

### Response to Survey of parents' views of school life 2018 to 2019

Thank you all for contributing to the survey of parents' views of school life this year. All responses are very much appreciated and I shall endeavour to answer as many of the issues raised as possible. This is a great opportunity to move forward with a more constructive model in a number of areas. Be warned – there are 11 pages but I wanted to make sure that all comments, both plaudits and criticism, were given equal and serious consideration. Parents' comments are written in italics. Some have been abridged but contain the intended message.

The tallies relate to the individual responses received. Some parents chose not to respond to all the questions.

#### How would you mark the school out of ten? (ten being excellent)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	1	1			2	5	30	21	29

Thank you – always room for improvement!

#### How well do you think the school is doing in the following areas?

Support and encouragement for pupils	Very well	well	Not very well	Unsure
	63	28	1	

Pupils are expected to work hard at school	Very well	well	Not very well	Unsure
	62	27	2	2

Ethos ( values and attitudes of the School)	Very well	well	Not very well	Unsure
	70	18	2	1

Providing parents with useful information	Very well	well	Not very well	Unsure
	34	43	13	

- *I understand that trying to get the balance of parent communication right is tricky however, I don't think we are there yet. As a parent, I feel I am being told rather than asked. Inviting opinion and feedback is not suitable for every aspect of school but there are occasions when everyone would benefit from this. I feel that recent situation have led to a defensive 'us and them' attitude, to the point where I feel like a naughty school child, being reprimanded when reading the weekly newsletters...*
- *Communication could be improved. The newsletter often has the incorrect dates ... causing concern among parents.*
- *Lack of communication and numerous errors.*
- *I am not one to complain especially in public forums/social media but it does seem like there are a lot of negative comments out there. I feel this is coming through the newsletters now... and I feel that (they) should be positive in line with the values and attitudes of the school. Hopefully this would then be filtered down.*

- *I always feel difficult to find out right school schedules on the newsletters or at the school website. It would be great to have everything on the same page. It is confusing what the right information is.*

With the new parent mail APP I really hope the communications issue will improve. We will rely on the website for up to date information - the 'dates' section in the newsletter has proved a millstone for the office and myself. I really want to improve communication and would welcome suggestions. Sorry about the newsletter – I will adjust my tone! I try to include all the competition and pupil information but I also need a way of letting everyone know that neighbours have complained about inconsiderate parking and that we have so many unnamed items lost property. Families still 'disappear' at the end of term – reminders are still clearly needed.

Some of the unkind things said on the school Facebook page do not follow the positive ethos but I do not have the opportunity to reply – other than by making the school's position clear through the weekly newsletter. Again, I would really welcome constructive advice and parents' views so we can move forward in a positive manner.

- *Not everything we need to know is on the newsletter. New parents who do not have older children could be communicated with in a better way – too many assumptions are made in this area I feel.*

I agree – even after two years I am still finding my way around some of the St Mary's traditions. I know there have been some short notice changes due to circumstances beyond our control but I agree that we need to make sure that all parents know what is planned with as much notice as possible. We are working on this.

- *It would be helpful to have a Class rep to pass on information via Notice board/ e-mail about trips and mufti days on a daily weekly basis rather than social media which is often inaccurate and sometimes used as an opportunity for some to rant!*

Great idea! Should this be separate to the Parent Council? Let me know if you are interested in helping and we can put this into place.

- *I often have additional questions about (the newsletter) and there is no easy/efficient way to ask for further details apart from e-mails/face to face which is time consuming for you to respond to. I don't believe Facebook is a satisfactory tool because many parents are not on there. When information is communicated face to face e.g. at the welcome meeting for new parents and the home visits it is done very well, But I believe there is big room for improvement for regular , ongoing communication through other channels.*

Hopefully parent mail will help but yes please – come and talk to me about your ideas. It is an issue which we all want to get right for the future.

