

FVS GENERAL MEETING

3 October 2024

Minutes

Present: David House (Chair), Nikki Yate (Secretary), Patrick Joyce (Treasurer), Suzanne Marshall, Sean Farrelly, Rick Lilley, Penny Farrelly, Andy Chanter, Deborah Rose

Apologies: Amanda Hopkins

By invitation: Jill Dean, Chair of Governors, Frieth CEC School (JD)

Martin Gosling, Head Teacher, Frieth CEC School (MG)

Chris Weaving, Sarah Hunt, David Bruce, David Redhouse, Rev Andy Storch, Dean Gibbons, Paul Marston Weston

Members of Frieth Village Society & other residents (c.60)

1.	Committee Matters
	<p>The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting to discuss the future plans of the school and its impact on the village.</p> <p>JD provided a summary of the decision of the Board of Governors to increase student numbers at the school: due to the growth in interest in the school and the decision to become a single form entry school. She apologised for not informing the village of this planned growth in numbers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase in PAN: Frieth CEC School has increased its Pupil Admission Number (PAN) from 20 to 28 to accommodate growing interest. This decision was made by the Board of Governors (BofG) after the school had exceeded its previous PAN, driven by increasing demand for places.• Voluntary Aided School: As a voluntary aided school, Frieth CEC is its own admissions authority. While rooted in Christian principles, it is open to children of all faiths and none.• Rationale for Expansion: The school's expansion was driven by the need for financial sustainability. At £3,500 per child, the funding was insufficient, especially with rising costs like teacher salaries. Without an increase in student numbers, the school would face financial challenges. CofG also explained our previous PAN of 20 was operationally very challenging with mixed classes. This left the option of changing to a PAN of 28 (single form) or reducing to a PAN of 15 which lends itself to mixed aged teaching. <p>MG provided a summary of the actions to date that the school has taken to engage with the village community and to address traffic & safety concerns:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community engagement: the students help out at the Lady Ryder Garden at Parmoor, have worked with Jolyon Marshall on a school clock project, worked

alongside Greener Frieth and the school is used to hold meetings, and supported the village Ukrainian visitors.

- **Impact on the Village:** Both the school and residents acknowledged the increased traffic due to higher enrolment. MG emphasized that the BofG are sensitive to the impact on the village and apologized for not communicating about the growth earlier.
- **Traffic Solutions Implemented:**
 - **Staggered Entry & Drop-offs:** The school has implemented staggered drop-off times to reduce traffic congestion, pupils are grouped by Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. This started in September 2024 and has been received positively by all parents and many local residents.
 - **Walking Routes & Parking Solutions:** Parents have been encouraged to use walking routes to school. Two park-and-walk locations—Yew Tree and Parmoor Park Farm—are available options. In addition, a parent working party is improving the pathways to make them more accessible.
 - **Car Sharing & Travel Plans:** The school is working with the Home Run car-sharing app, and more than half of the parents have signed up. A comprehensive travel plan is in the works, and a parent survey explored the possibility of introducing a bus.
 - **Wraparound Care:** To further ease traffic, the school extended its after-school care (ASC) offerings, with plans to make it available every day within the next two years. This reduces peak-time congestion as more children stay later in the day.

MG thanked those residents who had submitted questions prior to the meeting and provided the following answers:

- **Out of catchment student numbers:** Several residents expressed concerns about the increased number of children, out-of-catchment enrolment (especially from Lane End), and the associated traffic problems. There was discussion about whether the school should primarily serve the local village. 38 out of 156 students are currently in catchment due to principally the high cost of housing in the Hambleton Valley villages thus making house purchases out of reach for most parents.
- **Safety Issues:** Safety during drop-off and pick-up times was a major concern, with suggestions to improve car park management, introduce supervised drop-offs, and prevent dangerous parking behaviour. The school has addressed these issues by appointing Junior Road Safety Officers and conducting assemblies on walking safely to school. MG has also met with parents from every age group to discuss parking and road safety. Parents are asked to sign a parking pledge.
- **Pathway Conditions:** Residents noted that the Hayles Field walking path becomes impassable in winter, making it difficult for parents to walk their children to school. The school committed to working on improving this.

Financial Sustainability

- **Cost Management:** MG explained that the increase in student numbers was necessary to cover rising operational costs, including teacher pay raises and other essential expenses. Without this increase, the school would have faced significant financial deficits.
- **Parent Contributions:** MG advised that parent groups have been instrumental in maintaining the school, contributing to painting, forest school activities, and other projects due to budget constraints.

