

Report following external review of governance at Ruislip Gardens Primary School on 5 July 2017. The evidence gathered is presented under the criteria used by Ofsted when evaluating leadership and management including governance.

Context

Context

The school was inspected in March 2017. With the exceptions of Good grades for Early years and Personal development, behaviour and safety, all other grades were RI. SIP had previously advised G overall.

The Ofsted report provided this context

- *The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.*
- *The school is larger than the average-sized primary school. A greater proportion of pupils leave and join the school during the school year than is the case nationally.*
- *The school serves a wide range of ethnic groups. The largest is White British, followed by pupils from other White backgrounds and Asian or Asian British backgrounds.*
- *The proportion of pupils eligible for pupil premium funding is broadly in line with the national average. However, some year groups have a much higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils when compared with the national average.*
- *The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly in line with the national average.*
- *The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' progress and attainment by the time they leave the school*

The head has been in post for 5 years. Prior to that he was deputy head for 15 years. At the time of this review the Headteacher is on sick leave and the Deputy Head is Acting Head. The Assistant Head is Acting Deputy and goes on maternity leave at the end of term. Many changes have been made already to improve the quality of teaching and I am advised that the recent feedback from the CTG was more positive than in the previous meetings. I was advised however that staff are split re allegiances to substantive head and acting head.

The Finance Officer is also on sickness leave and the Business Manager is that post as well as her own.

The report had this to say about governance

- *The governors are committed to the school and are keen to contribute their skills and experience. However, they have not held the headteacher to account rigorously for the standard of education the school provides.*
- *Governors have access to a wide range of information about how well pupils learn and achieve. They visit the school regularly to meet leaders and see for themselves what is happening in classrooms. As a result, they are aware that pupils' achievement across the school is variable. However, they have*

not questioned leaders incisively on the reasons for this, or whether leaders' actions to address underachievement are securing rapid improvements.

- *Governors understand that the achievement of disadvantaged pupils needs to be better. However, their oversight of the pupil premium funding has lacked challenge. Consequently, leaders and governors are unclear about whether this funding is helping disadvantaged pupils to achieve as well as other pupils nationally.*

In the 2015-16 Performance tables the school was 88/125 similar schools. Girls in KS2 outperformed boys in reading and writing. The opposite was true in maths. The school was outperformed by the LA and nationally with regard to meeting expected standards in reading, writing and maths. However it met the current floor standards for pupils' progress and attainment when they left the school.

The process followed

In advance of the visit the following documents were scrutinised:

- Ofsted report
- SIP
- SEF
- GB impact statement for 2015-16
- Governor information on the website
- PE and Sport Premium information
- 2015-16 Performance tables
- Equality information
- May Parent Forum minutes.

Parent View was checked

During the visit meetings/interviews were conducted with:

- Sheila O'Neill. Acting Head
- Samantha Long. Clerk
- Stephen Courtnadge. Chair
- Munira Raja and Kenny Thomas. Recently appointed governors
- Stephen Courtnadge, Munira Raja Committee Chairs, and Andrew Halford Acting Vice Chair.

Ofsted stated that the **website** met the requirements for information to be published online so I did not conduct a full check.

The following documents were scrutinised in school:

- A range of governors' visits reports
- Gobs training record 15-16 and 16-17.
- Summary of skills audit.
- School improvement committee terms of reference
- Resources committee terms of reference
- Instrument of government
- Calendar of meetings.
- SFVS
- SIP.
- SI minutes 19/9/16

- Head's report 10/10/16.
- Minutes of FB 10/10/16
- Minutes of FB 23/1/17
- Head's May 2017 report
- Minutes of post inspection FB.22/5/17
- Policies checklist
- Training record for governors
- Terms of reference for committees
- Minutes of Challenge Task Group meeting 6/6/17
- Record of Pre Inspection visit

Key findings referenced to the criteria used by Ofsted when judging governance

1. **How effectively governors work with leaders to develop and communicate the vision, ethos and strategic direction of the school and develop a culture of ambition in which the highest achievement in academic and vocational work is recognised as vitally important.**

The website describes the school's values but does not set out a vision for the future. Evidence indicates that it is some years since the whole school was engaged in reviewing values and vision.