Preparation for life including an awareness of eco/sustainability issues	Very well	well	Not very well	Unsure
	63	26	1	2

The behaviour of pupils	Very well	well	Not very well	Unsure
	52	37	3	4

- *The behaviour of pupils – not very well... I have seen kids behaving so rude and arrogant, also some are violent and spiteful...of course, there are mostly lovely kids at school but some of them should be sorted out but the parents or school.*

We are often praised for the good behaviour of our children and our recent year 6 PGL stay made me appreciate the wonderful behaviour of our children when compared to other schools. The great relationship between our children and our staff help foster that positive attitude. Of course, there are still some children who are learning how to behave and we do our best at school to provide role models and to praise good behaviour so an excellent example is set. However, not all children experience positive behaviour in their home lives which leads to the situation noticed by this parent. Toni North our Inclusion Manager and Lisa Mack our Parent Support Adviser can help with different strategies to help with behaviour at home.

The way school deals with problems	Very well	well	Not very well	Unsure
	42	35	5	8

- *I had only one problem this year but the way it was dealt with was poor. I felt my family had been judged due to a misunderstanding... I felt the issue was deflected and I felt my child who was not the issue took some of the blame for another child's very poor behaviour.*

I have omitted some of the detail so no one can be identified. I am sorry that you felt this way and apologise for any misunderstanding. I often have to say to parents that there is often a bigger picture regarding children's behaviour and we cannot share the wider information that we know about all the individuals involved. Be assured that any situations of bad behaviour are dealt with in school.

- *The school is a wonderful place but I have noticed standards slipping. I attended a multiple school event and the difference in how the teachers and parents interact was very evident. Teachers at St Mary's huddled together and did not talk to parents. I felt parents could really help but the reaction from teachers is more defensive than encouraging sometimes – leading you to think – 'I won't bother them'.*

I am really sorry that you feel this way. I shall look into the event and find out what happened. As a teacher I was used to working alongside parents in school and in the wider parish community. There have been some super suggestions about workshops to welcome parents into school for more informal meetings so I hope these may help to form bridges between staff and parents. If you feel there are ever any particular concerns that you wish to share please do not hesitate to contact me.

The repair and decoration of the buildings	Very well	well	Not very well	Unsure
	34	50	3	3

- *Keep working on the fabric of the school (budget allowing!)*
- *The school pool is an incredible asset but maintenance is not great – not just the pool but the caretaker could paint the fence/remove weeds etc. It is looking scruffy and there is no pride.*

I shall put these items on an ongoing list for Mr Paxton. The maintenance of the pool itself, ensuring the correct balance of chemicals has been a real challenge this summer, talking up most of his time every morning. We are proud of the pool but it is one item that needs money spent on a regular basis.

You will notice the changes around the school funded by the recent successful capital funding bid. I hope you will all have the opportunity see on the 'Meet the Teacher' night. There are many rules about what you can spend different funding on within a school and we are doing our best to make the most out of every penny.

Trips organised by the school	Very well	well	Not very well	Unsure
	42	35	10	5

- *I really feel that the children miss out on school trips ... we have been told that some parents don't pay contributions so trips can't go ahead. How do other schools do it?*
- *I feel the school could do more school trips, like a whole day out on a coach.*
- *It would be nice to have trips further afield other than the river or the mosque like lots of other schools.*
- *More notice on school trips so I can be better organised.*

This is a perennial problem. The school can only ask for 'voluntary contributions' for trips and so some people choose not to volunteer to pay. We have had situations where the school trips have run at a loss. Since funding is so tight we cannot afford to do this. I know other primary schools have cancelled trips due to this situation.

Interestingly, on a trip this year there were some children who had never visited the river although they live in Maidenhead and others who had never 'fed the ducks'. We have children who have never travelled on a train or used an escalator. Most schools do not visit the Mosque but visiting other places of worship is very important to St Mary's.

If there are any ideas for curriculum based trips then please let me know. There may be a local gem that we are unaware of. Remember coaches can cost upwards of £10 per child before the cost of the venue is included. I take the point on notice for trips – we're trying to improve this.

