**Governors Report to Parents**

July 2023

Dear Parents and Carers,

As this academic year draws to an end, I’m delighted to report on a hugely successful year at Russell. The whole school community have all played their own important roles to make Russell the special place it is, so firstly, a huge thank you to you all.

This has been my first year as chair, but having been on the board since 2019, I naturally reflect on the huge challenges that navigating through the pandemic brought over recent years and compare to where we are now. And while we have enjoyed a much more settled year with regard to Covid, it continued to have a significant impact, particularly in the Autumn Term with spates of absences for both children and staff, often due to lowered immunity. Getting everyone in school has remained a major priority. However, we have seen a growing trend in term time holidays too. While we share the frustration of the vastly differing costs of travel during term time compared to the holidays, especially in this economic climate, it does impact the children’s progress – just like it would if the children’s teachers took term time holidays, which of course they simply cannot do. The school has worked tirelessly on the recovery curriculum to give the children the best opportunity for academic progress and all-round well-being. But for the children to be able to get the most out of this, it is imperative their attendance is as full as possible. Russell has historically had an excellent attendance record, and with your support, we look forward to restoring this next year.

Despite the impact from the pandemic and the absence rates, the school has continued to achieve excellent results across the school. Reports to governors throughout the year on the children’s attainment and progress have been extremely positive, and as you will have seen in the covering letter that accompanied the children’s end of year school reports, Russell children are achieving significantly above the national comparatives. This is a testament to the efforts of everyone within the school community – the teachers, the senior leadership team, the parents/carers and the children as well of course. We should be exceptionally proud of all of them.

Beyond the academic achievements of the school, it is the enjoyment of other enriching opportunities that enhance the children’s all-round school experience that stand out too. This year the school marked regular events like Harvest, Children in Need, Red Nose Day, World Book Day, CHUMS Shine bright non-uniform day, Christmas and Easter activity mornings, Sports Day and also celebrated King Charles’ Coronation. The children enjoyed a full programme of trips and visits, including to Woburn, Marston, the Verulamium, Celtic Harmony, Herrings Green Farm, Faith Tours, a WWI Impact Trail, a Picnic and Walk to Ampthill Park, a whole school visit to Full House Theatre and the hugely popular residential to Condover. There have also been countless workshops across the year too: Samba Drumming, an Africa Talk, World Cup football dance workshops, a Stone Age Workshop, author visits, Bhangra Dancing, Irish Dancing, Full House Theatre workshops, VW Inspire Day, Bikeability and the fantastic wheelchair basketball workshops too. The children also had opportunities to take part in the numerous sports festivals throughout the year, including basketball, athletics, swimming, tag rugby, badminton, cricket, tennis, curling and Paralympics. There were also memorable chances to perform in front of the school and parents too, such as the Foundation Stage nativities, Year 2 Christmas performances, music assemblies and the Year 4 end of year performances. The children also represented the school excellently in the local community at events like the Remembrance Day service. The choir performed at St Andrew’s Music Festival and at Richmond Manor. The school entered, and won(!) the Christmas Tree Festival and just this weekend was awarded second place at the Ampthill Gala Parade. With Mrs Tuck’s Brownies group gaining first place, it was an honorary one-two for Russell.

I’d like to take this opportunity to thank every single member of staff at Russell for everything they have done to provide a safe and nurturing environment for the children to enjoy all the wonderful aspects of life at Russell. The children are extremely lucky to have such an amazingly talented and dedicated team to care, support and challenge them.

I know all I have outlined above to be true from first-hand experience, but it was fantastic to have this confirmed with external validation this year too. In November, the school’s Ofsted inspection was a great success. Inspectors were so impressed by the warm, friendly welcome they were given around the whole school and the incredible behaviour and attitude of the children throughout. They were also staggered by the incredible feedback from parents, children and staff. The ‘Parent View’ responses, in particular, were fantastic. Governors would like to thank everyone that responded. It demonstrated unequivocally the support that parents and carers give to the school. The praise the school received from the inspection team was incredible. I’ve never felt prouder to be a member of the Russell community. Russell also had a Local Authority visit that went even further with its praise, stating that, “School is highly effective at creating opportunities for the infectious learning of difficult things. Children are curious, motivated and have the skills needed to access continually higher learning. Highly skilled and knowledgeable staff use their great subject knowledge, higher order questioning, as well as carefully designed learning tasks and the belief that there are many ‘right’ answers and possibilities, to enable a very good level of greater depth learning across all subjects.”

Another aspect of Russell Lower School life that must be appreciated is the PTA. The amount of work the PTA puts in is incredible. To organise an event like the Russell Ball, as well as all of the countless other events throughout the year that the children get such a huge amount from, is staggering. The work they put in, the events they run, the money they raise for the school and the enjoyment the children and the whole school community get from them is amazing. So, a huge, huge thank you to Jo, Lindsay and the whole team for all that they do.

