



English Bicknor & Aylburton Local Academy Committee Governors' Newsletter December 2024



Welcome to this English Bicknor and Aylburton Local Academy Committee (LAC) newsletter, which we write to update you on the governance of our school.

Christmas

One of the joys of being a LAC governor is that we are invited to visit both schools regularly; these are always enjoyable occasions and never more so than the ones at Christmas. The KS2 Christmas Carol Concerts were excellent; we may be small schools but you wouldn't know it from the quality and volume of the singing! The KS1 Nativities were equally impressive with even our youngest pupils showing great courage in front of large audiences. What most impressed us was the way our children were so respectful and supportive of each other; they listened attentively and encouraged their peers with real heart. Our schools are very special places because our children (and staff!) are very special people. Thank you for inviting the governors in to share these occasions with you.

We have also heard all about your panto trips, Christmas shopping events, Christmas craft fayres, Christmas dinners and more. Thank you to all the many people involved in making these not just possible but magical for our children.

As proud Church of England schools we celebrate Christmas to remind us of God's ultimate gift to us, His love for us expressed through the gift of His son Jesus who came to experience the highs and lows of life just as we do. It is love that drives our purpose as a school and guides us to seek the best opportunities for the children, which is why our vision continues to be 'through God's love we learn and flourish together'. Thank you for sharing our vision again this year and working with us to give the children the very best experience of primary school.

Developing Reading

Reading is *the* critical skill children learn in primary school as it enables them to access the full range of other subjects.

Staff at both Aylburton and English Bicknor have been raising the profile of reading across all year groups and encouraging children to develop their love of reading. The newsletters now include teacher recommendations for reading books that are suitable for different ages and reading abilities. With grateful thanks to FOEBS and FOAS and all the support they enjoy, the libraries are stocked with a variety of genres, authors and accessibility texts: pupils are invited to borrow a book each week to share at home 'just for fun'. We know that there is a direct link between raising the profile and importance of reading in a school environment and the attainment in reading. Not just with the mechanics of reading (use of phonics) but also the understanding of what is being read (comprehension). Children are being provided with the skills in school to develop a love for reading.

Please continue to support your child at home by reading regularly with them. We ask that all children read their school reading book at least 3 times a week and that parents/guardians make a note of this in their reading record/diary: children who have read at home are rewarded as part of our behaviour rewards system.

Home reading for fun is not just for younger children. There is a lot to be gained from reading to and with older children too. Older children really benefit from discussing the texts being read, making predictions about what might happen next and exploring how characters feel as the story unfolds. 'Book talk' like this is so valuable to learning but can also be an enjoyable way to share one-to-one time with your child. Reading for pleasure also has proven mental health benefits which we also all want to support. The Book Trust has helpful tips about reading with children of all ages [here](#) and they have a wonderful book recommendations page [here](#). Do make use of our school libraries. Happy reading!

Attendance & Punctuality

LAC governors and school leaders continue to place a high importance on school attendance. We do this because we want all children in our schools to have access to the same high-quality teaching and learning opportunities to give them the best start in life, or to 'flourish' as we say in our vision. Our whole school attendance figures continue to be in-line with the national average, but the number of pupils considered persistently absent (defined by the Department for Education as attendance below 90%) is still higher than we want it to be. We recognise the particular barriers to attendance some children face, which is why we have developed quality support programmes to help children overcome challenges related to social, emotional and mental health. If you think your child might benefit from specialised support, please contact your school.

All our school staff, across English Bicknor and Aylburton, continue to work tirelessly to provide rich learning opportunities for our children. Our curriculum is ambitious and planned to build knowledge and skills over time. This is why avoidable absence leaves children at a disadvantage as they may miss key steps in the learning process which can affect their understanding, enjoyment, and self-esteem when they return, which can lead to a vicious cycle of school avoidance. It also takes additional staff time and resources to help pupils catch-up and so we ask that you continue to support the schools and your child/ren by avoiding term-time holidays and sending your child to school every day that they are fit and well. To support families with this so they can take advantage of lower prices by booking holidays early, the LAC request that term dates are published on the school websites as early as possible. You can find these for the current and next academic year [here](#) (English Bicknor) and [here](#) (Aylburton).

This term LAC governors have been interested to see and hear the positive impact of the adjustments to the start of the school day. The overwhelming majority of our pupils arrive at 8.40am when the gates are opened, and lessons are starting promptly and calmly at 8.45am and so we extend our thanks to families for supporting their children to be on time and ready to learn, and to staff for facilitating this change. The positive start to the day has been noted by staff, but is also appreciated by pupils who expressed their preference for 'smooth starts' where everyone is ready on time in recent 'pupil voice' discussions.

