

Ickford News

They say that, 'absence makes the heart grow fonder' (although I am not sure who actually says it other than my mother) so I hope that the return of the newsletter will raise collective spirits.

The last half term finished with some notable high points, the netball team beating Lord William's Secondary School, a trip to see Nicola Benedetti, Class 2's assembly and, of course, the Valentine's Disco with 'Disco Steve' himself but I suppose the letter of congratulations from the Secretary of State for Education the RT. Hon. Nick Gibb MP, should be given some precedence.

This is the third year in succession that we have received such a letter congratulating us on our success and in each of these years we have improved our standing in comparison with other State Schools in the country. In 2015 we were in the top 5%, 2016 top 3% and 2017 top 1% - a far cry from when we languished in the bottom 20% in 2010. The PTA (more about them later) very kindly published the news of our success on their website and whilst I am pleased to accept the letter from the MP because it reflects the amount of dedication and determination the staff at Ickford have, I also find it a little frustrating and had some difficulty answering some fellow school leaders recently when they asked the inevitable question, "How?" so I thought I would try and give some answers for everyone.

Firstly, a great deal of our achievements is grounded significantly in the two areas that appear to cause some consternation in our school, Reading and Attendance and I cannot emphasise enough how important both are.

I had the opportunity to chat with a group of new parent readers this week about the value of being able to read and the way it unlocks the windows and doors of life. Every part of the curriculum is made accessible through the ability to read and there is nothing more satisfying for a teacher than watching the children's interest and enthusiasm for something burgeon as their reading proficiency develops.

I know that the impact that just 10 minutes per day reading with an 'expert' can have on a child and teaching reading is at the core of everything we do. The 'edge' that we gain is through the home school agreement that daily reading is embedded into children's homework and this is crucial.

Rather than take this for granted, I keep a constant track on children's home reading and consistently work with teachers on how it is taught in school. We are currently developing a more substantial Reading Record book to replace the current yellow one the children have. I believe that a better quality book will raise the profile of this document and reinforce the importance of reading at home. It will also enable us to combine teacher assessment with the reading record and to build a sharper profile of the individual child. Currently, our homework policy states that reading should be completed at home on 5 days per week but, if you really want to help your child, this is a minimum and every day is much more beneficial.

The second element that enables the success of the school is emphasising the importance of attendance. It goes without saying that, we can't teach them if they are not present but, though some schools may have a more relaxed approach to attendance, we do not and because of

this, every teacher knows that their challenge is to make every school day valuable and focused on 'learning'. As I set this as the teachers' target, I have a responsibility to make attendance a priority and, though sometimes difficult, to challenge non-attendance.

Non-attendances not only impacts on the child who is absent but also on the other children and staff. When a child misses school, they miss things and often return during the middle of a block of learning which means the class teacher must then, go back over material that the class has covered, give individual support to the returning child and often spend additional time rewriting plans. This causes additional workloads, holds the other children up and takes valuable resources from where they are most needed.

Our concerns are particularly elevated when those children who may find parts of the curriculum more difficult miss school but equally disconcerting are the times when the view is a child can be taken out of school because they are "doing well" and can afford to miss something as they have the ability to "catch up". This attitude has complete disregard for both the quality of teaching and learning and also of the impact on other children in the class. The message is therefore clear, to reap the full benefit of what Ickford offers and also to be part of ensuring that we maintain our standards, a commitment to attendance is crucial.

So, I have given two facts in answer to the question "How?" we have got where we are and, although there are many other attributes to our success, these are the two that you as parents can be most involved in. The difficulty that I have when discussing our position according to the league tables and rankings is in trying to explain to people how these standings,

which are based purely on results in English and Maths, are not what, in my opinion, should attract parents and children to the school. As I have said on many occasions, a Headteacher can improve English and Maths by simply narrowing the curriculum and focusing only on those two areas and then 'drilling' pupils towards test results.

At Ickford, we continue to maintain a varied curriculum and to try and achieve excellence in all areas. This is made possible because I have some of the best teachers around who work together to be successful, professional and effective. In turn they are supported by a team of support staff and specialists with the same aspirations and dedication to their roles.

We may not always be in the top 1% but we will do our very best to maintain the high standards of teaching we enjoy now. In addition, we will, I hope, always strive to offer the excellence and variety found in the curriculum beyond English and Maths.

Sadly, one factor that does have a significant impact on our capacity to maintain standards and indeed to improve further, is money. As I am sure everyone knows, these are austere times and school budgets are being severely constrained. I am therefore extremely grateful to our PTA (I said I'd return to them) who are doing so much at the moment to raise funds for the school as well as to engage and build the community. Ben has sent me a really exciting list of events in the pipeline and I really hope that everyone will try and support him and his team with what they are trying to do.

I am sending the newsletter early this week so that I can help to drum up support for the Car Wash taking place at

school on Saturday morning. It is completely donation based and at this time of year who doesn't need a car wash? (Motorcyclists) It opens at 9.00 am but get there early as I think there will be a queue!

The PTA has set a target to raise a significant amount of money towards new interactive screens for each classroom and with their help, I am sure we can achieve this. It was interesting to hear a potential new parent remark that, "You [Ickford] must not have the same budget difficulties as other schools, it all looks so smart." I can assure you we do but providing a clean, well equipped and comfortable environment is I consider, imperative for an outstanding school to survive. That said, I may be cleaning it myself soon!



Have a good weekend,

Mr Ronane

Ickford News from the office

Dates for your diary...

22 nd February 9-11am	PTA Car Wash
Boardman1 st March	World Book Day
5 th -9 th March	Y5&6 Residential

7 th March	Oxford Story Museum Trip
10 th February 10-12 midday	PTA Clearance Sale
13 th March	Reception & Y6 Height & Weight with School Nurse
16 th March From 7pm	PTA Race Night, Ickford Village Hall
23 rd March	PTA Kids Film Night
29 th March	Inset Day
30 th March – 13 th April	Easter Holiday

School Lottery

Last week's lucky lottery winner for the first time was Louise Merritt, congratulations Louise!

If you would like the chance to win, and support the school, please click on the link below and get signed up!

<https://www.yourschoollottery.co.uk/lottery/school/ickford-school>



TIDDINGTON
GARAGE



Boardman Windows

