The survey was conducted on-line using the Survey Monkey software. A total of 19 questions were included in two parts, covering school-to-home (Part 1) and home-to-school communications (Part 2). They included different types of questions: binary (yes/no); ranking (very good to very poor); and open (for comments). Parents were given two weeks notice about the survey, which was open from 27th April to 8th May 2012.

Below is a summary of the results. Wording in italics are direct quotes from parents’ comments. Actions and recommendations have been developed, often building on specific suggestions made by parents.

**Overall**

A total of 40 families responded to Part 1 and 37 to Part 2 – constituting less than one third of families with children at All Saints school.

In general, parents prefer electronic forms of communication, for communications from the school and a mix of electronic and face-to-face when communicating to the school. E-mail and text are the favoured media because of their immediacy and accessibility. Paper is seen to be wasteful and unreliable (letters can get lost).

**General Comments**

**Communications Effectiveness**

On the whole parents see the school as communicating effectively (58% ranked the school’s communications as effective/very effective; 35% as adequate, and 7% as ineffective/very ineffective).

Parents scored themselves less favourably: 43% felt they were communicating with the school well/very well; 46% felt adequate and 11% thought they were communicating with the school not well or not at all well.

**Channel Discipline**

Several comments suggested that there is some confusion/lack of clarity as to which channels should be used for what purpose. The texting service was highlighted in this regard, used for important matters, e.g. unforeseen school closure, as well as mundane information, e.g. cake sales.

Some parents complained about information overload on some channels (especially texts).

**ACTION:** Develop a Communications Policy that defines how individual or a combination of channels should be used to communicate specific types of information, whether this is from the school to home, or from parents to the school.

**Message Content**

A number of small issues exist here: some comments about the consistency of the quality of information given by staff; a view that staff letters can lapse into “teacherese” that makes them less accessible to parents; a comment on poor grammar and spelling.
Parents want various types of class-related information, from specifics like whether swimming hats should be worn, to broader matters such as what the class has been working on that week. Parents generally indicated they would welcome the opportunity to understand the curriculum and teaching methods more, as well as how this applied to their children.

**Responsiveness**

*This was a recurring and important issue raised by parents.* Most importantly comments suggest there are ‘black holes’ into which their communications sometimes fall.

78% parents would like clearer benchmarks around when they can expect a response to a messages/letter. The majority indicated they would like an acknowledgement within 1 day and an answer after 2-7 days.

**ACTION** All communications to the school, whether letters or e-mails, will be acknowledged by the addressee within 1 day, and responded to within 5 working days at the most.

The office staff were mentioned several times. On the whole, parents appreciate the work of the office and consider the office staff to be responsive when dealing with parents in person. However, they were felt to be less responsive when dealing with e-mails, and a few parents mentioned that their e-mails to teachers had not been forwarded. (This is dealt with in the section on e-mails below).

**Communication Timing**

Where comments were made about timing, these tended to reflect instances where more notice could have been given about events. This was particularly of concern to working parents who need to plan ahead.

**ACTION** The first newsletter of each term will include the term’s diary. It will then be kept up to date on the website, thereby giving longer notice for events.

**Other**

One new parent at the school felt they hadn’t been fully briefed about the school, and since they work full time, had not had opportunity to visit the school or to meet other staff/parents.

**ACTION** In addition to the meeting arranged in the summer for the new nursery intake, parents receive home-visits to help ensure a happy and smooth transition from home to school. At these home visits, parents will now be asked whether they were able to attend the meeting and have a tour of the school, or whether a separate school visit is required.

**Communications Channels**

**Text**

87% of parents rated the texting system as good/very good. **Texting is seen as a very efficient way for the school to communicate urgent/important information.** Several parents expressed frustration that it was also used for more mundane matters (such as uniform sales), whilst more urgent matters can be overlooked (such as a recent cancelation of a pre-school club). Overall, there is a sense that the texting service has been ‘hijacked’ by the Friends and is being overused for trivial information.

**ACTION** Texts will be used for school purposes only, for important and urgent communications with parents. This could include notice of emergency school closure,
cancellation of school clubs, class or child-specific information, changes in return times from school trips and so on. Friends will be asked to use e-mail communications to alert parents about cake sales, school uniform sales and other fundraising events.

