

Notes from Return of the Ethai – the second Ethos Meeting.

7.30pm Wednesday 4th May 2011, Lewes New School

In attendance: Karen, Patti, Sarah H, Louisa, Stephanie, Leora, Gaye, Raphaella, Jason, Lizzie O, Dahlan

These notes have been compiled by Dahlan, and incorporate feedback and input from all those attending.

The assembled attendees at the meeting on Wednesday were asked what they would like to do with the meeting. Each person expressed a desire to work on the actual ethos statement that exists (see attached) so that it meets the need of the pressing issue of the recruitment of a head teacher.

Personal Responsibility

This led to an open debate about what was missing from the existing ethos statement. Overwhelmingly, it was felt that the sense of Personal Responsibility was missing. That we, everyone in the school community, had a responsibility to uphold the ethos.

Children's Input

It was argued that the children should be asked for their input into an ethos that they would want to subscribe to. There was rigorous and involved debate on the subject. It was suggested that a Student Council would be an excellent channel where the views of the children could be presented to the management and wider community. This would be a forum where their voice could be heard. He was broad agreement that their input into the ethos would be welcome and perhaps could take the form of a particular class or exercise. This needs to be followed up with a concrete idea of how to implement this.

Who is the "we"?

There was much discussion about who at the school, the ethos pertains to. Who is the 'we' in the ethos? Is the school ethos something that the teachers, children, staff, heads subscribe to as well as the families, governors and trustees? If so, then this needs to be made clear in the ethos statement and is now being addressed.

Trust

The subject of 'trust' was raised as something that was not mentioned in the existing ethos statement. It was felt by many that trust was an essential component in the successful development of both the learning process for children and also adults in all their different roles in the school and broader community. It was argued that trust is a consequence of trustworthy behaviours and good communication channels - that it is respectful to let someone get on with their job unhindered and that people will only be able to do this when they feel trust and confidence. Further attention to this argument will be applied to the point below. In the meantime, 'trust' is being put into the existing ethos statement.

Further Explanation of Ethos

It was recognised that the existing ethos statement needed further explanation particularly with regard to the principles of respectful communication (and trust) that lie at the core of the school's guiding belief. There was agreement that parent courses in Respectful Communication were extremely important in maintaining cohesion and creating a shared understanding. It was agreed that subsidised refresher/introduction courses by Stephanie for the parent body should be organised. It was also noted that new families joining the school would/could be in the dark regarding a deeper understanding of the school's ethos. The suggestion for an Annual Ethos Meeting in September was believed to be a very good idea. This would both introduce the understanding behind the ethos to new families and also give existing members of the community an opportunity to reflect on the past year and how perhaps our ethos needs tweaking or addressing. This would also be the forum to see how we all, as a community, are keeping to our ethos.

In addition, it was suggested (and agreed) that governors and trustees (ie those working in an official although voluntary role) should have training around the respectful communication model.

Clarification of Roles

A great deal of discussion focused on the need for clarification of roles in the school community. What are the roles of parents, teachers, heads, governors, trustees, etc. This is an issue that has been raised before. There are a number of members of the school community that are working on this, not least those parents working on the Parents Handbook. With a clarity of the roles of different members of the school community, many of the existing concerns expressed by parents in the previous ethos meeting could be addressed. Channels of communication, management structure, persons of responsibility – with a clear understanding, many issues can be dealt with appropriately and proportionally. Indeed, all those present believed that clarity on these issues was essential and, when in place, would alleviate the majority of the concerns previously expressed in the first ethos meeting.

Actions:

Louisa to add 'trust' to the existing ethos

Karen to head a group that would provide an explanation behind the existing ethos.

Jason to provide Dahlan with documents and flow charts that present management structures where he works.

Dahlan to co-ordinate the different persons/groups working on the management/roles/definitions/communication pathways.

Points to be taken forward:

Student Council

Consultation with Children concerning our school's Ethos

Annual Ethos Meeting in September

Respectful communication classes for all (parents, school staff, teachers, governors, trustees)