Future Plans

- **Building Expansion:** The school is planning for seven classes next year but currently has only six classrooms. While no firm plans have been made, there is the possibility of creating an eco-classroom in the playing field. If we are unable to proceed with the, there will need to be some involve internal reconfiguration of the school. The school assured the village that any future plans would be shared openly.
- **School Size Cap:** Despite the increase in student numbers, the school cannot grow beyond the stated growth for single form entry as it would not be logistically or financially viable.
- **Monitoring Traffic & Impact:** The school will continue to monitor the impact of its initiatives, such as the staggered entry and walking routes, to ensure safety and manage traffic. A car safety workshop has been scheduled.

The Chair then asked for questions from the floor:

- A parent-resident praised the school for revitalizing the school and preventing its closure. He thanked the school for its hard work on this.
- A resident raised concerns that the school was taking precedence over the village's needs, emphasizing that a balance must be found between supporting the school and maintaining the village's character.
- A resident questioned the rationale behind growth, noting that other schools in the county operate successfully with smaller PANs, that Buckinghamshire County's strategy is based on a significant drop in projected birthrates in the future; that this would lead to approximately 1700 unneeded places in the county including at Frieth; Frieth's expansion could lead to empty spaces at other schools putting their viability at risk. The resident suggested that mixed-age classes are manageable and do not necessitate such expansion. The resident was very appreciative of the actions the school has already taken; however many parents were in a rush to get to work which is always a challenge: walking children up Frieth Hill to school is extremely dangerous; the use of Hayles Field path is impossible in Winter. MG responded that he acknowledged that mixed age classes can be successful with a PAN 15. The move to single entry follows feedback from parents. MG would not discuss the impact of the strategy on other schools.

A resident asked why the school could not keep its provision for children in the Parish only as the character and nature of the school was changing.

MG responded that the school would cease to exist unless out of catchment students were admitted. There are insufficient numbers of children in the Parish as previously mentioned.

The Chair of the PTA noted that for parents choosing to live in the village, the school was a significant deciding factor. She also noted that the school and its parents contributed to the village through the use of the pub, the village fete & the many parties held in the village hall. This was endorsed by an attending parent. She asked if FVS knew how much fete income was attributable to school parents.

The Chair advised that we are awaiting final accounts from the fete; the Chair of the Village Hall Committee (FHC) confirmed that parties provide the Village Hall with notable income currently.

A resident asked for further detail on the role of the Junior Road Safety Officers. It was suggested that the JRSOs should be supported by members of staff at drop off & pick up. Some parents wait outside school with car engines running. Also, it was asked if there was any other space that the school could use for parking.

MG responded that he did not know of any other land which could be used for parking. He was happy to come and view the parking at drop off & pick up times. He advised that the JRSOs monitor the parking around the village hall. The Parking Pledge includes the point about idling engines.

A resident suggested that the parking area could have an entrance cut through the hedge so that there was a better in/out layout. Also could JSROs be on hand to chaperone students from cars into school.

MG responded the school doesn't own the parking areas in front of the school. This belongs to the Parish Council who have been approached but they have not responded to date. There is a small turning circle in the existing car park and JSROs issue tickets to parents stopping in that area.

A resident asked for more explanation of the financial position of the school. MG advised that if the school remained with 120 students, the school would be in tens of the £1000s deficit. He advised that since numbers increased to 156 students, there have been no increase in Teaching Assistants; this additional income had been spent on an increase in staff pay, pensions, school equipment and an increase in other costs. He further advised that any decorating requirements are carried out by school parents, as is the development of the forest school.

A resident working in another school endorsed the financial difficulties facing all schools. He sought collaboration to address the concerns of the village and the small numbers of parents who behave irresponsibly.

The Chair asked for an indication of the number of students needed to make the school financially viable.

JD advised that it is difficult to answer as costs are increasing all the time. The school is reliant on PTA, donations, parents support.

A resident advised that there is still congestion on the hill and now over a longer period of time due to After School Activities. He was disappointed that the Board of Governors would not discuss the impact on other schools as longer term this could have an effect on Frieth school. He observed that single entry was the right decision as parents are choosing Frieth.

MG wants to ensure that the school minimises the impact on the village, recognising nothing is perfect and is always open to any suggestions. He recognised that more transparency from the school is needed and committed to improvements in communication.