E-mail
This is one of the most preferred forms of communication to/from school, yet is clearly a problematic one. E-mail communications from teachers were ranked as good/very good by only 11% of parents, compared to 59% who ranked their emails to the school as good/very good. As e-mail is now a standard form of communication across work as well as home life, parents also expect to see it at school - to contact teaching staff, the Head, the school generally as well as being used by the school for all forms of communication from finding out about a child’s progress to being told of future events. Of the 32 parents who told us which form of communication they use most, 14 said e-mail (i.e. 44%).

Two issues dominated the comments made by parents:

The low ranking given to e-mails from the school partly reflects the mixed experience of parents across the different year groups (some receive termly information by email, others on paper). Many commented that email communications from the teacher had ceased altogether, which parents regarded as an obstacle to effective communications.

The decision to only allow indirect e-mail contact with teachers (from parents via the school office) has caused widespread concern. It is seen as inefficient, unreliable, alienating and lacking in confidentiality. As one parent put it: “E-mailing teachers through the school office is a poor way of communicating. It puts additional work pressure on the already busy office, and leaves queries ‘hanging’ in a triangle of indirect communication”. Although a few parents were understanding as to the reasons, one also commented: “I think the blanket ban on email direct to the teachers was an over-reaction to something. If some parents were abusing the system then they could be spoken to directly and action could be taken against them. I have found sending emails to the school office very uncomfortable”.

Several comments suggested that parents had no idea whether their message had been forwarded to the relevant teacher. In two instances, parents only received a response after a long delay and two or three reminders.

ACTION A new e-mail address will be established specifically for parental communications with teaching staff. This address will be managed by the school office, who will forward e-mails to the relevant staff member. E-mails will be acknowledged within 1 day of receipt and a response will given within a maximum of 5 working days. If a response has not been received by then, parents are invited to speak with the office manager.

RECOMMENDATION The e-mail software used by the school office will be examined to see whether the acknowledgement of e-mails sent to the new address could be automated, so as to reduce some of the impact of the new system on office staff.

The senior management team will monitor that the system is working properly, and that teachers are responsive to the communications from parents.

Although responses to the survey indicated that parents would prefer having direct e-mail access to teachers, there are two substantive reasons why this will not be put in place:

Firstly, in the past, the direct e-mail system has been abused by a small minority of parents who have sent unpleasant and in some cases even hostile messages to teachers;

Secondly, and linked, the immediacy of e-mails means that there can be a perception that teachers are on 24-hour standby and that responses should be immediate.

Both issues add substantively to the e-mail burden that staff need to manage.
**ACTIONS**

Teachers will provide half-termly (rather than termly) email updates, about what the class will be doing. The structure for these will be standardised for consistency across all year groups, and will be sent on the same day across the school.

Information about school trips will be e-mailed (hard copies will be sent home in book-bags for those not using e-mail). These will need to be printed off at home, and the signed permission slips returned to school as usual.

**RECOMMENDATION** The suggested use of Parent Mail will be considered, and a decision made before the summer break.

**Website**

69% of parents ranked the new website as good/very good. In terms of improvements, parents pointed to a few broken links, missing information and out-of-date information (especially in regard to class blogs). There were also one or two comments that the website is slightly old-fashioned compared to other schools.

The general consensus was that the website should be used more and should become a more integral part of the school's communications efforts. The key is to ensure information is properly maintained.

**ACTION** The Head will convene a small meeting with relevant staff, governors and the school’s IT consultant, to develop a strategy on how to develop the school’s website. This will address a number of issues that were raised in feedback to the survey: such as the degree to which the school promotes the use of the Fronter learning platform; blogging (for class updates); ease of updating the calendar; creating an online portal where parents can feed in improvement ideas to the school.

The website will include information on the syllabus, goals for the year, attainment benchmarks for children in the various year groups, half-termly class plans, and, on a weekly basis, what is being taught and how (these weekly updates will be prepared by support staff).

**RECOMMENDATION** Once the school uniform policy has been reviewed by Governors, the school uniform list will be posted online. One suggestion from a parent, to include a facility to order school uniform from the website, will also be considered.

**Newsletter**

The electronic newsletter was liked very much and the fact it was weekly was seen to be a great benefit. 79% parents ranked it as good/very good. Suggestions for improvement seemed to go in two directions: to update the overall look of the newsletter and bolster its content; or to use it to signal to parents new information available on the website. The latter would also make the newsletter more accessible on mobile devices, as it would have less heavy graphics, which is useful for busy parents.

