



1st September
2025

High Firs Primary School

NEWSLETTER

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MESSAGE FROM MR KILBRIDE

A warm welcome from everyone here at High Firs to you all – we hope you enjoyed a terrific summer holidays and that children are raring to go for the exciting start to a new school year.

I am writing to share a couple of key messages with you before term gets underway tomorrow.

Roof works

Firstly, as you approach school on Tuesday you will see that we still have scaffolding erected – as I shared with you in July, the work to replace our roof will continue into the first weeks of this term, as expected. The good news is that the roof over Reception and Y1 is complete, so no work will be going on overhead there. As for the rest of the classrooms, the old roof felt and gravel has been removed and a new damp resistant membrane has been fitted. The next step is to install insulation (for the first time over much of the building) and then for the finishing layer to be applied. The majority of the power tool work is behind us, and once the insulation is on, the tramping noises from above will be significantly muted. The builders access the roof from the car park at the front of school by the corner of my office. Any areas where they are working immediately adjacent to the playground have a fenced buffer zone of up to 1 metre to ensure children are not playing below working areas. Any doorways that pass under working areas have scaffolding ‘fans’ erected to ensure no falling objects can jeopardise anyone below. The only area where people can pass right next to the roof being worked on is in the scooter park at the front of school. As this area is only in use from 8.45-9 and from 3.10-3.30, the builders have agreed to cease work during these periods. Any parents of Y6 children taking the Kent Test on Thursday 11th need not worry – we have already arranged for no workers to be on site for the whole of that day.

Front entrance development

The front entrance work is now complete and the office is operating once more from its usual place. We are very happy with the new form and function. From now on, when you arrive at the school office, simply pull open the outer door and once inside, speak to staff in the lobby through the hatch, or buzz for attention. There is a little more space to the entrance and it all looks much more clean, modern and fresh. We hope you will agree that this is a better experience on the next occasion that you need to visit the front office area.

Smartphone ban

A quick reminder for parents of children in Y5 and Y6 that we announced in May that from this September smartphones would no longer be allowed to be brought into school. Instead, children can bring a basic phone with the capability to make calls and send text messages – but crucially without the ability to engage with social media. If you would like to revisit the detail around the rationale for this decision, please see what I shared with you on May 23rd in the box below.

Governor recruitment

Finally, we are once again trying to recruit a parent governor. I have attached a letter explaining this with information about the role and how to apply below.

Parent governors have to be elected by the parent body – but we have further governor vacancies where the governing body can appoint ‘Co-opted’ governors. This role might be suitable for any grand-parents, other relatives or friends you might consider, who would like to get involved in helping to improve and develop our great school. If this is the case, please do ask anyone interested to contact me directly themselves.



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As we draw Term 5 to a close, I would like to share with you the experience I had this week when attending a Swanley headteacher meeting, where we were spoken to by the inspirational Katherine Myatt, who is a co-founder of the charity Smartphone Free Childhood.

Katherine is a parent herself who has read very widely around the available research evidence concerning the impacts of smartphone use in children.

Essentially, there is now an alarming amount of evidence and research of the negative effects of smartphones and social media on children and teenagers. These include:

- Poor mental health, such as depression, anxiety and low self-esteem.*
- Issues with cyberbullying, attention, focus and sleep.*
- Exposure to dangerous and harmful content, and inappropriate material; and*
- Smartphones can be highly addictive, so time spent on a device reduces time spent playing, interacting and developing vital social skills.*

Our current policy regarding mobile phones for children in school is that in Years 5 and 6 we allow children to come in with a phone that is then handed in and stored in a locked box during the school day, and returned to the child at home time. Ordinarily, this causes no problems at all – but by allowing smartphones into school we have unintentionally added to the peer pressure that parents have to deal with when children reach the age of 9-11 years old.

Not a year has gone by for me since about 2015, where I have not had to deal with mistakes, upset and trauma caused by children accessing the internet on phones and using social media without appropriate supervision. Whenever I look into this issue, I am always shocked by the sheer volume of content that our children in social media groups generate. In dealing with a recent breach of our mobile phone use policy, I saw a whatsapp group involving our students where on a typical school day, over 200 messages were sent amongst the group – starting at about 6.30am, pausing during the school day, and then resuming on the way home from school – when children are needing to keep their wits about them – and on into the late evening around 11pm. This pattern of use is clearly not something that is good for the healthy development of a 9-11 year old brain. It represents something of a runaway train.

So from September 2025, we will be joining many other schools locally in no longer allowing children to bring smartphones into school. The bringing of a basic phone that can make calls and send texts (but crucially not access the internet or any social media apps) will continue to be allowed – with the same rule of handing the device in during the school day.

I am in the middle of arranging a date for Katherine herself to come and present to parents and share a little more of her knowledge on this subject. The aim of Smartphone Free Childhood is not to prevent access to technology – it is rather to delay the unsupervised access to the internet and social media platforms until children are old enough to manage use more effectively – broadly speaking around 14 years of age. If our new policy can contribute towards reversing the alarming rising trends in pupil wellbeing concerns and mental health concerns, then that would be a fantastic outcome for all concerned.



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High Firs Primary School

Headteacher

Mr A Kilbride

Deputy Headteacher

Miss C Rennie

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Dear Parents,

I am writing to let you know about a vacancy for the role of parent governor that we have on our governing body.

The role of the governing body

The school's governing body is responsible for providing confident and strategic leadership, and creating robust accountability, oversight and assurance for the school's educational and financial performance. The body is passionate about education and committed to continuous school improvement to ensure the best possible outcomes for all our pupils.