A resident noted that there is an atmosphere of polarisation and partisanship between the school and the village due principally to the lack of communication from the school. He acknowledged the balance between school viability and safety. He also noted that the school is part of the village (not the heart as a parent suggested). He would like to see a longer term vision for both parties with both working together to implement and measure the success of the traffic initiatives. There is a need for anyone coming to the village to be safe. MG thanked the resident for his comments.

The Chair noted that concerns had been raised by some about impact on other schools but also that others had commented that the governors should only be concerned with the success of Frieth School. He commented that the Code of Conduct for Frieth school governors was not on the school's website. JD advised this is in action.

Notwithstanding that, being a local school governor himself, he noted that the model code for school governors does require the impact on other schools to be considered. He acknowledged that MG and JD did not want to discuss the questions regarding the impact on other schools as Frieth school expands at this meeting and therefore he asked for guidance on where this conversation could take place.

The Chair of the PTA advised that all Governors were volunteers and the Chair was questioning the BofG's integrity which she found insulting.

The Chair apologised if she felt insulted but repeated that he was simply clarifying that contrary to comments made by some, governors do have a duty to consider the impact of their decisions on other schools and was asking where and when that could be discussed.

A resident asked for information about the kitchen and Committee Room of the Village Hall being used for school catering.

MG advised that the previous catering suppliers in Bourne End had ceased trading earlier in the year. The school firmly believe that providing a hot lunch to all students provides a significant improvement to the students' learning. The Governors had approached the VHC to use the kitchen; the school pays rent to the VHC. There are no plans to move the catering from the VH at the current time but it is at a very early stage. Ideally the school would like its own kitchen on site as this would be a cheaper operation.

The Chair of the VHC advised that the use of the VH facilities over the last year has been zero. The VH hall is still available for use at all times. The VH is in need of regular income to keep it in good repair – for example, new windows are needed which will cost ca £35,000.

	<p>A resident sought clarification on what issues and aspects of the schools plans the village community can have influence over and what are non-negotiable? JD advised that the major concern is safety for all and the BoG are open to any suggestions for improvements. They are still investigating school bus options and the in/out driveway. The school is chasing up a response from the Parish Council. She also advised that if student numbers do reach 196, it is unlikely that this will cause any more impact than currently.</p> <p>A resident asked for an update from MG on discussions with Bucks Council regarding the route of the bin lorries on Mondays. MG advised that he had contacted Bucks but had not heard back so no further progress on this issue (Post meeting note: Paul MW has now spoken to Bucks council for this to be reviewed)</p> <p>A resident advised that the use of bollards at the school entrance is variable. He encouraged the school to think more radically.</p> <p>A resident asked for more information on the adult supervision of parking. He advised that the standards of expectations of parents needs to be increased and planned for. He made the observation that the safety measures being followed by the school were aspirational and these need to be measured for their impact. MG advised that the school seeks to be as proactive as possible and will look into the adult supervision suggestion.</p> <p>A parent asked if FVS could seek volunteers to help. He also suggested that if parents paid for a bus, perhaps FVS could volunteer a driver.</p> <p>A resident observed that speeding was not just by school parents but other vehicles also driving through the village.</p> <p>The Chair advised that Greener Frieth and the village's parish councillor, Amanda Hopkins, are exploring options regarding speed reduction. A report from the Bucks Road Safety Officer is expected imminently.</p> <p>A resident observed that more students meant more staff. What plans did the school have for more staff parking. MG responded that it was likely to be only 2 more cars (1 x teacher, 1 x TA). The turning circle seems to work well in the morning.</p> <p>A resident welcomed the meeting and asked for a follow up in say 3 months. MG & JD advised that they would gladly accept an invitation to further meetings.</p> <p>The Chair thanked the Governors and the Head for attending the meeting and reiterated the desire for an ongoing collaborative relationship.</p>
2.	Community Speedwatch
	<p>The Chair advised the meeting that a Community Speedwatch Group has now been formed. A Speedwatch briefing and training session is to be held on Saturday 19th October at 10am for those wishing to attend.</p>

3.	Upcoming events
	The Chair advised that the village litterpick & tidy is to be held on Saturday 9 November from 9am starting at the Village Hall. Full details are to be found on fvs.org.uk .
4.	<u>AOB</u>
	None
5.	Date of next General Meeting
	TBD in January 2025
6.	Items for newsletter:
	Summary of meeting