One parent noted with disappointment that merit awards from support staff for especially kind behaviour by children are no longer featured in the newsletter.

**RECOMMENDATION** The format of the newsletter will not be changed. Given the very positive feedback in the survey, priority will be given to modifying other communication channels that are performing less well. Should a follow-up communications survey be undertaken next year, then the performance of the newsletter will be re-appraised.

**ACTION** Merit awards given by support staff will be celebrated at the top of the newsletter.
Face-to-Face

This is the most-used channel when parents wish to communicate with the school. Of the 35 parents who responded to the question ‘What forms of communication have you used since the beginning of the academic year’:

- 77% had had a chat with the class teacher at pick-up time;
- 57% had prearranged a meeting with a member of staff;
- 43% had had a chat with the head teacher at the school gate in the morning; and
- 29% had had a chat with head teacher at pick-up time.

In terms of effectiveness, pre-arranged meetings with staff received the highest ranking: 61% ranked these as good or very good. In contrast, messages left at the school office received the lowest ranking (10% parents felt this is a poor or very poor channel).

ACTION Recognising the constraints faced by working parents, exceptions may be made for urgent matters to arrange pre-school meetings at 8.30am.

Although the school gate is seen as a good place to talk to individual teachers, it is not appropriate for sensitive, complex or time-consuming issues. For parents who pick up their children, the teaching staff are seen as very accessible and a quick conversation then can be enough. For working parents or those who rarely do the pick up this is not a viable option.

The parent/teacher meetings came into a lot of criticism. Although parent-teacher meetings were reasonably well received (59% ranked them as good / very good), a large number of comments were made on the theme that two 10-minute conversations across an academic year were not enough time to fully discuss each child’s progress/behaviour and sort out any concerns. Some parents also commented that the limited time was not well used by all teachers (implying that they weren’t well prepared). The sign-up sheets outside the hall are of no use to working parents (who then have to book through friends or the office).

The feasibility of holding an additional round of parent/teacher meetings was carefully considered by the Head Teacher. However, this cannot be undertaken because of the limits in how much ‘directed time’\(^1\) can be allocated to teachers, and All Saints is already at that limit. Nevertheless, parents’ feedback about the parent/teacher sessions is of concern. Several steps will be taken to ensure that the time available is used productively:-

ACTION All teachers will ensure that children’s class work is available for parents to look at before the meeting. Parents will be reminded to arrive 10 minutes early for their appointment in order to have time to go through them.

ACTION The parents consultations that take place after the Autumn Half Term will now include individual child targets so that parents get an early indication of their child’s trajectory.

ACTION The second parents consultation will be brought forward from early in the summer term to late in the spring term. This will reduce the gap between the consultations, and provide parents with a briefing on their child’s progress with a whole term to go to help address any outstanding concerns.

ACTION The ‘Class Welcome’ meetings at the beginning of the academic year will be carefully structured (by the senior management team) to ensure consistency across all years, so that parents receive a thorough overview of what they can expect across the three terms.

\(^1\) This is time in addition to the normal teaching/marking/planning work undertaken, e.g. to attend INSET days (staff training), parent evenings, the music/arts festival, nativity play and for report writing.
**ACTION** The ‘Book Look’ parent visit in the summer will now be scheduled to take place after the children’s annual school reports have been sent out (to date, these class visits have taken place earlier in the term, before the reports). This will create opportunity for a brief level of parent/teacher exchange, but, more importantly, a chance to arrange a meeting should parents have any questions/concerns based on the reports.

**ACTION** School reports for Key Stage 2 children will now include their literacy and numeracy levels attained. These can then be assessed against the benchmarks for each year, which will be posted on the website.

**Letters in Bookbags**

Only a very small minority of parents appreciated paper forms of communication; more voiced frustration about lost / late / crumpled communications from the school.

Parents with children further up the school also expressed dissatisfaction with the ‘scraps of paper’ in book bags with homework on.

**ACTION** Homework instructions will be glued into the relevant exercise books consistently.

Few had received letters from the Head Teacher (with the implication that they would welcome more), though none recognised that the Newsletter is effectively the Head’s weekly communication to parents.

**Notice Boards**

Only one parent identified the notice board by the bike sheds as a useful place to post current issues, news and notice of upcoming events.