The role of a parent governor

As a parent governor, you'll work with other governors, including myself as Headteacher, to ensure the governing body effectively carries out the duties referred to above. Governors are encouraged to take part in the work of committees of the governing body, allowing them to develop particular areas of personal interest and expertise. The Local Authority has a responsibility for providing support and training for governors and there is a full programme of activities, with particular support for newly appointed governors.

To be a parent governor you should have:

- A strong commitment to the role and to improving outcomes for all children
- Good inter-personal skills, curiosity, and a willingness to learn and develop new skills
- Skills to ensure the governing body delivers effective governance
- A rigorous regard for confidentiality and safeguarding

Expectations of governors

Meetings of the Full Governing Body take part six times a year; these last approx. one and a half to two hours each. Governors are also invited to undertake monitoring activities once a term and are welcome to join us for occasions such as the Fun Day and class assemblies. The term of office for all governors is four years and a parent is able to remain as a governor if their child leaves the school within that period.

How to apply

I am writing to you now to invite you to nominate a parent, who may be your partner, yourself or any other parent who you have ensured is willing to stand for election. New governor appointments may be made subject to any checks required at the time of appointment with regard to safeguarding.

Please let me have any nomination by 9am on Monday 15th September, using the form below. This includes the opportunity for the nominee to make a brief statement of no more than 100 words stating the reason for application, which will be shared with the parent community. If the number of nominations for parent governor exceeds the number of vacancies available then a parent community vote by secret ballot will take place. Otherwise, any nominee will automatically become an elected parent governor of the school's governing body. In either case I will let you know the outcome as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely



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Become a parent governor at High Firs Primary School
Further information....

We are looking for parents to join our governing body. Your input on issues such as finance, site management and curriculum development will help to influence and improve school performance. Free training is available to develop skills and boost self-confidence.

To find out more about becoming a school governor visit:
www.becomeagovernor.com

Governors are people just like you!

What do school governors do?

School governors provide strategic leadership and accountability in schools. In some schools the site is owned by the governing body. It is governors who hold the main responsibility for finance in schools, and it is governors who work with the headteacher to make the tough decisions about balancing resources.

Each individual governor is a member of the governing body, which is established in law as a corporate body. Individual governors may not act independently of the rest of the governing body and decisions are its joint responsibility. The role of the governing body is a strategic one, its key functions are to:

- set the aims and objectives for the school
- set the policies for achieving those aims and objectives
- set the targets for achieving those aims and objectives
- monitor and evaluate the progress the school is making towards achievement of its aims and objectives
- be a source of challenge and support to the headteacher (the critical friend)

What is the role of a parent governor?

There are no duties specific to the parent governor role which do not apply to other governors.

As a parent governor objectivity is essential. You do not have to vote in a particular way because you have been pressed to do so by parents – you are a representative, not a delegate. It is also important to remember you are also not there to promote the interests of your own children but all children.

As an effective parent governor, you will:

- Help to decide the priorities for improving the school
- Make yourself available to parents, listen impartially to other parents' opinions and take account of them as you contribute to governors' decisions but you will not act on these individually or take a personal involvement in them.
- Guide parents about appropriate lines of action and procedures
- Work in partnership with the headteacher, senior leadership team and other governors to raise standards and improve outcomes for all children
- Prepare fully for meetings by reading papers beforehand; be committed to reading briefings and newsletters for governors
- Take responsibility for your own learning and development as a governor including attending training (including staff INSET)
- Attend full governing body meetings promptly, regularly, and for the whole time – this is approximately six meetings per year – plus allowing time for visits, training and events.
- Promote the interests of the school in the wider community
- Be loyal to the decisions made by the governing body
- Respect the confidentiality of governing body affairs and school matters
- Never promise, or be expected, to 'solve a problem' on your own
- Never press your own child's case – particularly at the expense of others
- Declare an interest and withdraw from any meeting where you, a partner or close relative or associate stands to gain, or where you are so close to a matter discussed it is difficult to be impartial
- Have regard to the broader responsibilities as a governor of a public institution in regard to promoting accountability for the actions and performance of the governing body
- Take part in school events and spend time in school meeting with children & staff
- Present a balanced view of issues, representing different sections of the community
- Act as an ambassador for the school



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HIGH FIRS PRIMARY SCHOOL

Nomination Form for Election of Parent Governor

Return to the Headteacher by 9am on Monday 15th September.
The nominee **MUST** be the parent of a child currently registered at the school

| | |
|---|---|
| Name of person being nominated | |
| Address of person being nominated | |
| Signature of person being nominated | <i>Signature indicates consent to being nominated</i> |
| Name of child(ren) currently registered at High Firs Primary School | |
| Candidate Statement (Max 100 words) | <p><i>In this section, outline:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>The skills and experience you have that may be of benefit to the governing body</i>• <i>Why you believe you would be an effective governor</i>• <i>How you plan to contribute to the future work of the board</i>• <i>Any other relevant info to support your nomination</i> <p><i>In the event of an election being necessary, this information will be circulated to eligible voters.</i></p> |

continued overleaf...



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All nominees must be proposed by two other parents at the school, who will be contacted to confirm their agreement.

| | PROPOSER (1) | PROPOSER (2) |
|--|--------------|--------------|
| Name | | |
| Address | | |
| Email | | |
| Name of child(ren) at High Firs Primary School | | |



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