

Report to Cleobury Mortimer Parish Council

Annual Parish Meeting Monday 26<sup>th</sup> April 2021

Lacon Childe School (The Shropshire Gateway Educational Trust)

Mr D Reynolds Headteacher

Dear Council Members and members of the Parish, apologies for not appearing in person as I would have liked but I have another matter which I must attend to.

Just over 12 months ago I had to take the hardest decision of my short time as Headteacher of our lovely school which was to close due to the pandemic. We received notice on the 17<sup>th</sup> March and said goodbye to our Year 11 students for good, and the rest of the school on Friday 20<sup>th</sup> March. The year since then has proven to be exceptionally challenging with further lockdowns imposed after the surge in cases after Christmas. Thankfully, as we had changed our holiday dates last year, we have gained time over other Shropshire secondary schools as we returned from the Easter break a week earlier than them.

We are still in the middle of having to alter our plans for the education of our children with no exams for Year 11 students this year the preparation for Centre Assessed Grades, CAG's, is creating a logistical nightmare.

During the enforced lockdowns we adapted our teaching and learning to ensure that most of our children were able to access their full curriculum entitlement using Microsoft Teams.

We provided over 70 devices for our students to work on and with the super support of Matt Yarranton at Blisstech Solutions, in Cleobury, were able to donate laptops to some of our most vulnerable students.

We are now trying to get back to as normal a position as is possible, however, the situation in school continues to be challenging as we try to get our students back to a working in school with the guidance in place to keep them safe. One way systems, cleaning down at the end of lessons, designated social areas for year groups and continued testing from home are added distractions.

Most of our 568 students have coped remarkably well and our staff morale remains very high.

During the lockdowns, our school remained open every day, including Easter and half term holidays for our vulnerable children and children of critical workers. The idea that schools were closed during these periods, as regularly mentioned in the media, was totally fabricated and something that has disappointed all those who work in this sector. We have become the testing centres for the wonderful NHS and the guinea pigs for the re-opening of society. Our staff might not be able to see loved ones, family members etc, but they can share a school with over 600 other people daily.... apologies for the mini-rant.

The positive news is that our school is full. Our pupil numbers keep increasing and we now have 568 pupils at Lacon Childe School with a further 111 joining us in Year 7 next year. We have also, during these challenging times, managed to increase our staffing over this period and are now one of the largest employers in the area. The recruitment drive continues, and we hope to provide a further 8-12 jobs soon.

We have finally received confirmation that we are to establish a specialist placement hub at Lacon Childe and at Cleobury Mortimer Primary School. This will enable both schools to adequately provide for some of our most vulnerable, challenged, and reluctant pupils to get the educational provision they deserve. South Shropshire will, at last, be able to accommodate pupils who, in the past, would have been transported for over an hour to placements in Shrewsbury and beyond. This has enabled both schools to develop further bespoke alterations to the buildings and accommodation to make a suitable environment. At Lacon Childe School we have secured funding to replace some of our very old demountable buildings and replace them with new, more permanent structures. The new 4 classroom block and attached SEN Specialist Placement hub will be completed by the end of the summer, providing specialist teaching rooms as well as a fully integrated provision for children with SEN.

We have had further work done at school during the lockdown period with a brand new £160k astroturf being laid and a new heating/boiler system installed.

Governance at Lacon Childe School remains a strength with our governors continuing to meet throughout the lockdown and holding the school accountable for the decisions and direction it takes. We do have a vacancy for a community governor, so, if anyone would like to join this exceptionally important group, please contact me at school for more information.

Unfortunately, many of the experiences we traditionally offer our students have not taken place this year and we have had to postpone many of our plans for this summer. School Prom, trips to Arthog, Poland, Barcelona, skiing have not taken place.

We have been unable to have our usual fundraising events, school production, musical events and annual Senior Citizens Christmas Party which contribute so meaningfully to the life of our school community.

Our sports teams have been unable to play fixtures against other schools, but we are seeing the small shoots of recovery appear as restrictions ease.

This has been a very unusual year, one that all of us will be happy never to repeat. Your school has continued to provide a fabulous education for your children despite the restrictions and new procedures we have had to manage and adapt to. The children of Cleobury Mortimer are fortunate that they can access high quality learning experiences in schools which really care for them and have their health, happiness, and welfare at the core of what they do. We are an integral part of the community and enjoy the support of the people of the Parish. We have a rich history and a tradition for providing great education for our young people, enabling them to become valuable and valued members of society. The support of our Parish Council has been integral to this, thank you.



DJR 26<sup>th</sup> April 2021