



The Forest Federation
of Soudley, Steam Mills and Woodside Primary Schools

End of school year Governors' report letter to parents and staff

Dear Staff and Parents,

July 2025

This has been another busy year for the schools. The governing body is made up of all volunteers and meets both as a full governing board and as two committees; a Quality of Education Committee, dealing with teaching and learning and educational outcomes and a Business Committee dealing with premises and finance. We hold three full governing board meetings and three committee meetings during the year. Governors also meet with leaders and subject leaders regularly throughout the year.

As a Governing Body we have been working hard to balance our budgets despite significantly higher costs across the board. As a federation of three partner schools working together, we have been able to share some costs and resources, helping us to try and maintain our staffing levels, school buildings, SEND and family pastoral support as well as subsidise the extra opportunities the school provides through breakfast and after school clubs, school trips and residential visits. This all helps with improving the experiences of all the children.

As school budgets are based on an amount of money per pupil and the Forest has an ageing population and a falling birth rate, with a predicted drop in the number of school age children over the next five years, all schools in the area are facing a potential drop in their income. This is already being felt by schools across the Forest, with many schools reducing classes and staffing for the coming year. As a Governing Body we will have to continue to carefully plan and monitor our budgets for the next few years.

The governors have looked at other sources of funding for the schools. Earlier this year we worked with Terry Hale the previous county councillor for Woodside and Steam Mills to access match funding through the Build Back Better Fund towards developing the pond area at Woodside. As rural schools, Woodside and Soudley and Steam Mills were selected to be included in the first tranche of schools nationally to receive funding for new solar panels through the Government's Green Energy Fund. The panels were installed at Soudley in June, at Woodside in July and are likely in August at Steam Mills. As you can imagine, the electricity bills for the school buildings each year are large and the new solar panels will help reduce these considerably.

We are extremely grateful for the efforts of our parent and friends' groups at each school, who work so hard throughout the year organising fundraising events to raise funds to provide extra resources and activities for the children.

This year is the second full year of our programme of single subject leadership for our staff. At most schools in the area, teachers have to co-ordinate and be responsible for several subject areas in their school and be ever-ready to discuss their subject in detail during an Ofsted inspection. In small schools this can be often four or five subjects on top of the teacher's class teaching responsibility.

We ask staff to be responsible for one subject area across the three schools. The aim being to allow staff to specialise in one area, eg. Reading, Maths, Science, Geography etc. improving their individual subject knowledge, monitor standards in their subject area, and through working with staff at all the schools, share good practice, and impact teaching and learning across the three schools.

We are very fortunate to support a strong staff with expert leadership and subject knowledge, who enjoy working together and sharing their knowledge and expertise. For example, our staff regularly train other teachers on maths courses, and have teachers from other schools come in to observe their lessons as examples of good practice and this year our reading lead arranged a visit for the children across the three schools to the Cheltenham Literature Festival in the Autumn term.

We have also this year welcomed student teachers back into the schools. Our mentoring lead has led this and it enables us to establish contact with local universities and access new ideas. Some of our experienced teachers were originally student teachers at our schools.

We have continued joint school-based federation activities for the children this year. The Governing Body set up a fund with equal contributions from each school to fund the transport for these activities, as we felt it was important for the children to experience working with different children in different environments, something they will encounter when leaving our small village schools and going on to secondary school. I have attended federation activities and it has been great to see so many smiling faces, and how easily the children have adapted to working in different groups, in different environments and making new friends. The Governing Body agreed that the schools will continue to fund transport for activities next year.

We have also joined together to take groups of children to activities and events further afield. In January children from the schools took part in the Young Voices Concert, along with a choir of thousands from all over the country. In June, the children on the school councils at each school visited the Houses of Parliament where they observed a debate on clean energy, took part in workshops on democracy and how laws are made and met our local MP, Matt Bishop. Children's outcomes across the schools are good as a result of all this work. The most recent activity was a joint seaside trip for the EYFS, Year 1 and Year 2 children from the three schools at Weston-super-Mare. The feedback we have received from the children has been very positive.

We have been able to re-introduce pre-school provision at Soudley this year. We already have excellent and thriving pre-schools at Woodside and Steam Mills which provide such a valuable contribution to both the schools, and we are really pleased that we have been able to offer this opportunity for the youngest children in Soudley, who all settled well into the early years class.

We would like to thank Mrs Davis and all the staff at the three schools for their hard work and commitment during the year. They always go above and beyond to give the children the best start to their education. We would also like to thank the staff that are leaving the federation at the end of term for all their hard work and dedication during their time with us and would like to give a warm welcome to all our new staff joining us in September.

We would also like thank all the parents who do so much to support their children and the schools during the year.

I would like to thank all the governors for giving up so much of their free time to help the children and the schools. I would like to thank Graeme Drage, who is stepping down as a parent governor at the end of term, for all his hard work while being a member of the governing body.

Finally, we would like to offer our best wishes for the future to all our Year 6 children who are leaving us this year and going on to secondary school after the summer holidays.

Regards,

Dave Wildin

Chair, The Forest Federation of Soudley, Steam Mills and Woodside Primary Schools.