Provision of after school activities	Very well	well	Not very well	Unsure
	34	36	12	7

- *I would like there to be a wider selection of after school/before school activities. Can there be any free classes?*
- *The school could provide more activities for children after school. An art and craft club would be ideal.*

- *I would like to see more after school, activities, especially for the younger ones. The school has a swimming pool, maybe offer swimming lessons after school. The school also has an eco-garden, maybe a gardening club.*
- *As I can see there's so many sports club on go. I would love my kid to have experience of art, craft and musical instruments as well. Hopefully, the school will be able to offer this.*

We have some free sport clubs – hockey and netball. Some are provided by outside bodies so incur a cost. There has to be a limit on pupils attending clubs because of safety and the number of adults required to supervise. If we have staff members willing to run clubs I would be happy to support. With the current funding issues we are actively encouraged to let our facilities to local organisations to provide extra income. This means that some areas are not available at the end of the day. For instance, in the summer when the pool is operational then the FoSM Pool Club runs the pool after school.

Whilst it would be lovely to have EY and KS1 after school clubs as a school we have to be careful that these clubs do not become cheap childcare. Tough though it sounds, some children do not want to attend clubs and would rather play and St Mary's have an historical relationship with Missing Link for after school care with play at its centre. However, if an idea for a club is brought to the school's attention and the school has sufficient staff to run it all ideas will be considered.

- *Sports – Is there anything that can be done to improve things here? I went to the Quad kids and other schools had teachers who were very involved and their pupils seem to have practised ahead of time. Our teachers left before the results were announced which was disheartening.*

St Mary's send to teams to most of the Ascot and Maidenhead School Sports Competitions – we made it to the Berkshire Games for Hockey and Quad kids this year. I know how involved our teachers are in ensuring their children receive opportunities but – unlike some schools – we do not always put a team in to win but to take part. We want all children to have an opportunity to represent their school at some point in their time at St Mary's. The final point – the majority of our teachers stay until the end of the competitions; I am sure there was a good reason that the teachers had left by the point you mention.

- *I think the school swimming pool should be made indoor as it would get more use throughout the year. Some schools have lessons every week at the Leisure Centre as they have no pool.*

St Mary's is lucky to have a pool but it comes with a big maintenance cost. Without the support of Friends of St Mary's and the summer Pool Club we would have problems paying for all that is required. The cost of covering the pool is prohibitive. We have been approached by organisations wanting to do so but then we would lose control of the pool for our own use. Schools that do not have pools identify which years they are concentrating on for swimming lessons and then these children get the weekly swimming lessons – not the whole school. In the summer term we are lucky to have at least 2 swimming lessons a week for all children within the school.

- *After school activities like drama could accommodate more children.*

'Little Tanks' is a drama club that operates in the school hall once a week. It is very popular so has a waiting list.

Resources e.g. books, IT equipment etc.	Very well	well	Not very well	Unsure
	49	30	2	6

You will notice the new computer equipment also funded by capital grants. We are very grateful to FoSM who help fund so many resources. We are also supported by different local charities and the generosity of local families for topping up our books both for class libraries and for the reading scheme.

### Do we meet these Standards?

Staff are approachable and willing to talk to parents	Yes	Mostly	A little	Not at all
	72	14	3	

- *I think there is a disconnect between the school and parents and this causes friction. I think the relationship can be improved, it would be better for everyone.*

I would really like to know more about this if someone will come and talk to me. Please, if you have any issues come and have a chat at the beginning or the end of the day – or give me a call. I am always happy to hear from parents and hope that I will be able to build some bridges in this respect.

The head teacher is approachable and friendly	Yes	Mostly	A little	Not at all
	72	15	3	

- *A lot of parents don't like change and I feel that the head has a tough time trying to implement changes for the benefit of the children, whilst keeping everyone happy.*

Thank you!

Parents/carers needs are dealt with effectively	Yes	Mostly	A little	Not at all
	58	27	3	1

- *I would like to see the school reply to e-mails. I wasn't happy about something and I sent an e-mail and got no reply.*

Sorry about this – I reply to every e-mail or call back every parent who contacts me. If I am out of school of course there might be a delay. I will remind all staff to check their e-mails daily to check if there are any parent e-mails or requests to call.

