

## **Message to Parents and Carers from the Governors**

*January 2008*

The Government has abolished the requirement for a Governors' Annual Report to parents. In many ways this had become a rather cumbersome document, both to generate and to read, due to the statutory requirements dictating its content. The Ashcombe School governors are therefore exploring alternative ways to continue to communicate with parents.

We attended last year's PTA meeting so that parents could question us and raise any issues of a general nature, but we were not exactly inundated with parental comments! A posting on the website covering what we have been doing over the past year therefore seems to be an appropriate alternative.

### **There are three main roles for governors:**

- to provide a strategic view over all the school's activities, so that standards are raised, high expectations are promoted and effective teaching and learning takes place. We set the broad framework within which the Headteacher and his Senior Management Team run the school.
- to act as 'a critical friend', which means that we don't just rubber-stamp anything that is proposed to us, but ask challenging questions, offer support and advice by drawing on our collective knowledge and experience and help to promote the interests of the school and its students.
- to be accountable for what takes place within the school and answer for our actions to parents and the wider community.

We are careful, whilst undertaking our many responsibilities, not to encroach on the Head's role in running the school on a day-by-day basis. To carry out our duties in an efficient and effective manner we have four committees:

- Curriculum
- Human Resources and Welfare
- Finance
- General Purposes (dealing with site development, utilities, health & safety issues etc)

Each committee meets once a term and then reports back to the main Governing Body with recommendations for decisions and action.

We also delegate special responsibilities to named governors, who individually oversee:

- Child Protection
- Children in Care
- Special Needs
- Disability Equality and Accessibility

All governors are involved in undertaking Health and Safety visits, and between us we inspect every part of the extensive school site once every term.

### **Planning and Monitoring Building Developments**

You will know that there has been a lot of building activity at The Ashcombe starting in the Easter Term 2007 and continuing during the Summer holidays. We spent time considering the plans and finance for the various projects and monitoring progress, and are delighted with the improvement in accessibility for those with disabilities, and the complete refurbishment of the Sixth Form block.

### **Interaction with Staff**

A great deal of the success of any school is dependent upon the quality and enthusiasm of its staff. Governors are involved in interviewing every member of staff before appointment, and in maintaining an overview of the performance management processes and professional development available to them. We meet Heads of Department twice a year to discuss the development plans relating to their subjects and to get an understanding of issues relevant to them. We also have a session on pastoral matters with Heads of Year, and we meet all new teaching staff in the autumn term.

### **Curriculum**

Each year we review the curriculum that is available to all pupils, and from time to time we benefit from a presentation by subject heads on the content of their particular courses. Our understanding of the delivery of the syllabus at the school is enhanced by sitting in classes given to a wide range of pupils in terms of age and ability.

### **Review of Examination Results**

Early in the autumn term we review examination and test results in detail and have the opportunity of comparing these with previous Ashcombe

results, with other Surrey schools and with national results. Every year we also spend time looking at an analysis of the ‘Valued Added’ (VA) outcome achieved by the school – i.e. the measurement of progress made by every pupil from when they first joined the school. Comparison of the overall achievement by one school with others is nowadays a very complicated process, taking into account a whole range of factors such as levels of deprivation in the catchment area, the gender of pupils and whether English is their first language.

### **Setting Targets**

Each year it is part of our responsibilities to set targets for KS3 pupils in English, Maths, Science and Information Technology tests; GCSE passes of 5A\*-C including English and Maths; and GCSE pupils’ average point score. We also set targets for School Attendance. In setting these targets we look at percentages and points attained by Ashcombe pupils over the last few years, and consider advice from the Headteacher and the School Improvement Partner - a consultant allocated to the school by the Local Authority.

### **Governor Training**

Governor training and development are continuing processes for us. We have spent time getting to understand this new complex VA measurement, so that we can draw appropriate conclusions about the school’s performance. Governor development sessions (two Saturday mornings and two early evenings each year) enable us to be up to speed on the substantial amount of new legislation and regulations imposed on schools. They also ensure that we have a clear understanding of the issues and circumstances of school life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century – a very different scenario from some of our own school days.

### **Overview of Finance**

An important part of our responsibilities is to plan the school budget and to monitor income and expenditure on a regular basis each term. This is becoming much more complex, due to a plethora of funding sources, some of which are ‘ring-fenced’ for specified purposes. We also endeavour to keep a careful watching brief to ensure as far as is practicable that the money provided for each year’s cohort of pupils is indeed spent on them, and not squirreled away for some future expenditure on another group of students.

### **Pupil Pastoral matters**

Governors are informed each term about the figures on pupils' attendance, behaviour and disciplinary matters and the management systems to deal with these. We are kept informed (without of course any breach of confidentiality) about the work of the school counsellor, and issues relating to accessibility. Recently we have spent a lot of time considering responses by parents, staff and pupils regarding the school's uniform and in coming to an agreement on the new requirements.

Governors have also been involved in discussing a number of issues at the school relating to healthy living, which included decisions on what food and drink should be available in the school canteen. Drafting policies concerning all these issues is an important and time-consuming task for us, which is often delegated to a small group of governors who then report back to the whole governing body. In all the work we do we benefit from professional guidance from the Head and his senior management team.

### **Wider Community contacts**

We are delighted that a few years ago The Ashcombe was able to become a founder member of the Dorking Schools Partnership. This initially focussed on sharing teaching and learning techniques and materials amongst 18 schools in the area, and now extends to co-ordinating and sharing a response from multi-disciplinary professionals (such as psychologists and welfare officers) to support vulnerable pupils within all these schools. In Dorking we are ahead of the game which the government is now promoting for schools to join confederations in their particular localities. Governors representing The Ashcombe join with governors from other Dorking schools in a twice-yearly Forum to discuss issues of mutual interest.

### **Supporting Extra-Curricular Activities**

Governors are mindful of the goodwill and hard work of teaching staff in organising so many extra-curricular activities. We are keen to support the school's high-profile events such as the annual musical or play, concerts, gym and dance displays, Business Week, Awards Evening, Christmas Service and biennial Careers Fair. We greatly value the many trips offered to pupils both in this country and overseas, and several of us have been to China on various occasions (at our own expense!) to strengthen the relationship with our link school in Shanghai.

### **PTA and The Ashcombe Trust**

We are very grateful for the support given to the school by the Parent Teacher Association, who from time to time organise informative

evenings and social events for parents, and who provide invaluable assistance by running uniform sales for pupils. It is interesting to record that several of us in the Governing Body first made a contribution to the life of the school as PTA members! We are also grateful to those who organise and oversee valuable additional funding to supply much-needed items for the school through their work for The Ashcombe Trust.

### **Your Comments**

The school's web-site contains a wealth of information so please explore it fully. Should you have any comments to make about general matters in connection with the school, do contact us, we shall be interested in your views. Click onto 'Governing Body' for our names and photos and either phone or write to the Chairman at the address given or, if you prefer, contact another governor in the first instance by writing to them c/o the school.