



Chairs Report AGM June 2022

Firstly, I would like to thank the Management, Staff and Committee members, for what has been another challenging year, in some regard. Overall, we have aimed to maintain a consistent and outstanding provision, for preschool children and families, whilst supporting our loyal and committed staff and yet remain sustainable for future generations of our community.

A NEW NORMAL

Following the refocused Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Guidance (2021), we have reflected on and tweaked our curriculum which was shared with all families last year. It has been an opportunity to consider what we offer in relation to our ethos.

Now we are operating in a “New Normal”! Some of the incentives from Covid restrictions we have kept for example the more remote dropping off and collecting of children. This has been a revelation, in supporting the children’s wellbeing in general, though obviously we are now able to be more flexible in allowing parents to come in to see the children in the preschool environment for meetings and hopefully going forward we intend to have some stay and play sessions. The other aspect has been to maintain the Hive as a separate cohort, enabling 2, 3 and 4 year olds to receive a more tailored experience to their age and stage, though this has not been without challenges, as locally there is a real shortage of 2 year provision, so we are constantly trying to accommodate as many families as possible in this age range.

We opened in September to slightly lower numbers of children, however this has been a trend across the country, with a year of lower birth rates. This year North Hinksey Primary is not full in reception for the first time in many years.

Extreme weather/ preschool closures

We’d like to thank parents for their patience this academic year where we have had to close 3 times! Firstly we had to close preschool completely for one day, for extreme Wind conditions in February. Then we had to close the Preschool room for a week, in March as we had an outbreak of Covid in 3 staff and a large number of the children in that group. Finally we closed for another day, when the school site had a flood in May! We do feel grateful, however, that our closures due to Covid have not been regular and we have been able to provide a consistent experience for family and their children.

Staffing

We managed to recruit our lovely Jasmine in September to undertake her Early Years Educator Apprenticeship and she has proved to be a welcome and delightful member of our team. Jasmine hopes to complete her apprenticeship in the early part of the new academic year.

We were then very sad to lose Natalia at Christmas. Natalia had been working with Ali in the Preschool room since September 2019, however she decided to further her career in Early Years in a School Nursery nearer to her home.

Since last year we have been struggling to recruit staff as with so many sectors, following Brexit and also due to Covid and perhaps less people training as Early Years Practitioners, there is a recruitment crisis, especially across our county. We therefore decided to remain open, sustainable and to support existing staff, that whilst trying to recruit Linda and Ruth would work in ratio with the children across the week, and complete admin/ managerial tasks out of hours. We had not imagined it would be for the whole year! We do continue to advertise and hope that one day things will change.

Training

We have managed to stay on top of statutory training and Ali and Ruth have just managed to complete the governments Early Years Professional Development Program (EYPDP), a key element of the national government initiative to improve children's outcomes in early language, literacy and mathematics. It has run weekly from January to July, entailing online learning every week and a weekly webinar. The course has focused on Communication and Language, Maths and Personal Social and emotional development, all of which had been highlighted by the government as areas particularly impacted on during Covid. The course was open to all practitioners however as we have been short on staffing it has been undertaken out of hours, which has been a big commitment which not everyone was able to undertake this time. We believe this highly reflective and informative course will be continued in future.

Fundraising

In October we were extremely excited and grateful to parents that ran in the Oxford Half Marathon to raise some funds for Preschool, with the aim to raise enough money to buy a new set of outdoor building blocks. They were very expensive so we were really pleased that The Oxford Rotary Club agreed to provide us with £1000 to enable us to buy a bigger a set! It was really funny and not completely unexpected when the new blocks arrived.. All the children helped unpack them, played with them for about 10 minutes and spent the rest of the week playing with the large boxes they came it!

Next year we aim to piggy back again on the school fundraising events and hope we can raise some pennies whilst having fun in our wider community. We really hope some of you and the new parents we will have, will support us and get involved.. you can do this without being on our committee. If any

of you ever hear of grants we can apply for or if any of your work places are looking to support charities please remember us!

Finances

Obviously last year there were no government support schemes to counter balance the losses still made due to covid. With lower numbers of children, insufficient government funding for the Free entitlement for 15 hours of Nursery Education, we have been running at a loss for this academic year, however Oxfordshire County Council have supported us with a £20k sustainability grant, enabling us to break even once again. We have been very lucky that we have managed to maintain our reserves keeping us sustainable for the foreseeable future, however in order to break even this year we will need to review fees, and staff hours, as we will not receive a sustainability grant from the council. We may need to move some children across from the Hive, to the room in January, to be able to offer more places to children on our waiting list. Whilst preschool is a non- profit-making charity, we need to keep a few months running costs in accordance with the charity commissions guidelines to ensure sustainability in the face of unforeseen difficulties. This year we have had unseen costs to replace the Hive Decking, the heating in the hive and a new boiler!

Wrap Care

Our extended hours on a Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday is working well and has enabled us to provide some further support for working parents. This session is proving popular with the children too and we will be continuing with it in the new academic year. If you are interested please let us know.

Joint working

We continued to have a good working relationship with North Hinksey School. We meet termly with the Head teacher, Amy Pearce to discuss premises issues, transitions and shared policies. We also have support from the Early Years Special Educational Needs Intervention Teachers, Speech and Language therapists, Health Visitors, and a wider network of other Early Years Settings across Oxfordshire. We also maintain and work in Partnership with Social Workers and the Locality and Community Support Services and our Local Authority.

30 Hours Free Nursery Education Funding

We continue to offer the 15 hours free NEF to all families and remain opted out of the extended offer of 30 free hours for working families only. We continue to allow parents to buy additional hours above the 15, as many of our current families already do. We feel this way we can accommodate more families who require our services, remain sustainable and maintain a high-quality provision.

The NEF funding this year was set at £4.35 per hour for a funded 3-year-old and £5.89 for a funded 2-year-old, an increase of just 17p and 21p respectively. Funding is still inadequate across all Early Years settings as has been recorded at length in the media.

Fees

From September 2022 we will be increasing the paid fees to £7.50 per hour for a paying 3-year-old and £7.80 for a paying 2-year-old. We are also increasing the voluntary maintenance fee to £50 a full term, to cover the increased cost of utilities, cleaning, cleaning products, administration, snacks and consumables.

Staffing

This year I would like to thank staff for their continued support and motivation. They have demonstrated resilience, tenacity, loyalty and commitment to both our setting but mostly to the children and families in our care.

Future Plans

We hope that this next year we can continue to grow, recruit staff, take on more children and get the balance right so we can remain sustainable for many years to come. We aim to support staff, families and their children, in what potentially will be a challenging few years financially, whilst still maintaining the high quality of provision we know we provide.

Committee

Our committee remains in place as Stuart Dashwood -Chair, Ian Fitchett- treasurer and Linda Kitching - Secretary. And we'd like to welcome Tess Trigg and Liz and Christine Kelly Eldridge who have agreed to join our committee for the coming year.