- *I would like homework explained in more detail, sometimes I don't know how to sound out certain sounds, or maybe more parents into school mornings or afternoons for parents that might need more explaining.*
- *Informal meetings would be good - its difficult to get a chance to speak to the teachers. Not because they won't speak – timings are just not there.*
- *More homework please.*

A great point – your first call should be the class teacher for explanations but especially if you work this is not always easy. I love the idea of extra parents into school to explain sessions. If phonics is a need we can put this on – let me know about other areas that you might want some advice. We can keep it chatty and informal if this would help more parents to feel they would be happy to come. Let me know!

The school encourages parents/carers to take an active part in school life	Yes	Mostly	A little	Not at all
	64	17	5	1

- *Also, not sure if this has been done before but for the school fete let's try to get some more stalls... A lot of the children love the 'Be teacher/TA/Head teacher for the day. Maybe do it every 2 months and kids can contribute if they want to have a chance of doing it. This way the school gets the money and the kids love it.*

Discussions over the 2020 School Fete have already started with FoSM. The excitement about the teachers/TA/head teacher for the day really amazed me when I joined the school. We do lose a day's teaching as the successful 'post holders' in each class get to decide what the class will do for the day. Both head teachers for the day also needed a bespoke day when they could be in charge. I would not wish to lose the excitement of this once a year opportunity because it became too familiar. However, there might be other opportunities for children to take the lead and contribute to school funds. Any other ideas anyone?

- *There is sometimes a lack of relevant information in advance as a new parent e.g. details of bottle mufti date in Autumn term. Some dates and details are given with very little notice. Our daughter, who is very well-behaved always does as asked, felt she did not get much recognition for this at times – e.g. lack of merits, being star of the week initially. This has improved but there should be more focus on those who do well all the time rather than those who have improved would be good.*

Firstly – see the communications section above – I take this on the chin! I understand how you feel about Merits and Class Stars – this is also an issue – do you always chose the good children or do you pick a child who has improved and recognise their changes to keep them going? With 30 children in a class this is a weekly tough decision for teachers. The Merits have been very successful and recognise a wide range of achievements across the school – I shall remind everyone to look across the school for suitable recipients.

Please ask your child's class teacher if you wish to volunteer to listen to children read. We have a number of volunteers who come in through the Rotary Club and often finding space for everyone to sit and listen to children can be a challenge. If you are happy to listen in any class please come and see me and I will find you a class that might need extra adult readers.

Teachers treat parents/carers as partners	Yes	Mostly	A little	Not at all
	60	21	5	4

- *FoSM and teachers need to work more together!*

Yes please! I will do what I can to encourage support – you may have noticed me ‘getting down’ at the Junior Disco. KS1 Staff have been taking turns on being available for the Infant Disco. A new year – let’s all try to move forward with new ideas.

- *Information for new parents in Reception. When our child started we were overwhelmed with the amount of things to remember with all the events that led up to Christmas. It would be helpful to provide more information for new starts with the dates and requirements because we felt like we were supposed to just know and had to rely on the Facebook page and teachers to help. Information can be quite last minute at times because there is so much going on. Again, this is a good thing that you organise so much with FoSM but more notice and information would really help.*

This is a really good point – especially for new parents. I am still finding my way around the St Mary’s traditions after two years! I shall talk to the Early Years teachers and perhaps, with some parental assistance and consultation, we can come up with a starter pack for the new term.

