mary's to join. However, no formal comment can be made by the RSC until after the election, and the final decision will not be taken until after the January 2020 Head Teacher's Board. At this stage however, there is no reason to believe that the collective view of the school, LA and Diocese would be disregarded by the RSC. On that basis therefore, CH asked AW to explain what it might be like if the school were to join MNSP.

AW advised that MNSP is currently made up of 23 schools, mostly in the geographical area to the south of Bath. There are 16 primaries, 6 secondaries and 1 special school. The scale of the Trust means that there is much opportunity for schools that join in terms of interest groups e.g. Head Teachers, geography leads working together to effectively share the burden of work. Children are also able to join together e.g. to look at greater depth in maths, all of which leads to improved outcomes.

MATs, although heavily regulated in terms of finances, safeguarding etc, are able to be more responsive to the needs of schools than the LA. They are also able to bid for funds which are not available to maintained schools. One of the reasons that MNSP is favoured by the Diocese as the best fit for St Mary's is because there are church representatives on the Trust Board and the MAT has a member of staff specifically to work on church school distinctiveness. All SIAMS inspections of schools within MNSP have been very positive.

If St Mary's were to join MNSP, the Trust would aim to secure the leadership, staffing and finances with a goal of making St Mary's a place where people are happy to work and learn, in order that outcomes for children and school improvement is achieved. MNSP is a learning

organisation to which each school contributes something unique and it would welcome St Mary's and the community should it join.

AW advised, that if the Head Teacher Board approved the move in January, he would expect conversion by September 2020. RB noted that the RSC has a target timescale of 9 months to convert a school to academy status following an Ofsted judgement which leads to sponsored conversion.

### **Further Questions from the Audience**

- *How can parents know that the Trust is effective?*

AW responded that the best way was to read the Ofsted reports for schools within the Trust. Even when the outcome of an inspection has been RI rather than good or outstanding, the actions of MNSP are positively commented on within the reports. The reputation of MNSP relies upon it improving the schools it consists of.

- *Does the Trust have capacity to support St Mary's?*

AW advised that currently only 1 MNSP primary school is in RI, so there is capacity to support St Mary's. MNSP has just appointed two full-time school improvement staff, and in general the pedagogy and quality of teacher is good in the primary phase.

- *How is a Headteacher held accountable within the Trust?*

AW advised there is a triad of accountability:

1. Alun Williams as CEO line manages Headteachers
2. The Local Governing Body holds the Headteacher accountable for standards of education for children, although Trust Board may also get involved in this.
3. The Trust Board is the employer and the legal entity of the schools.

- *Are staff 'shuffled' around the Trust?*

AW confirmed that yes this happens, but not without the agreement of the staff. AW noted this can be a very effective way to improve schools, as strong staff can be moved to more vulnerable schools with immediate impact. It also enables staff to experience a range of roles for professional development, and to trial things in a low risk way as they can return to their original school.

- *Is St Mary's currently undersubscribed as this must be affecting the budget?*

The panel confirmed St Mary's is a 210 place school, with around 160 currently on role which yes, does have an impact on Per Pupil funding. Parents expressed concern that a downward spiral could result as lack of funding and low pupil numbers drive each other, with a negative effect on the standard of education. TS, the finance governor, confirmed that financial monitoring indicates the budget and financial management is secure for the time the school will remain maintained and he is confident that we would be joining the MAT in a sound financial state, the finances are being managed responsibly and appropriate caution is being used when predicting numbers.

AW reassured parents that money would be found to fund school improvement as that would be in the MAT's best interests. The MAT would be able to spend money from their reserves if required but an application would be made for school improvement grant to be

allocated on conversion. AW noted that one school in MNSP has only 23 children on roll, and confirmed that the MAT is interested in supporting schools and communities.

RB acknowledged that a low number of roll impacts funding and the huge importance of moving the parent community to a place of being able to positively advocate for the school to encourage more families into our school community. The IGB is committed to improving the quality of education, the reputation and positive advocacy out in the wider community and hopes we can move that forward with parent/carer help.

MC also noted that the SLT want to move towards positive local press to further engage with the community and build that positive reputation.

- *How long before we can will get the opportunity to demonstrate improvement in our Ofsted rating?*

AW explained that technically, when a school converts to academy status, it closes and reopens as a new school without an Ofsted judgement. It would then be likely to be inspected in the third year after opening.

- *What will happen with school meals production on conversion?*

AW noted that not all schools in MNSP have cooking kitchens, but generally where they were in situ on conversion, they have remained. He added that the Trust would welcome another cooking kitchen at this stage

- *What are the results predicted to be this year?*

DF noted that current indications are that children at the end of KS1, KS2 and in Y1 phonics are on track to be above national averages, but that the first round of assessment data is now being taken and more will be known after that assessment and analysis.

- *Will there be a rebranding of the school and uniform upon conversion?*

AW responded that there was no expectation from the Trust for any change to the school name, uniform or brand. That sort of process remains about what is right for the school community and would involve consultation with stakeholders before any change was made. RB noted there was no drive from the IGB on this at this stage.

- *Will the children be affected by the change to academy status?*

AW said that he thought that the only difference children should notice was that school and learning should get better.

*What is the benefit to the MAT should St Mary's convert?*

AW responded that there are some great leaders, teachers and governors at St Mary's who have expertise that they will be able to share across the MAT as the school gets stronger. However, the aim of the Trust is to remain locally based, there is no desire to become a national chain.

- *How long will the IGB last?*

RB/CH responded that by definition the IGB is an interim measure that was initially established until the next inspection. However, as the school will now convert it is sensible to maintain the IGB until it transitions to a Local Governing Body (LGB) upon conversion. However, RB/CH reaffirmed their commitment to ensuring that governance at St Mary's is

developed and handed back to the community when it is appropriate to do so, again noting that any parents who are interested in governance should get in touch.

### **Closing Comments**

DW noted with pleasure that as the evening had progressed that the audience response had become more positive. He acknowledged an earlier comment from the audience that there seemed to be a high level of cohesion amongst the panel which was inspiring confidence in the parents and demonstrating a transparent approach.

DW reflected on the Bible verse John 10 v10 which says that 'the thief comes to destroy but that Jesus came to bring life in all its fullness'. He felt this seemed to resonate with the journey at St Marys and that this meeting offers hope for the joy that should be experienced on a journey through school.

DW confirmed that the Diocese holds MNSP in the highest regard and is confident in their work.

The meeting closed with a further vote of thanks being given to the staff for all their hard work and a vote of thanks to the parent community for attending and for continuing to work with and support the school.