Behaviour



LAC governors receive regular data updates on behaviour-related incidents at school so that we can fulfill our duties to monitor this important aspect of school life. As with all data we use, the behaviour data is anonymized. It is not about individuals but broad patterns and trends so we can work with school leaders to identify strengths and areas to improve. In our end-of-year analysis of the parent, pupil and staff surveys completed in the last year, and from our internal monitoring, it was decided that our behaviour expectations would be refined and relaunched in September. We can now report the hugely positive impact this has had for pupils and staff alike. Children are clear on the expectations and can reference these with support from the posters displayed in each classroom and around school. The use of supporting images ('widgets') have allowed *all* children to access and understand these expectations, there is clear continuity throughout the school and this allows staff to embed the expectations into daily practice. These behaviour expectations have been shared with families and anecdotes have been offered about how some parents have also used these to support behaviour at home.

Alongside these expectations, we continue to prioritise work to tackle some of the underlying issues that relate to behaviour. This includes monitoring the quality of our curriculum intent and implementation to ensure that work is pitched at the right level so that it is both achievable for pupils so they feel it is worth trying, but also has sufficient challenge to hold pupils' interest. LAC

governors also monitor the effectiveness of support for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and monitor that Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs of pupils are addressed appropriately. Staff also work closely with a wide variety of external agencies to support our pupils. Supporting the wide and increasing diversity of pupils' needs is a nationally reported challenge, but our staff rise to the challenge, and we will continue to work on this so they are supported in their work.

Safeguarding – Road Safety

Thank you for all your support with improving road safety around our school entrances, particularly when parking in the morning and afternoon. We have been pleased to see improvement in this area, but it must be maintained to keep our children safe. At Aylburton some families continue to park/pull-in right by our school gate which poses a risk for children crossing this area to enter/leave the school gate. Similarly at English Bicknor, there is still an issue of children having to cross between parked cars on Balls Hill which limits visibility for and by vehicles. We understand our sites are awkward to access, but please work with us to ensure the safety of all our children, which must be our top priority.

Policy Updates

As is routine practice, LAC governors have reviewed, refined and ratified several key policies this term to ensure they are compliant with revised Department for Education requirements and fit our schools' needs and are achievable. This is important if they are to effectively guide the work of our schools. Throughout the year, LAC governors will monitor the implementation of these policies as part of fulfilling our brief of holding school leaders to account.

This term both schools have introduced a Uniform Policy for the first time. However, do not be alarmed, no change to uniform has taken place, nor are any changes planned for either school; the new policy has been introduced to fulfill a government requirement. It sets out our commitment that uniform should be affordable for all and allows for adaptations for children with different sensory needs. It also recognises the role of uniform in helping children feel a sense of pride and belonging in our school communities. Arriving smartly dressed for school also supports pupils to have the right mindset for starting a day of learning. Both schools continue to hold quality preloved uniform items readily available to all and work with partner agencies such as the Forest of Dean Baby Bank to supply children with the clothing, coats and shoes they need for school. If you would like support with uniform, coats, or shoes, please do contact the school.

You can find all our school specific policies here: [English Bicknor](#) and [Aylburton](#). Severn Federation Academy Trust policies that apply to all schools in our Trust can be found [here](#).

Governor Changes & Vacancies

Rev. David Gardiner stepped down as LAC governor at the end of October as he moved to take up a new post in Salisbury. We are thankful to have benefited so long from David's guidance and counsel. We wish him and his family all the best. As the Foundation Governor role is appointed by the Diocese, we are working with them to fill this new vacancy.

Laura Calcutt was appointed as parent governor for English Bicknor after a close election in November. Laura is mum to two boys, one is in Year 2 and the other will start in reception next year. Laura is an experienced primary school teacher in Berry Hill and so brings with her a wealth of knowledge and understanding about primary education that will enrich our committee. She is particularly passionate about work on developing wellbeing for pupils and staff alike and so has taken on the Health, Safety and Wellbeing link governor role.

The equivalent parent governor election at Aylburton was unsuccessful with no candidates coming forward. This means the role is still vacant for an Aylburton parent. It is important that our committee is balanced and that the parent perspective from both schools is heard in our discussions. Please contact Katie our Chair (krolphACM@englishbicknor.gloucs.sch.uk), or speak with Mrs Isaac, if you would like an informal, no-obligation discussion about the role. The process only involves an actual election if more than one person comes forward; if there is just one candidate they are automatically appointed (subject to the usual safeguarding and eligibility checks). If you know of someone you think would be suitable, please encourage them to come forward.

As you will already know, our Deputy Headteacher Miss Simon is leaving at the end of term. Miss Simon, whilst not officially a governor, has attended LAC meetings since the very start of the executive leadership collaboration in 2022. We will greatly miss her wise insights both in LAC meetings and during the many school monitoring visits she has led with governors. Her attention to detail, passion for learning and deeply nurturing approach has earned her our enormous respect. Together with our sincere thanks for all she has done for our children over the years, we wish her all the very best.

Finally...Merry Christmas!

The LAC governors' would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our community, young and not-so-young, for their continued hard work and dedication. We hope that you all enjoy the holiday season, however you may spend it.

Merry Christmas from us all!

Mrs Katie Rolph (Chair), Ms Becca Lacey, Mrs Emma Isaac, Mr David Walker, Mrs Linda James, Miss Chloe Penfold and Mrs Laura Calcutt