- *Security of the school slightly concerning, being as gates do little to stop someone coming in. Far too easy for anyone to wander in especially in the summer with all the doors open.*
- *Concerns over safeguarding. School gates (iron) unlocked. Wooden gate although locked will not stop a child leaving/someone entering the school. Classroom doors open in hot weather...concerns someone can easily enter the school building. Would prefer a buzzer system and locked gates. No CCTV on wooden gate and perhaps an alternative gate to the wooden one.*
- *I’d like to see all gates locked during the school day especially lunchtime. Wooden gate replaced with something taller so access by outsiders cannot be gained*
- *Car park gates need to be tall to stop outside access.*
- *Currently fire doors of the hall can be open and anyone could walk in and go into the school.*
- *..it would be good if the gates allowing car access to be automated... I would be happy to contribute financially to a solution.*
- *I for one would be happy to fundraise to make the site more secure with coded high gates like other schools. I appreciate that budgets are tight but safety of staff and pupils is vital and something that worries us all.*

I must admit I responded to these responses straight away by locking the street gates during the day. Despite putting new signs up saying ‘please close the gates’ I found them regularly left open so I can understand parents’ concerns. But I accept that doors being open might cause concern. We can look into this but all doors have to be able to be opened quickly in case of fire. We keep the wooden gates locked during the day. The Vehicle gates are closed but not locked to allow for vehicle access – you would not believe how many delivery and other vehicles enter and leave the site during the day.

I have made enquiries about new school fencing and replacement gates with appropriate security. Estimates have come in upwards of £60,000 so the school would need another capital bid such as we have used to provide the fire safety work that has been undertaken this summer. However, whilst we can apply for funding this is by no means certain. Unfortunately normal school budgeting does not allow for large capital items like fencing. Perhaps we need a straw poll of parents who would be

happy to fundraise for site security and new fencing? This could be another new year opportunity – if you have any ideas let me know.

- *Parents not encouraged to be involved... lack of consultation with parents... not active parent council ...homework haphazard...safeguarding offsite not effective.. .general decline.. some attitudes of teachers could be viewed as intimidating and bullying.*

I am truly sorry that this parent is so unhappy with the school. The communication issue is dealt with above. I really value parental involvement in school and would happily consult on matters that would benefit from wider consultation. However, operational matters and the running of the school are part of my job and whilst some of these roles are delegated, others have been taken over by the Frassati Catholic Academy Trust. We will be producing a new Relationship and Sex Education Policy during the year and I will be consulting widely on this. What other areas do you feel parents should be consulted upon? I will be very happy to discuss these.

Yes please to the *Parent Council* – I have spoken to a few earlier members but I will happily discuss plans and ideas with a new parent . We can renew this in the new school year – do I have someone who would like to take on the role as initial contact?

*Safeguarding offsite – not effective.* I am not aware of any incident but I can look into this if details can be provided. I will not turn a blind eye to anything concerning safety with regard to the children.

*General decline* – I am sad that is a parents’ opinion especially in the light of so many other positive comments. What I have noticed is that the school needs to adapt to the needs of the children it has now – not the children who were here 5 or 10 years ago. Interestingly, there have been many changes to pedagogy and practice even since I joined the school in September 2017 and we have to embrace these. Being part of the Frassati Catholic Academy Trust has also highlighted some areas for improvement so change was inevitable – even if it is not always welcomed. I have tried to make changes without losing the heart of the school, the values that make St Mary’s the school it is.

- *There are some amazing teachers who are kind, sensible and dedicated. But I see so many other schools moving with the times and I worry the school won’t catch up.*

I am caught between two worlds on this matter. There are the long term St Mary’s families who do not want to see any change whatsoever to the school and then there are those that are newer to the school and have experiences from other primary schools with which to compare St Mary’s. I know we have to modernise – the new Ofsted framework makes it clear how our curriculum will need to reflect the needs of the children we have and we are moving towards this, together with the introduction of a new maths Scheme of Work – Power maths – that ensures we fully embrace maths mastery. My hope is that as we move towards education for 2020 and beyond, that we keep the identity of St Mary’s whilst ensuring that all children received the education they need to become positive citizens of the future and stewards of God’s world.

