

Polehampton CE Infant and Junior Schools

Feedback Friday: Responses



Summer 1 2024

Below are the comments and our responses for the first half term of summer term 2024. Please note that, where similar questions/comments have been raised, we have used one parent feedback comment/blended a few comments to illustrate the general view, rather than duplicating.

We (Mr Sherwood, Mrs Castell and Mrs Medcalf) have also chosen to respond either as 'all' or one specific person to each comment, depending on who is best to answer. This is made clear in our response to each comment.

Thank you all for engaging in the first Feedback Friday – we have found it very useful and appreciate your comments.

Mr Phil Sherwood
Executive Headteacher

Helen Medcalf
Head of School

Liz Castell
Head of School



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“There was a real buzz from the 1K Your Way recently. It is so exciting to see the PTA funds being invested in both schools.”

All: Thank you for your feedback on this – we were delighted with everyone’s engagement, and the funds raised were incredible! The PTA and us (as senior leaders) share a desire to improve the schools in as many ways as possible, and these funds will be vital to that. Thank you to everyone for donating and being part of the event.

“I often find that the time to get from the Junior school drop off to the infant school drop off and vice versa at the end of the day from infants to juniors can be a little tight. There doesn't seem much wiggle room. In the morning, if the junior gates are open slightly late or there is traffic on the roads (the Twyford crossroads can be very unpredictable!) it seems to be a rush. Is there something that can be done to help ease this time pressure?”

We are mindful that many parents have to drop children at both sites, we do understand that on occasions traffic can be tricky. If on those occasions, where there are several children late due to traffic (as used in this example), we will of course make exceptions for how this is coded for attendance.

“Great feedback from me - very happy with all the teachers and staff as well as facilities and activities! :)”

All: Thank you! It’s not often that we (as humans) take the time to shout about the positives, so we appreciate this comment.

“The infant school doesn’t get mentioned as much as the junior school in the weekly bulletins. Could this be looked at?”

Mrs Castell: We have looked back over the bulletins and can see that there is almost equal commentary about both schools. There may well appear as though there is more from Key Stage 2 as the children are older and do take part in different outside-of-school events - and it can then end up with more ‘notable’ activities involving older children. However, we are looking to introduce half termly newsletters from each year group from September so that parents have more information about what their children are doing throughout the half term. We hope this will help parents to feel that there is a fairer amount of information from both schools.

“Lack of implementation on uniform is a shame, especially boys’ footwear. It’s unfair to those children following the rules and also unfair for parents who have paid lots of money for school shoes.”

Mrs Medcalf: We are delighted that this has been raised, as it is something we have been discussing too and fully agree with! We are going to have a reset on uniform expectations (as well as other expectations) ahead of September 2024 and communicate this to parents, pupils and staff, so we will make sure that this is addressed.

“Might the Heads of School be better served with one Junior and one Infant Head, rather than 2 Junior heads to ensure some balance?”

Mr Sherwood: Thanks for this feedback. This is a really useful opportunity to explain the structure of our school again, following the restructure in July 2023. Mrs Castell and Mrs Medcalf were the Junior Heads of School before our restructure, but are now Heads of School across both the schools and share the role as Co-Heads of School. Mrs Castell

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and Mrs Medcalf both work three days per week, so they split their time across the infant and junior sites. This can be challenging as the Co-Heads of School are effectively one person, so there is lots of travelling between the sites! This is also why we have employed Miss Ackerman as our out-of-class Assistant Headteacher across both the schools, so that we have the same leadership. Miss Ackerman spends a lot of time in the infant school as well. I hope this explains in a little more detail.

“We do not see the new executive headteacher much. Is there a chance for him to speak with parents about the plans and vision for the schools?”

Mr Sherwood: My role has been challenging this year, as I am only employed within the schools for 1 day per week (in total across the two schools), to support the Heads of School with the top-level strategic operation of the school. Mrs Castell and Mrs Medcalf are the day-to-day leaders of the school. This means I split my time between the infant and junior sites each week for the one day I am working at Polehampton. It also means I am not able to do gate duty or be around as much ‘on the ground’ as I would like. Being only 1 day per week also means my role is not quite the same as Miss Ball’s (who was 5 days a week until September 2022). Previously, Polehampton had 1 Executive Headteacher (5 days per week, going down to 3 days per week in September 2022), and two Heads of School (Mrs Castell/Mrs Medcalf in the Juniors and Mrs Scott in the Infants). Now, from September 2023, we have an Executive Headteacher (1 day per week), one Head of School (Mrs Castell/Mrs Medcalf sharing the role), one Assistant Headteacher (Miss Ackerman), four Phase Leads. This creates a larger leadership team so that there are more leaders around on a day-to-day basis, but therefore means less of me. We are, however, looking at further options for September 2024 and I fully take this on board to consider how I can be more present. Part of this feedback system is to feel more connected with parent issues.