**Governors were generally felt to have a ‘low profile’**, and parents were not always clear about their role. None of the responses mentioned the governors’ notice board to the right of the main entrance which identifies all governors and the work of the various committees.

**ACTION** Governors to attend school-wide events wherever possible – for example, during parent consultations, the autumn Class Welcome meetings and the summer Book Look visits. Parents will be informed prior to the event that Governors will be available to meet with them, to introduce their role and work, and answer any questions. Governors will be easily identifiable with Governor Badges – to be issued.

**RECOMMENDATION** Whenever possible, governors will make short presentations before key school events (e.g. the Class Welcome meetings). As one parent suggested, “this could increase awareness of the importance of giving to a foundation fund”.

**Governors’ Annual Meeting**

Many reasons were given as to why the 2011 summer meeting was poorly attended: from the positive (that there were fewer issues in the school that parents were concerned about, and the school was making good progress) to more negative ones (such as an overall defensive attitude by staff/governors, parents didn’t feel their questions were really welcome, it was just a talking shop, boring, not focused on the children and therefore too general). Timing was another constraint to attending, although it wasn’t clear whether this was on the day or the time of year. It was also suggested that it was not particularly well promoted.

**ACTION** Instead of an annual meeting, Governors will produce a brief, accessible annual report, like that produced by All Saints Church.
**Action**  Public minutes of Governors’ meetings will be posted on the website routinely. This was approved in 2009, but has not been actioned consistently.

**Recommendation**  The idea of holding a social event to meet governors received a mixed response: 40% said yes; 26% no, 34% were not sure. This will be reviewed early in 2013, once other measures have been put in place.

**Proposed Online Payment/Permission System**

The idea of using an online facility for payment of school trips/activities and dinner money received resounding support (84% parents said yes to the suggestion). There were also further suggestions, all of which will be carefully explored by the school office and Governors’ Finance Committee, with a view to having a new system in place for the new academic year.

**Recommendation**  The school office and Governors Finance Committee will look into the accounting and banking implications of different forms of payment facilities:- PayPal, BACS transfer, direct debits for the school maintenance fund, and the use of in-advance payments (where, for example, each family could deposit (e.g. £20-£50) at the beginning of each term/year, and the school could deduct costs for trips from that).

**Governors Post Box**

Only one parent had used this since the start of the academic year.

---

**Other Communication Channels**

We asked parents which of the following they would attend if offered by the school:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Yes (%)</th>
<th>No (%)</th>
<th>No opinion/unsure (%)</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Head teacher coffee mornings</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshops for parents on specific aspects of the curriculum</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Workshops for parents on specific teaching methods</strong></td>
<td><strong>69%</strong></td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td><strong>37</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshops for parents on how the school measures progress</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Drop-in sessions after school with the Class Teacher</strong></td>
<td><strong>84%</strong></td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td><strong>38</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drop-in sessions after school with Head Teacher</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Action**  Workshop for parents on the curriculum or teaching methods will be run at least once a year, for each year group. These sessions may coincide with other events, such as the Class Welcome Meetings.

**Action**  Head Teacher coffee mornings, with at least one governor in attendance, will be established on a regular basis – on the first Thursday of each half term.
RECOMMENDATION The feasibility of instituting drop-in sessions after school with the Head and/or Class Teacher will be carefully explored in light of constraints with ‘directed time’.

Conclusions

This survey has provided valuable feedback and ideas on ways to improve communications between home and school. It is anticipated that the actions agreed will help strengthen the mutual support and shared understanding between parents and teachers on how to best support the children at All Saints School.

On the basis of this report a new communications policy will be developed by Governors which clearly lays out the purpose of each channel, key performance indicators regarding response times and timing.

In broad terms, the changes will see teachers communicating with parents more frequently, by e-mail wherever possible, and in a more structured manner in accord with new guidance to be developed by the senior management team. Parents are encouraged to communicate with teachers by e-mail via the school office (to a new dedicated e-mail address), by letters given to their child to deliver, through pre-arranged meetings and at pick-up times. The functionality of the website, and its content, will continue to be enhanced so as to provide a reliable repository for parents to access important information. The texting service will be more clearly demarcated for the sole-use by the school for urgent/important matters. Governors will replace the annual meeting with more regular interaction with parents at other school events.