Are you happy with the homework provision?	Yes	Mostly	A little	Not at all
	62	18	6	5

- *Every week is different with homework and sometimes we struggle to fit it all in. I seem to remember a meeting at the beginning of term where we were told homework would be cut down but it seems to have crept up again.*
- *Homework can sometimes be too much especially during the holidays when it is a time we want to forget about school work! One of the 'My Maths' took us 90 minutes. I think it should be set on the child's ability. My child is very behind but gets the same maths homework as everyone and we really struggle.*
- *..the amount of homework my year 3 child gets. I think it is too much and stresses us all out trying to get it done. It encroaches on our precious family time and is a source of much stress and many arguments. I find it difficult to explain some of the maths in a way in which he understands as it has been a long time since I needed to use maths in that way!*
- *Think maths/comprehension homework should be more.*

We will never get the level of homework right for everyone. Some want more and some want no homework at all. Please talk to the class teacher if your child is struggling to complete tasks or talk to me and I'll investigate. The more interest you take in your child's learning, the more time you give them talking about their day and listening to them read then the better they will do. If you ever need any help or advice then please contact us and we are all happy to help.

Your child/children is/are happy at this school	Yes	Mostly	A little	Not at all
	76	14		

- *My children don't like assemblies as there are too many and last too long so they get bored.*

Interesting – we only have two assemblies a week. On Monday we have a Gospel Assembly which is based on the previous Sunday's Gospel. It is only 30 minutes – sometimes less. On Thursday we have the Merit Assembly with Class Stars, Merits, outside awards, sports achievement, Mind-set badges – all manner of good things. As a Catholic School we have an act of Worship every day; either a whole school assembly or Class Worship.

If your child is currently in the Reception Class were the arrangements for you and your child on starting school satisfactory?	Yes	Mostly	A little	Not at all
	32	6	1	

Thank you for such a positive response – great news!

#### **Is there anything the School does particularly well?**

- *Integrating community and church values into the daily lives of the pupils*
- *I think the discipline is very good – I am always impressed by the children's behaviour. I am also pleased that kindness and generosity is really instilled at the school.*
- *Involving parents – parents into school.*
- *I find the school extremely friendly between parents and staff.*
- *Approachable staff and head, always do their best to ensure any problems/concerns are dealt with fairly.*
- *My kids always feel included in everything, they never feel left out. Their teacher encourages them in every way and this has made a difference in my child's attitude towards school.*  
*Thank you!*

- *All of the office staff are lovely, the ladies are very helpful.*
- *Partnership working with the parents*
- *Supporting children in achieving desired outcomes*
- *I can see great progress in my kid's learning, so I guess your methods work very well.*
- *Fab teachers who are caring and supportive*
- *It's a very close community school*
- *The staff are brilliant and shows because my child enjoys going into school and is learning and taking things in based on the conversations we have.*
- *Approach to students' individual needs, every student is treated with respect and the teachers' approach to students individual progress*
- *Support to the children and teaching good values*
- *The kids are very disciplined and listen, I've noticed this during assembly. The teachers do a great job! They are amazing and so is Mrs Barry, always outside and willing to talk to anyone.*
- *The love care and attention shown is special. You cannot replace that!*
- *The school teaches beliefs and values very well and is inclusive of everyone.*
- *Overall very good. Thank you to all the teachers for their hard work and commitment.*
- *Helps new students to settle into school very fast.*
- *Most teachers care and work hard to do their best for students*
- *Welcoming families and children into school*
- *The way it incorporates traditional Catholic stewardship into its mainstream, curriculum teaching.*
- *Eco-sustainability agenda – very impressive*
- *Forest School very impressive*
- *FoSM – huge financial support – no longer common in many schools.*
- *Ensuring children are progressing and learning – amazed at the progress in learning during reception and development in reading/writing.*
- *Really makes you feel welcome and helps new children settle in.*
- *Pastoral care is excellent; Mrs Cox is very good at keeping us informed and we're happy with a child's development, both educationally and socially.*
- *Going above and beyond in involving parents in activities such as the treasure hunt.*
- *The school has high academic standards and it teaches that each person is unique and valuable. Teachers in this school are committed to students.*

**Thank you all – we can make St Mary's the place we all want it to be!**