In addition, a lot of the time parents won’t meet with me as your issues will be dealt with by class teachers, phase leads, assistant head or heads of school in the first instances, but that does not mean that I am not aware of issues as we use an online system to track and monitor issues within the school (including safeguarding and bullying, for example).

Finally, we are in the process of organising a meeting for all parents towards the end of the year to discuss the vision and plan for September 2024 onwards. This will be with me and other senior leaders. Please look out for the date when it is released.

“We are so grateful for the swimming pool. This is an amazing resource.”

All: Thank you – we agree too. We are grateful to the Polehampton Swimming Association for their continued support and the work they do.

“Children are really encouraged to read and praised when they do so.”

Mrs Castell/Mrs Medcalf: Thank you! We recently had a Peer Review (where headteachers and leaders from other schools come to look at our schools and give constructive feedback on improvement) and focused on reading. They agreed and said that there was a clearly embedded love of reading within the school. We appreciate the positive feedback and validation on this.

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“Any additional activities such as languages? (E.g. Spanish or non-European languages). I know there is one French after-school club.”

All: Currently, we do not have the expertise to put on additional clubs. However, we will consider this and see if there is an appetite amongst parents and pupils for additional language clubs. Thank you for raising this with us.

“I have to say that I feel the communication has improved somewhat compared to last year. It’s still not perfect though. I can see that an effort is being made and a number of the school activities have been enjoyed this year, so thank you.”

Mrs Castell/Mrs Medcalf: We appreciate the comment about improved communication. We agree that this is not perfect yet either and we will continue to work on our communication systems. There were also a few comments about the communication needing to be clearer and that some communication ends up in parent WhatsApp groups, which is not ideal either. In our efforts to keep communications succinct, there have been some inconsistencies in messaging and created extra work all round. We will take this on board and aim to address this in future communications.

“Sometimes e-mails are not responded to. I think it may be because everything goes to one admin box so things may get missed. Maybe each year group could have an e-mail box? I understand why teachers can’t have individual e-mails, but a class team e mail box could ensure queries don’t get missed.”

Mr Sherwood: Thanks for your idea on this – we appreciate the ‘come with a solution, not a problem’ mindset! In my experience, class email addresses can lead to even more missed emails as there is no one central person chasing or monitoring the inbox. Whilst I agree with the point you have raised on missed emails (which should not happen), I believe it will be easier to improve our monitoring of the two admin emails (infants and juniors), so please do continue to email through to there and we will work with the teams on both sites to make sure emails get to the right people and responded to.

“Can we have photos on the website so that people know who the key staff are in the school?”

All: This is useful feedback, and we are aware that this has been requested in the past. We will get on this soon, for members of the senior leadership team.

“Can children be grouped in mix learning groups? To develop healthy competitiveness for those behind and desire to improve and allow kids that are ahead to develop empathy and peer support.”

All: We can confirm that pupils are, in general, in mixed learning groups within their classes. There are times (such as during Phonics) when we need pupils in attainment groups to provide the most focused and effective short burst teaching.

“There have been inconsistencies in my child’s class with regard to teachers. I appreciate that some things can’t be predicted and you have to do the best you can, but children need consistency.”

All: This type of comment came up a few times in the feedback, and we fully agree. Changes in staffing is never easy at any time, let alone mid-year; we fully appreciate the disruption this can cause and have worked incredibly hard to

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recruit new staff. There may well be further changes in staffing as we move forward (we can't promise there won't be), but what we can do is assure parents that we will only recruit the very best teachers to support your children (across both schools). We have the very highest expectations and standards, and want to recruit teachers who share this vision for education. It's hard to ask for and needs to be earned, but we would ask for you all to trust us as we move forward. We always have your child/ren's best interests at the heart of all the decisions we make.

"Teachers who have joined Green class have been in for nearly a whole half term, but it feels like we have had no communication from them. Just a simple introductory email would have been nice. But a meet and greet would have been better after a couple of weeks of bedding in. Especially as we had no proper parents eve with the teacher last term. Also, reports won't be done by teachers who knew them all year."

