

GILES BROOK PRIMARY SCHOOL

UPDATE FOR PARENTS

Monday 16 October 2006

1. What is the building problem at the school and what actions have already taken place?

On Friday 6th October during a routine inspection by governors, the headteacher and the council's architects a slight bowing was noticed in the ceiling of the Foundation Stage classroom. Above this room there were also more than normal movements in some parts of the floor of the rooms directly above (Music and ICT). On Saturday 7th October council officers, the headteacher and chair of governors were joined by a specialist structural engineer in the field of timber framed buildings who examined the situation and indicated that it was localised but would require attention.

The decision to close the three classrooms (Foundation, Music and ICT) was taken and the Foundation Stage children were not in school on Monday 9th and Tuesday 10th October. On Wednesday 11th the Foundation Stage children returned to school and were taught in the school hall as a temporary arrangement for the rest of last week. The hall was, therefore, not available for normal usage.

Further visual examination of all other classrooms by the structural engineer confirmed that there were no signs of similar problems elsewhere in the school. In addition, other structural engineers confirmed that the issue with the Foundation classroom ceiling and flooring above appeared to be a localised one.

As part of ongoing investigatory work the builders erected several props in the Foundation classroom between floor and ceiling and these restored the floor levels of the upstairs rooms to their normal positions.

2. Why was a change in strategy made on Friday 13th October?

On Friday 13th October at 3.00pm a further inspection of the affected ceiling by an independent structural engineer took place. This included the removal of a section of the timbers directly above the affected ceiling and gave a clearer indication of the cause of the problem, which may be a manufacturing defect. The engineer advised that, as a precautionary measure further testing should take place. The tests would be non-destructive and would be comprehensive in their extent.

With this updated advice, council officers in collaboration with the headteacher and chair of governors made the decision that the school would need to be closed this week and during half term for the testing to take place, along with any necessary remedial repairs to affected areas.

3. What has happened today (Monday 16th) and what will be happening next?

Structural engineers, the builders (Gleasons), and specialist council staff, met today to plan the testing and to consider the impact this would have on the school. It was confirmed that the testing area will be limited to the classroom block and that the hall and administrative area of the school are fully safe. This is because they are entirely separate from the classroom block and have a different floor construction.

Testing will start tomorrow (Tuesday) and will commence in the Foundation Classroom with the full ceiling structure being exposed. The results of this process will be discussed with the council and the school and will then inform the testing strategy for the rest of the block. Experts

from the University of Brighton have been commissioned to advise on the testing process. The testing and repair work will be signed off by an independent structural engineer prior to the school re-opening.

4. What alternative arrangements are being made for this week?

The school is able to offer emergency childcare provision in the school hall on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday of this week. This will cover the normal school day (8.50 am – 3.15 pm) and is being provided for those parents who have been unable to make their own alternative arrangements for this week. We urge parents to only use this facility if absolutely necessary, as places are limited. Please add your name to the emergency cover list if you require this service.

5. What contingency arrangements have been planned?

The council has to plan for all eventualities and is already doing so. Any arrangements will be agreed with the school and will ensure the full safety and security of the children and staff.

The short-term contingency plan will involve children being taught in spare classrooms in other schools by their own teachers with their own support staff. We have already secured a number of spaces and school staff will check these out tomorrow. In each case a whole year group will be able to be accommodated at each school. The headteachers who have offered spaces are showing a real sense of partnership in supporting these arrangements and are confident that they will work. However, the headteacher and colleagues of Giles Brook need to feel comfortable with the proposals. The Foundation Stage children will be taught in the hall at Giles Brook. The new arrangements will begin straight after half term and we will write to you with the details of location and transport and other key matters. We are unable today to state how long these arrangements will be needed but the target would be no more than four to eight weeks – of course, it may be much shorter than this.

Transport will be provided from Giles Brook but details have not yet been finalised.

The longer-term contingency plan, should it prove necessary, would be to set up a temporary school, ideally on the school site at Giles Brook.

6. When will there be further communication with parents?

We will write to all parents and carers to update them on the plans for after half term and also provide details of this on the school's web site www.GilesBrook.org.uk. This correspondence will be sent out this week.

7. What are the key contact points?

Giles Brook School 507627 and website as above

David Gamble and Mark Dolling (MK Council) 253052