I must of course also thanks Mrs Walker. Her leadership of the school, alongside Mrs Bunney and Mrs Knight is second to none. Seeing her dedication to giving the children the best opportunities possible and her drive to even further improve a school that is already achieving so much is something to behold. She is an incredible figurehead, not just within the school, but within the whole community, and an impeccable role model for the children. The governors cannot thank her enough.

I would also like to acknowledge the work that the governing board have put in over this year. This time last year saw much change on the board, which has resulted in newer members having to learn their roles quickly and alongside more experienced members, step into new responsibilities. In particular, I must thank my vice-chair Mariella Cook, who has attended countless meetings and attended school frequently throughout the year. The hours she has put in have been vast and the whole board is extremely grateful for her time, dedication and expertise. It is hugely appreciated. At this term’s Full Governors’ Board meeting last week, we said goodbye to Christopher Day, who has stood down from his post. Chris joined the board as a parent governor in November 2019, and has been a valued member of the board throughout his term, including chairing the Finance and Resources sub-committee this year. We’d like to thank Chris for his service and contributions to the board during this time. Chris and I joined the board together as parent governors, so with my four-year term approaching its end and Chris standing down, it was time for a parent governor election. We were delighted to have a number of parent applicants, which further demonstrates the strong links between all of Russell’s stakeholders. Thank you to all of the applicants and all the parents/carers that submitted votes. I’m very pleased to have been re-elected to remain on the board as a parent governor and I’m pleased to welcome Amy Beeken to the board, as she was also elected as parent governor. Our board is now full and I look forward to introducing you to all its members early in the new academic year.

The board would also like to wish those children leaving Russell all the best for the future as they move on to new schools in September. We’re sure they will continue to make us all very proud of their achievements. We also look forward to welcoming our new starters in September 2023. The school is full and ready to provide the children with wonderful, exciting new adventures next year.

Thank you again for your continued support.

We’d like to wish you and your families a happy and healthy summer.

Best wishes

**Richard Gallagher
Chair of Governors**

 **Curriculum, Learning and Standards Sub-Committee**

2022/2023 certainly seems to have followed some more recognised structures than the last few years, but ‘normal’ wouldn’t be the right word to describe this, (or any other), academic year. However, once again the outcomes of the school and love of learning demonstrated by the children has been highly impressive. Yet again, the results achieved in 2023 look to have far exceeded national and local outcomes, and the school is proud to be achieving beyond pre-pandemic levels again now. The school's constant drive for continual improvement and sheer hard work by the children and staff has enabled this to happen.

The school’s recovery curriculum has been well implemented and continues to be refined to further improve outcomes. For children to be able to get the most out of this, it is imperative their attendance is as full as possible. High levels of parental support and engagement and a focus on good relationships are a key 'USP' of the Russell Community and we would again like to thank parents for their continued support of children's learning and school policies this year.

Although the performance data of a school is important, Russell is about so much more than this. Governors have followed with interest the outcomes of the pupils but it’s also important to recognise the nurturing environment where pupils thrive academically and emotionally, supported by the school’s passionate, and highly skilled staff.

2022/23 has also seen a number of external visitors, such as our highly successful OFSTED and Local Authority visits, validate what we already know about the many strengths of the school.

For those children moving onto Middle school, they leave well prepared for the next stage of their education, and those that remain, we look forward to another successful year with you.

**Graeme Armstrong
Chair of Curriculum, Learning and Standards Sub-Committee**

**Finance and Resources Sub-Committee**

I am pleased to inform you that the school has recently undertaken some important improvements to ensure the safety and well-being of our students. As part of our commitment to Health & Safety compliance, the scooter and bike shelters in the foundation stage playground have been replaced, and several sinks have been refurbished. These upgrades were necessary to address the recommendations made during our external Health & Safety review in 2021. I am delighted to announce that the school is now fully compliant with all necessary regulations. While internal evaluations will continue throughout the year, we can expect an external evaluation in the '24/25 school year.

I would also like to share some positive news regarding the school budget. The Finance & Resources and Full Governing Board committees have thoroughly examined and approved the budget, indicating that the school is in an excellent financial position going forward. This is particularly remarkable considering the financially unstable conditions we currently face. As a result, we have been able to maintain the same costs for the Catering and Aviary clubs as last year. We understand the financial pressures faced by families, and we hope that this decision will help alleviate some of those burdens.

Furthermore, the Finance & Resources committee has conducted a comprehensive assessment of the school's standing compared to national competitors. I am pleased to report that we are either average or better in all comparisons. Our higher-than-average ICT expenditure can be attributed to the recent acquisition of new iPads for the children. Additionally, we have plans to upgrade the computer suite and school servers in the near future. These investments will ensure that we provide the best possible technological resources to support effective learning.

Thank you for your continued support and partnership in creating a safe and nurturing environment for our students.

Kind regards,

**Christopher Day
Chair of Finance and Resources Sub-Committee**