All: Thank you for the feedback on Green class. Mrs Rea and Mrs Bond are both exceptional teachers, and it is not through lack of effort that they haven't specifically been in touch. We will be arranging more formal meetings towards the end of the year to discuss your child's progress. With regard to reports, we (as an SLT) have been monitoring the pupils' progress and will ensure that the reports take into account a range of staff views and teacher assessments to ensure they are accurate and a fair reflection on the pupils. We also know that the class have had a disrupted year and will continue to do all we can do ensure next year is smoother.

"The class daily run is a great idea but I'm not sure how often this happens now. Could this be more regular now the weather is better?"

Mrs Medcalf: Running is embedded into the PE curriculum. All children are very welcome to join cross country sessions run at lunchtime (at the Juniors). We have moved away from the daily run due to the impact this has on learning time; we still pride ourselves on being a very active school where running is held in high esteem.

"It would be good to know what for concerns about my child that fall outside of the anti-bullying policy."

Mrs Castell: We would always encourage parents to speak to class teacher in the first instance. If this doesn't result in an improvement, the next port of call would be the phase lead for your child's phase (e.g. Early Years, KS1, LKS2, UPKS2) who will then decide whether this needs to go to a member of the senior leadership team.

"It would be good to be told what topics the children are studying at any one time, which would help with learning at home too."

All: Thank you for the feedback on the curriculum. We are currently reviewing our curriculum plans and what is shared on the website, so we will certainly factor this into our considerations and think about how we can best share our new curriculum plans with you. We are in the process of updating and improving our knowledge organisers, which are a valuable source of information about your child's learning.

"I really enjoyed and appreciated the sessions run by Mrs Castell on anxiety and positive behaviours. Thank you for these. I would love to see more."

Mrs Castell: We would love to run more too! We will add these ideas to our School Improvement Plan for 2024-2025 ideas so that we can deliver more parent sessions on key aspects/issues.

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“It would be really great if the bullying policy could be reviewed. There have been a number of incidents in Reception.”

All: We are sorry to hear about these issues. We are aware of these issues and are working with the class teachers to address this. We have an online reporting system that all staff use, which gets shared with all designated safeguarding and behaviour leads, so we all see the incidents raised and the actions being taken to address issues so that we can monitor provision and effectiveness. We would encourage families to continue to raise if their child reports issues of bullying that they have not shared with the school so that we can continue to tackle it. We will also look carefully at our Anti-Bullying Policy to check it is suitable and will bring it to our governing body for the first meeting in September 2024 for review.

“When asked to help do support work at home e.g. reading diaries as a way to communicate between home and school, it would be good if the school/teacher could also add their comments as promised. We have currently had one since March and there hasn't been one comment added from school. It's quite demoralising for the child and also the parents. If they could get some positive feedback, perhaps some house points for doing it, it would make it a little more enjoyable.”

All: We agree that this is not what should be happening. We are currently building mechanisms to ensure clear consistency to expectations on aspects such as this, which will be put in place from September. Please raise this with the class teacher or phase leaders, if it continues to be a problem, so that we can identify the class and address any concerns. We are in the process of reviewing our home learning and new guidelines for this will be sent out in September.

“Wish lists and school documents need to be updated on website. There are things on there that aren't relevant anymore and need refreshed.”

Mr Sherwood: Thank you for the feedback on this. We add this to our list of website improvements and will get on it as soon as possible.

“I feel disappointed that there was not clear acknowledgement of the hard work of the Polehampton ASC currently puts in, ahead of the change in provider.”

All: We would like to take this opportunity (and in a separate letter which went out at the same time as this feedback document) to say a huge thank you to Stephanie and her team for all their hard work over the past 14 years. Many of the staff may stay on to work at the new Polecats OSC which should provide continuity of provision and friendly faces, but we want to make it clear how thankful we are for the provision that Stephanie and the team have offered. As one parent said, many places do not have wrap around care, so we have been fortunate to have such a long-standing provision in place.

“Thank you for introducing this form and a mechanism for parents to feed into the school. I hope this channel allows people to share their views and ideas in a positive way and for the school to respond appropriately.”

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All: Thank you all for engaging – we are excited by this process and hope it will prove valuable and successful long term.

“Has the heating been turned off yet?”

All: Yes, we can confirm that it has!

[There were a few separate comments, praising key members of staff]

All: We have chosen to keep these names private from this document to avoid other staff feeling left out. However, we have passed on your kind words about key staff to them in person.

