

Great Missenden C of E Combined School
Open Forum – Tutoring
11th October 2010

Staff: Mala Close (MC), Rozalyn Thomson (RT), Claire Beever (CB), Rowena Durrant (RD)

Parents: Nicola Smith(NS), Gillian Garvie(GG), Caroline Arnold(CA), Greg Nicholls(GN), Phil Jarvis(PJ), Julie Gannon (JG), Debs Woolley(DW), Claire Western (CW), Lara Finch(LF), Vicky Dalton(VD), Sara Rose(SR), Emma Burgham(EB), Siggi Halling (SH), Lawson (EL)

RT explained that following a Governors meeting, it had been decided to broaden the debate on 11+ tutoring and gave a brief overview of the schools approach to tutoring.

In the past, 11+ tutoring had been 'banned' by previous head teachers.

LEA guidance was that the school should not supply or condone tutoring, though this had relaxed somewhat over the years. The school has neither the energy nor time to monitor this.

The school's current stance is that tutoring is a parental choice and whether parents decide to engage in this depends on the child's and parents circumstances.

RT acknowledged that tutoring is a fraught topic and that in many ways it is not a level playing field.

As a school we should provide everything that a child needs to progress via curriculum, provision, support and looking at any gaps in a child's learning The school provides CATs tests in years 4, 5 and 6 with extensive preparation for this type of test, and at the end of Year 5, beginning of Year "saturation" familiarisation and practice for the 11+.

RT opened up the debate to parents:

What should the school's role be, to provide or ban tutoring and how can we, as a school do this?

GN: Tutoring is happening and as a school, we should support those who aren't having tutoring. Although this is addressed to a degree in school, he felt that this doesn't compete enough with those who are being tutored. Could an after school club be provided for familiarisation?

RT explained that she would lose her job if she did this! Bucks Head Teachers are not allowed to provide extra-curricular 11+ tutoring.

The children take part in the CATs tests from Year 4 and begin learning exam techniques and strategies from this time.

RT strongly feels that with enough practice at this level and avid reading (which is the biggest indicator of 11+ successes), children will be more than adequately prepared.

NS: If we don't offer tutoring and private schools do then this puts our children at a disadvantage. What about help with what to expect?

RT: This is provided through the CATs scores and information, sent out to parents in November/December each year.

SG: Are any figures available of scores from the time tutoring was not allowed to determine if this has raised scores

RT: There is no specific data available on this. Intensive tutoring might increase children's confidence, but our monitoring of CATs scores from Year 4 shows that tutoring has minimal impact on 11+ verbal reasoning scores.

CA: Agreed that CATs scores from year 4 had been an accurate indication of 11+ scores in her experience. She asked if it would be possible to organise a familiarisation evening for Parents which could look at ways of encouraging our children?

SR: Has taken 3 children through the 11+ system all tutored and doesn't believe reading alone gets the children through, but that technique needs learning. Doesn't like the system, but it seems that children are being tutored in Maths and English from a younger age. SR queried why this is happening and why times tables and spellings were not such a large part of the curriculum as they were previously. She asked about mental maths strategies. Several parents agreed that a more old fashioned type structure of home learning was easier for Parents as was finite and more structured

RD: The Key Stage teams have acknowledged the importance of getting back to basics. KS2 now has a literacy lesson every week, which focuses on grammar and spelling learning in a more traditional style. More spellings can take away a whole lesson and can get forgotten when not taught how to be used in context. CB agreed that spelling tests are not memory tests and that technique is important.

EL: felt that the children should use their times tables more. A discussion took place about differing levels of maths home learning. RT agreed that consistency throughout each year group was needed, though this would differ depending on a child's level. There is to be more focus on time table basics after half term and RT apologised for not communicating this to parents. LF pointed out that this sometimes could arise from the child's level of communication at home. The general consensus was that further information and possibly workshops for parents providing strategies and guidelines to help would be useful. This has been achieved in the past via adult learning sessions in the school. MC expressed that it was good to receive this feedback and information sessions could be organised which would clarify expectations. PJ agreed that if parents were more familiar with techniques then they would be able to help their children with home learning, without missing opportunities. A discussion took place about home work marking. RT explained that peer and on the spot marking is useful so parents won't always get to see every piece of marked home learning. JG asked about 11+ familiarisation papers RT: 5 papers of 50 minutes, 4 of which are completed towards the end of Year 5. These are talked through in class, ensuring every child has time to assimilate the strategies needed. The final familiarisation paper takes place in Year 6 followed by the practise papers.

PJ: Is there a general philosophy regarding 11+ available for parents?
RT: Assessment policy on school website or available from school office.
LF: Is there a policy about talking to parents about 11+. Are parents given guidance about whether their children are likely to pass or not?
RT: The children are given a really strong message that they are valuable, whichever school they go on to. The individual child will do better if they are keen to learn and have a positive attitude to learning. Year 4 CATs scores give a first indication of verbal reasoning ability and although many children's scores start quite low, they improve into Year 5. Intensive tutoring has not made a significant difference to these verbal reasoning scores.

DW: there appears to have been a cultural shift in attitude to tutoring; now the majority of children seem to be tutored rather than vice versa.

GN: Agreed and emphasised the point that the ability to tutor a child means there is never a level playing field.

CA: Some children have peer pressure and have the feeling that they will 'never pass without a tutor'

RT: The children can do it without tutoring. Parents should encourage them to read and to study, and be proud.

The teachers and head teacher's recommendation carries a lot of weight if a child goes to 11+ appeal. Commitment to work and a track record of strong achievement in the classroom can contribute to a successful appeal.

DW: Parents have to have confidence in their own convictions and if they feel they are doing what's right for their child, then they should follow this path and not be distracted by other opinions.

NS: The unfairness is out of our hands, some children are 'promised the moon' if they pass and there is the extra pressure of parents who move into the area to send their children to the local Grammar Schools.

RT: Children can come out of Upper or Grammar School with just the same number and grade of GCSE's if they are well supported and want to learn.

GN: What about the idea of 'free tutoring'; maybe an after school club with past papers which feed into the 11+.

DW: On what basis would these children be chosen?

NS: Perhaps an After school Home learning club, not necessarily 11+ based?

RT: If offered, children who most needed to go to this possibly wouldn't go, then would still not be fair. School wants to support home learning, but can't provide these facilities. As a school, setting up something of this nature would be giving out the message that Grammar School is the best place, which is a false message for many children.

G.G: Upper/Grammar School Open Days really help to see where your child would fit in.

A discussion took place about Upper and Grammar school views.

AS: It would be a good idea to have a parent learning guidance forum attached to the School website.

RT: this could be attached via the V.L.E.

RT gave explanation of the 1:1 tutoring system, giving selected children some 'catch up' sessions within the taught day. This was proving very beneficial.

The meeting ended at 3.15pm.