



Louth St Michael's Primary School

Virtual External Audit of Governance March 2021 undertaken during the Covid 19 pandemic, all activities were virtual or paper based. There was no discussion with the full governing body as would be normal and therefore this has been a limited review.

Chair of Governors- Mr R Baddon

Head teacher – Ms S Addison

Makeup of the Governing Body

The Instrument of Government – 21 May 2015 states-

2 Parent Governors

1 Local Authority Governor

1 Staff Governor

1 Head teacher Governor (Ex-officio)

3 Foundation Governors including 1 Ex-officio (DBE appointed)

6 Co-opted governors

Current vacancies

2 Foundation Governor vacancies (including ex-officio)

Ofsted status – Good November 2016 (overdue inspection due to Covid restrictions)

S 48 status – Good- December 2017

Local authority -Lincolnshire

Annual Internal Audit

There is no evidence within the minutes that an internal audit has taken place in the last 18 months.

External Audit

The Governors were asked to undertake a skills audit for the external review of governance. Five replies were received.

Minutes from the Full Governing Body Meetings and Finance Committee meetings 2019 – 2021 were scrutinised.



Scrutiny of the school's website was undertaken

Copies of the School Improvement Plan and Implementation Plan 2020/21

Also seen: -

Ofsted Inspection Report November 2016

SIAMs Report December 2017

Initial discussion with Chair of Governors and Head teacher.

Findings

This is a Church of England VC primary school. An external review of Governance was requested by the Chair and the Locality Lead following a meeting with the Chair, local authority, Diocesan Deputy Director and the headteacher.

In September 2020 a new headteacher was appointed after the retirement of the long standing head.

The chair and vice-chair of governors are both co-opted governors. They have been in position for a number of years as have some of the other governors. The governing body have discussed the governance structure and the possible change to this to enable governors to be more effective and strategic.

During lockdown the Chair and headteacher met with the Locality Lead and the Diocesan Deputy Director to discuss the school's leadership and management structures, particularly with regard to governance. The current pandemic has curtailed monitoring activities but the chair and governors have endeavoured to continue to support the school particularly with regard to Covid safety and health and safety matters.

When speaking of governors in respect to roles and responsibilities I will not be including either the headteacher or the staff governor.

Both the chair and the vice-chair have a great deal of experience supporting the school through governance. Their roles and responsibilities (Website) are stated as finance, school meals, safeguarding and sports/PE. Other responsibilities are delegated to members of the governing body, these include SEND, Pupil Premium, communication including website, H & S, attendance, SIAMs, admissions and curriculum.

Scrutiny of the governor training schedule shows that governors have taken part in safeguarding and prevent training, and the updates. It is essential that members of the governing body are continually kept up to date regarding safeguarding- *this could be through LCC updates/ headteacher reporting etc.*



According to the schedule, a number of governors have taken part in additional training. There appears to be very little training with regard to the curriculum, roles and responsibilities in a Church school (Chair and Vice-Chair) and Church school distinctiveness/ SIAMs. It is essential that any training undertaken is disseminated throughout the whole of the governing body. It is not clear from the governing body minutes that this regularly takes place.

Full Governing Body (FGB) minutes have highlighted events linked to the pandemic including the use of the Covid grant and how children are accessing learning if they are self-isolating. For example, FGB minutes dated December 2020 state that the headteacher talked about Covid catch-up funding and a governor asked about national data. Previously in the same meeting a governor also asked about boosters for the SATs in May.

Overall the minutes of the FGB and the finance committee do not clearly show how the governing body are fulfilling their role as a strategic organisation. Previously, there has been little dialogue or questioning of senior leaders, for example September 2019 the headteacher gave his summary report, in this there was information linked to standards, assessment, EHCP (SEND) funding with no comments or questions from governors.

Questioning appears to be in the main linked to operational matters, for example numbers in a Covid bubble, staffing systems linked to Covid bubbles, lockdown alarms and running repairs. Please do not get me wrong, all of these issues are extremely important, but they are on the whole linked to the day to day running of the school, which is the role of the headteacher.

With regard to the statutory duty of the governing body: -

Oversee the financial performance of the school and making sure that its money is well spent, including pupil premium.

The minutes of the finance committee are detailed showing budget forecast and expenditure. The minutes of September 2020 show that LCC have made an analysis and report on the school budget and this was also highlighted in the minutes of FGB 24th September 2020. Once again it is vital that the governing body have full understanding of the financial undertakings of the school and are monitoring this to ensure that the money is well spent.

However, it is also necessary that the governing body are asking questions regarding the impact of the budget. The impact on pupil progress of specific pots of money- Pupil Premium Grant, sports funding and SEND funding. Please also note that the Pupil Premium strategy statement on the website is currently out of date (2019-2020)



Another of the three statutory functions of a governing body is: -

Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction

Once again, although the governing body are given information through headteacher update reports, SEND reports as well as some governor visit reports there is very little strategic questioning or discussion seen in the minutes. There appears to be little opportunity to look at the school's Church school vision or ethos, or indeed the curriculum intent (vision), implementation or impact. These are the essential qualities within the school, the vision should sit at the heart of everything the school does. In the SIAMs schedule – the core question *is-*

How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?

