

GILLESPIE PRIMARY SCHOOL

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Headteacher: Mark Owen B.Ed. Hon NPQH



Friday 22nd November 2024

Dear parents/carers,

I am writing to you to update you on important plans for the school which we are seeking to implement in the coming period to continue to enrich and deliver an outstanding education for all our pupils and do so whilst also managing with ever tighter financial circumstances. This letter provides some context and summarises our plans so that you can learn more and hopefully engage and contribute.

In almost every respect this has been another fantastic year for Gillespie School. This time last year in November 2023 the school retained its outstanding status after a rigorous inspection by Ofsted. In the end of KS2 National Assessments in the summer of 2024 our Y6 pupils achieved outcomes that put the school in the top 2% of the whole country for our combined reading, writing and maths scores at expected national standards. In the greater depth high scores the school was in the top 6% nationally for reading, in the top 5% for Grammar, punctuation and spelling and in the top 1% nationally for mathematics. We have achieved this by providing a rich, broad and vibrant education where pupils experience additional opportunities in areas including Science, Music and Forest School. For me personally this has been a poignant time to reflect on the incredible journey my staff, pupils, governors and parent and carer community have been on since the disruption of the pandemic in 2020/21. I'm delighted that we could make such progress in three years! We could not have done this without the dedication and commitment of staff and governors and the support of our parent and carer community through the great work of our PTA Friends of Gillespie.

It is an irony that during this same period I have had to work hard with my staff and governors to make year on year savings and cuts in spending from our main allocated Department for Education (DfE) budget to maintain a balanced budget. As you will be aware, there have been cuts upon cuts to education budgets over recent years. Today our staff numbers are reduced by about a third compared to when I was first appointed as Headteacher at Gillespie. A reduced budget, along with some underfunded government policies last year which we had to fund, including rightful pay increases for staff and teachers and huge increases in electricity and heating bills, also not covered, have put our school - and many others in the Borough and across the country- into deficit. This is looking like £100,000 by the end of this financial year in April 2025. For the first time in my 19 years as Headteacher at Gillespie School, the school and governors have had to apply to the Local Education Authority (LEA) for a licensed deficit budget. We have made this difficult decision because we believe that at some point if we simply keep following the path of cutting services to make savings our wonderful provision and standards will be affected.

We are determined to keep our school flourishing and improving. Rather than making cuts to our existing provision, I want to be investing in additional services. I have consulted carefully with our governors and discussed in detail with our FOG Committee and taken advice more broadly so that we can put a plan in place.

Setting up a Gillespie School Foundation

We plan to use the budgetary challenges we face as an opportunity to put in place some new structures to ensure high standards are maintained on a sustainable financial footing. Whilst we will go through certain deficit reduction procedures, we have also decided to use this moment to spell out our vision for the school and launch a school foundation and fund alongside the enrichment efforts already being delivered by Friends of Gillespie to enable us to work together more effectively to seek more regular funding streams through individual donations and grants. This is a typical model run by many schools and we think now is the right time to initiate our own.



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So many of you already support the school in many ways. Our wonderful school Library and used uniform stall are organised and run by a team of dedicated parents. Events such as our Summer and Winter Fairs, Halloween Disco, International evening and many more help promote community cohesion bringing our wonderful and diverse community together and raise much needed funds through the PTA for the school.

How Your Donations currently help

Current donations made via the PTA FoG, have made it possible for us to offer a range of valuable programs that enrich our pupils' learning experiences. These include:

- *Forest School:* Providing our pupils with outdoor learning experiences that build resilience, creativity, and teamwork.
- *Class Trips:* Enabling pupils to go on enriching trips that bring classroom learning to life and broaden their horizons.
- *History off the Page Days:* Giving children the chance to immerse themselves in historical periods through interactive and hands-on activities.
- *Music Enrichment:* Supporting music lessons and extracurricular activities that inspire creativity and self-expression with direct funding for Clare our strings teacher.



In addition to these, your continued support will help us help realise our vision to fund in future:

- Improvements of our school facilities and provision to better meet diverse and SEND need of pupils
- Technology upgrades and digital learning tools
- Expanding opportunities to develop modern foreign languages
- Arts partnerships such as Sadler's Wells Dance Theatre
- Further PE, Sport and Swimming enrichment



We are confident that our vision for the future will inspire parents, grandparents & carers, local businesses, alumni, and other community members who can continue to invest in it. I will be in touch via class reps to invite parent year groups to a meeting where I would love to tell you more about our vision, obtain your valuable input and to launch our new School Foundation together... Also do talk to me or email me!

Yours sincerely,
Mark Owen
Headteacher



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