

CFS Parents' Forum – Saturday 5th March 2016
10.00 am – 11.30 am

Mr Morrall thanked all parents and children present for coming along to today's meeting. He explained that today's Parents' Forum was to follow a slightly different format from the usual 'open session' forums in that today's attendees were all parents of Year 7 students who had been asked to attend to give their views on how well their children had settled into school and what things, if any, could be improved around this process. This morning's discussion would focus on what parents thought of the teaching their children received, how consistent the school was being in its application of homework and marking policies, what they thought about the school's behaviour policy, the extra-curricular life of the school, whether their children felt safe in school, if there were any bullying issues and if they were happy with the progress their children are making in lessons. But before the group went on to discuss these issues Mr Morrall introduced himself as Executive Principal – a title that he holds as he performs the role of Headteacher in two schools, Chingford Foundation and Rushcroft Foundation and then asked parents and children to introduce themselves. He asked if the children present could let the group know what were their favourite subjects and anything else that interests them about their experience in the school and their aspirations.

The children enjoyed a variety of subjects but Art, Music, Science, Maths, PE, Design and History were the most commonly liked. One boy said that he thought Art was 'inspirational' and would help him go on to be a Designer like his father. He also liked the repetition of subject matter (sometimes in slightly different ways) in Maths until teachers knew that 'you'd got it'. There were subject that he didn't like so much, but was going to 'keep his head down' and get on with them. Another girl said she liked studying design which wasn't offered in her primary school and her careers choices would be either an accountant or a footballer. Other child liked Maths and shared how integral algebra was to all aspects of life. Learning about World War 1 had been 'fascinating'. History was helping them learn things that have happened in an exciting way.

Mr Morrall asked the children what pastimes they liked out of school. The pastimes and activities were many and varied; drama, dance, netball, karate, maths, swimming, basketball and many feed into extra-curricular activities already provided by the school.

Mr Morrall asked the children to rate the school out of 10 ... the scores ranged from 8/10 to 10/10.

Parents felt that their children didn't dislike any subject in particular and felt that the focus needs to be kept on the children as they move from Year 7 into 8. Mr Morrall agreed that in some schools Years 7 and 8 were 'treading water' as OFSTED's *The Wasted Years* report had highlighted. This school understands that is why students need to be pushed and challenged in these early years.

A mother said that her son needed to adjust to the new pace of secondary school life with for example its increased amount of homework but Mr Carter (Lower School Head) had been really supportive in helping with this and now a term and a half in, he was coping very well.

Parents generally felt that the amount of homework set was sufficient but they felt that sometimes what appeared in Students' Planners was too vague and therefore they weren't in a position to help their children should they need it.

Also one parent felt that 'poster' work shouldn't be set too regularly – his child had recently had to do three posters for three different subjects. This kind of activity if repeated was not sufficiently stretching and challenging for the children. However it was agreed that the stretch needed to be measured, not so great that it dented the child's confidence.

The families were unanimously supportive of CFS's Year 6 into 7 Transition Summer School and said how much it had benefited their children in helping them to set up friendship groups before they came to school and to settle into school life much quicker in September when they entered Year 7.

Parents felt that their children's books were marked regularly and appreciated the spotlight the school was putting on this aspect of learning – Mr Morrall mentioned the homework audit that is to be carried out in the school next week as a marker of the importance that the school attaches to regular homework setting.

Most parents felt that CFS was already a large school and the provision of extra school places should be a Borough/government responsibility via the building of new school(s) to accommodate numbers. It should not be Chingford Academies Trust's responsibility to plug this gap. Mr Morrall did say that class sizes are capped at 30 but in the present economic climate the school had to be aware that a school's budget is ultimately derived from the number of children attending so some expansion may be necessary.

Parents felt that school trips build confidence and agreed with the principle that in some cases trips were offered as an incentive for good progress in lessons and in 'readiness to learn'.

A parent said that her son had taken a while to settle at school, and had been bullied by other students. She immediately informed Mr Carter who dealt with the problem speedily and the problem has never reoccurred. The parents were pleased with Mr Carter and the way he handles the Lower School. They liked the behaviour policy and supported the zeroing of points each half term which allows student who have behaved poorly to 'remake' themselves. Mr Morrall cited that over 50% of the Year 7 cohort had never received a negative referral which was impressive.

Children confirmed that they all felt safe in school, that that they knew who to go to should they be bullied, and were aware of the school's motto in relation to bullying of 'keep on telling', whether this was bullying they were experiencing or bullying they saw others experiencing. Mr Morrall reiterated that the school does not tolerate bullying and incidents, if sufficiently serious, will be reported to the police. Mr Morrall understood what that children said about their general reluctance to 'snitch' but that ultimately this behaviour supports bullies, because bullies rely on victims keeping silent.

Parents felt that they could communicate easily with Mr Carter, but that it was sometimes more difficult with subject teachers and email addresses for subject leaders should be on the school's website.

They suggested that there was a locker zone installed in school or in the outside areas used to house them, as children had heavy loads of books and equipment to carry about with them and this was acceptable.

The school uniform list should also include overalls for use in Art.

The children's main concern was about pushing in of older students in the queue for the Refectory, the length of time they had to queue to be served, the variety of food sold and shortage of paninis on sale (a popular item with all the children). They thought that the subsidy on food should be higher and some food items were good value for money. Mr Morrall hoped that with the coming of the new caterers Olive Dining after Easter, many of these problems would be solved, as in addition to a new menu, extra serving points are to be added. This will allow the serving of students in the Refectory to be speeded up.

Mr Morrall thanked parents and children for attending today's meeting which had been extremely useful.