Governors should know the vision, what it means to them as a governor and how it influences every decision they make. It is unclear from the minutes or the website what the school's vision is. It is, however, good to see that governors are reaching out to parents/carers and asking for views and opinions through a parental questionnaire.

The third statutory function is: -

Hold executive leaders to account by monitoring the school's performance and the performance management of its staff

Although the governing body is beginning to ask more questions in relation to information given by the headteacher for example – FGB minutes 11th February 2021 show questions related to communicating with parents, support for staff and 'blind' testing there is still very little strategic overview of the curriculum, pupil progress, school improvement targets, vision or impact.

There is commitment within the governing body to developing an understanding of the enhanced expectations on governance and developing the effectiveness of governance. The governing body should work as one, making sure that roles are evenly distributed and not solely led by a small number. Any work, meetings, reports etc. undertaken should directly link to the school's overall strategic vision and development plan. Monitoring, including visits, asking for reports and information, pupil voice etc. should have a specific focus linked again to the strategic vision and improvement targets and should not encroach on operational matters. This must all be minuted so there is a clear trail of strategic governance.

The governing body has very recently taken on a new and very experienced Clerk to the Governors. This should enable the minutes to be precise in relation to specific strategic questioning and the clerk will be able to advice and support governors with regard to their key functions.



Normally areas identified for action in the external review would be discussed at a Board meeting. This has not taken place due to Covid restrictions. The report will be sent to the Chair to be distributed to the full governing body and then shared with the local authority and the Diocese.

Summary

I would like to thank all members of the governing body and in particular the Chair for their enthusiasm and support for the external review. As a progressive governing body I hope that the results of the review and consequently the action plan will enable you to develop and become stronger. It is essential that every governor commits to being active in contributing fully on a regular basis, sharing the workload and conscientiously completing tasks that they agree to lead on.

All governors must be fully committed to sharing responsibility for implementing recommendations arising from this review by ensuring that the action plan produced is linked to the School Development Plan. This must prioritise tasks and make clear who will do what and when so that every governor is clear about their own role. The aim should be to have this in place by the end of Summer term 20/21 if possible.

Summary recommendations

Further develop robust monitoring and accountability processes by ensuring that everyone involved in the governance of the school is clear about their role and responsibilities. Accesses high quality training, support and advice in order to be confident in carrying it out thereby sharing responsibility and building corporate capacity for school improvement.

Detailed actions to be undertaken through a clear action plan.

It is vital that considering and implementing the recommendations outlined in this review does not in any way detract governors from their ongoing core function of continually monitoring, and being accountable for, the educational performance of the school.

Actions

1. To undertake an annual internal audit, thus ensuring that the governing body has a clear understanding of its skills, developmental needs and gaps. (recommendation not in action plan)
2. To continue to discuss the model of governance- using the 20 questions on the NGA Governing Principals questionnaire and with external support. Making sure that the governing body works as a whole and that the governance model and calendar of meeting/ monitoring is useful, time smart for both the governors and school leaders and enables governor to fulfil their statutory functions successfully.



Ensure that governance does not over-burden leaders with administration, excessive reports or meetings in addition to those set out in the timetable.

3. All members of the Governing Body have a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities as strategic Leaders- **Statutory Function 1.-Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction.** To fully embed the school's vision and strategic plan, ensure it identifies the needs of the school in line with the school's ethos. Ask the questions-
'where do we want the school to be in 5 yrs.?'
'How do we get there?'
4. Ensure that all members of the governing body have a clear understanding of leader's curriculum intent, implementation and impact and can articulate their role within this. Governors will need to be able to talk with clarity about this during an Ofsted (S5) inspections.
5. SIAMs schedule- Leaders have developed a Christian vision that reflects the school's local context and they use the vision to underpin all decisions and actions taken.
6. All members of the governing body understand the impact of specific funding pots e.g. Pupil Premium not simply how much it is and what it is spent on.
7. To continue to develop expertise in the monitoring of standards, attainment and achievement to ensure that the governing body has an accurate view of standards in the school linked to the School Development Plan milestones.

-governors have a robust monitoring timetable linked to the SIP targets. Monitoring activities need to be strategic not operational (day to day running of the school) You need a strategic overview and evidence of impact on pupil progress.

-governors have sourced training to support them in the monitoring of standards.

-governor monitoring activities and outcomes are fed back to FGB and are a standing item on the agenda and minuted

-governor training schedule and impact is minuted on FGB as a standing item

-ensure that records of visit from the school adviser and any other relevant external sources are received in full by a relevant committees and discussed in a timely way.

I hope that this report and action plan now provides a sound basis to help the Board to underpin the shared commitment to developing really strong and effective governance at Louth St Michael's C of E Primary School.

Samantha Stewart

Diocesan Senior School Effectiveness Adviser

March 2021