



Willaston Governor Newsletter, Spring 2016

Dear Parent and Carers,

The 3Rs – Respect, Resilience and Relax.

We have now been an Academy for 6 months and have spent this time transitioning from Local Authority control. We now have a new logo and website, several new administrative and financial systems and work has begun, with input from children and parents, to choose a new school uniform. All good so far, but this was not why we decided to become an academy – it was in part because we wanted the freedom to be creative, individual and adapt to the particular needs of Willaston children.

Work is well underway personalising and further enhancing our curriculum, we have a new homework policy and improved strategies are in place to aid the delivery of maths and SPAG. As you know the Government removed existing assessment and level systems, introduced a changed curriculum and are replacing SATs with another testing model yet to be fully unveiled. We have therefore developed our own target card and tracking systems for assessment and are working towards the new tests in May. With so many changes it has been a challenging time for children, teachers and leadership team alike.

It has been well documented and is regularly in the news that the mental health of our children is suffering and schools are becoming ever more stressful environments. This stress can be felt throughout a school, with not only children, but teachers driven by ever increasing targets and deadlines. With this in mind, as a school and governing body we are investigating the best ways in which to support our children / staff and have created a new governor committee to put our plans in place.

Our initial focus will be the 3Rs – Respect, Resilience and Relax.

Respect

With the aim to improve the general behaviour of children, working on compassion towards themselves and others, increased tolerance, patience and respect for another's point of view and good manners (Mrs Virdie sent a recent email detailing some of these actions). We have seen an increase in children falling out with one another and on occasions being unkind. This is something we want to prevent by encouraging them all to make better choices, to be kind and show respect to each other and staff.

Resilience

"Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress — such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems or workplace and financial stressors. It means "bouncing back" from difficult experiences." We want to increase children's resilience, especially when facing increasing levels of testing and a documented growing mental health problem within schools, this bold aim will help our children not only during their time at Willaston but hopefully beyond.

Relax

Part of the ability to cope is the ability to relax, become less tense and stop feeling nervous or worried. We are investigating the best ways of integrating this throughout the school and have sought expert advice on embedding a specially designed mindfulness package. Initially we intend to introduce '5 minute breathers' with each class building up as we access further training. There is a wealth of evidence to show that the right mindfulness activities undertaken at school can greatly improve many things including behaviour, self-belief, achievement and happiness.

We would also love to find a yoga teacher who could lead a weekly afterschool parent and child yoga session – if anyone knows someone who could do this please let the school know.

Together with the implementation of a whole school approach to wellbeing, we want to look again at ways in which we can identify potentially more serious mental health issues at an earlier stage, again investigating several options including external support, counselling and mentor schemes.

It can be incredibly difficult to access the right help and interventions when they are required, funding locally and nationally has been cut with services reduced and parents often have to fight hard to get the help their children need. Several parents who are either professionals within this field or who have gone 'through the system' are helping put together an information pack containing guidelines on what help is available and where.

With these strategies in place we hope to help improve the lives of all children at Willaston and give them vital skills to use throughout their lives.

Of course parental involvement and support will be vitally important and we would love to strengthen the partnership we have between pupils, parents, staff and governors. It would be great to have parents on the working party investigating these and further ways in which to improve the time our children spend at Willaston, even if you only have a little time available.

We also would like to encourage more parents to get involved with the school in general and have some exciting projects planned. A parental feedback sheet will be sent home soon with the opportunity to detail how well you think the school is serving your child's needs, what we do well and you would like to see more of, what we could improve and importantly how - plus any problems that you think require attention. There will also be space for you to include anything you would like to be involved with within the school or skills you could share.

There is so much still to do and this is just a start, but as a team of pupils, parents, staff and governors we can work together and really make a difference.

Enjoy the Easter break!

Willaston Academy Governors