“Thank you very much for pulling together this feedback mechanism. It is a really good idea and makes it feel like the school is more open to ideas and constructive criticism than maybe it was in the past. Polehampton is a very special place and I feel very positive that an openness to feedback is a really constructive way forward. Thank you.”

All: Thank you – we agree with how special Polehampton is and will continue to work tirelessly to improve and grow our schools.

“The school minibus was a great asset, and if there is a way that can be reinstated, that would be a massive bonus. Perhaps consider asking for volunteers. I’m aware of members of extended families who already drive buses as volunteers.”

All: Asking for volunteers is a great idea! Since Mr Wickens (our site controller) left us, we have not had anyone minibus trained so this would be a brilliant way to use it more. Thanks for the suggestion.

“At times there has been a really good explanation about why census day is impotent. But not every time. So parents don’t understand the impact and importance. (If indeed it is still the case). I would like to see this clearly communicated each time please.”

All: Sorry we have missed the boat on this term’s census – it’s really helpful to know if some families aren’t sure of the benefit. We will aim to make this clear in the build-up to future censuses.

“We would like to know more specifics about where money from PTA goes.”

Mrs Medcalf: Thank you for sharing this. We agree. Moving into next year, we will work with the PTA to explain this in more detail so families can see where the money is going. Rest assured that it is going to useful places! Initially, we have a big spend on air con for the junior site hall, and a similar spend on the Blue class outdoor area for the infant site as part of our Early Years work.

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“Good range of planned events by the school and the PTA.”

“Well-resourced in school (e.g. books/computers/swimming pool).”

“Feel the wider curriculum and trips have improved greatly and it is giving our children some lovely opportunities.”

All: These comments are indicative of a range of positive about what we offer – thank you. We will continue to work hard to ensure that we provide an excellent range of experiences for your children.

“Would be positive for all if there was more staff on the playground to greet children and parents mornings especially. Appreciate staff are busy but staff should represent the school from gate opening. Would help eliminate anxious and worried children if staff members were there. Would also aid safety for safeguarding children.”

Mrs Castell/Mrs Medcalf: Heads of Schools try to be out at the beginnings and ends of days but, as we have mentioned, this has been a challenge with the two sites. Please do speak to your class teacher if you have any specific concerns about your child’s anxiety.

Reflecting on this a little more, it is difficult to find a ‘catch all’ position for us to stand due to having two gates at each side. We are out there when we can be – please do look out for us!

“The newsletter has become sparse in recent years.”

Mrs Castell: We have tried to condense the bulletin to make it easier for parents to find key messages.

“The newsletter is really easy to digest – thank you. We like the short messages.”

Mrs Castell: Thank you. We do appreciate that there is a fine balance with the amount of communication sent out to parents. From September there will be year group newsletters detailing further information about what the children have been learning.

“I believe that the way reports are measured has changed recently. So they are measured slightly differently to how they have been in the past. So it is not possible to really compare our children’s progress over time. Eg greater depth has changed. This has not been communicated as far as I know to parents. This has a negative effect on how the reports are received at home. These changes need to be communicated.”

Mrs Castell: We will provide further information about this when the reports come out in the summer term. We hope that with our new shared leadership team, there will be improved moderation between years groups, and key stages.

“Selection for sports teams does not appear to be consistent or transparent. I’m aware of parents who are disappointed that their children have not been selected for football teams, for example, when other children have been selected a few times.”

Mrs Medcalf: We have a main team we have organised more friendlies and tournaments than we have had in previous years to get other players a game. When football teams are selected, we invite all interested players, both boys and girls to register their interest. We then watch them to get an idea of their ability. We then promise I will do my best to ensure that they get at least one opportunity to represent the school. Priority tends to go to Year 6's first, as that

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is the last year they can play for the school. Players have explained that there is a core squad, to allow us to have continuity and be competitive for league fixtures. We then rotate in other players to have a chance. There are B team competitions which gives opportunities to those who may not play in the first team.

From September we will have a new Director of Sport who will be reviewing all these processes.

“After school clubs at Polehampton are expensive.”

All: We are constantly reviewing our extra-curricular club offer and do take prices into consideration.

“Lunch portions are too small children go hungry in the afternoon.”

All: Thank you. If you could let us know whether this relates to Infant or Junior lunches, we can investigate this with Caterlink (our lunch provider).

“Can washable markers be used in school?”

Mrs Castell: Believe it or not, we do use washable ones but I know, first hand, how hard these are to wash out. We will speak to other schools to see if someone else has found the magic answer!

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