The 2016-17 SIP has 10 key aims one of which is to develop the effectiveness of the board. The section on governance is very weak and makes no reference to the core functions. Evidence indicates that the plan was written by the substantive head and was presented to the board for comment. That has been superseded by the Ofsted Action plan. That too is not robust. It was written by the Acting Head and the Assistant Head with input from the School Improvement Partner and leadership Team. It would be enhanced by explicit success criteria and milestones, and reference to role of the board in monitoring and evaluation.

The plan had very few costings. It was presented to Resources Committee on 28/2/17 and minutes indicate that governors were invited to send amendments to the clerk for forwarding to the Finance Officer. I was subsequently advised that the minutes did not fully reflect what had transpired and a more detailed discussion about post Ofsted finance did take place.

Recommendations

- Engage the whole school community in a review of the values and vision. Decide the vision with reference to the local, national and even global contexts. This will inform priorities on the next iteration of the SIP and will embed Ofsted's key issues in a more comprehensive plan for the future. **Resource: Values and vision consultation.**
- Negotiate with the Acting Head re an alternative format for the next iteration of the plan. Make explicit the links to the SEF and to the committee structure. **Resource: format for an action plan HIGH PRIORITY**

2. **The effectiveness of governors in discharging their core statutory functions, NB safeguarding, and how committed they are to their own development as governors in order to improve their performance.**

3. The effectiveness of leaders' and governors' work to raise awareness and keep pupils safe from the dangers of abuse, sexual exploitation, radicalisation and extremism and what the staff do when they suspect that pupils are vulnerable on these issues.

The chair has been a governor since Jan '16 and has been chair since January '17. He followed a Chair who had a short tenure from Jan – Dec 16 who had herself followed a longstanding Chair. The clerk who has been in place for 3 years is leaving at the end of term and thus far a successor has not been appointed. Her job description has never been discussed and she has not been appraised. The board has recognised the need to make the clerk's job description more comprehensive and for the amount of hours to be commensurate with the workload.

Evidence suggests that there is little/no structured in house induction for new governors

Committee meetings are scheduled in advance of board meetings and all agendas are headed by the core functions. Attendance at meetings has led to the clerk to check in advance whether enough governors plan to attend to ensure meetings are quorate.

According to the instrument of governance there are 18 governor positions with five vacancies (3 co-opted. 1 LA and 1 Parent). The skills audit indicated a range of skills as well as gaps in prior experience of working on a board, knowledge of wider community and financial planning . The training record provided by the clerk to governors indicated that the majority of governors have undertaken some training. The majority of governors are parents and the ones I met were appointed because there were more vacancies than nominations.

The chair and vice chair attend training on a regular basis and encourage other governors to do likewise. Governors are linked to year groups, subjects, marketing, safeguarding and health and safety.

There is a long list of policies including many that are non statutory. The list is held by the school rather than the clerk. They are all presented in due course to the board and reviewing them is a paper based activity.

The board has committees for Resources and School improvement. There is also a Strategy group but its meetings are not minuted. Challenges noted in the minutes of meetings were collated into a Board impact statement. This is very weak. It describes activity rather than impact of the board's actions on school improvement. Almost every statement leads one to say 'So what has been the impact so far?' or 'and what difference did that make?'

The terms of reference for Resources give no detail of the responsibilities for finance and buildings/H and S. For Personnel there are one to three word descriptions of functions and no reference to statutory policies or the SEF. In the School improvement terms of reference there are one /two words list of responsibilities. The SEF and SIP are given a brief mention.

Reports from committees are neither analytical nor evaluative. E.g. 'SI looks at data from all stages of the school'. '*Governors heard about the new way that the school reports on attainment and progress*'. '*School finances are looking healthy*'. Typically there are very few, fairly superficial questions on the head's reports.

The safeguarding and child protection policy runs to 20 pages. There is no index and so it is not easy to check whether all the statutory policies have been dealt with rigorously. Ofsted judged that arrangements for safeguarding were effective but made no comment re the contribution made by the board. Governors were not aware of the need to have at least one of their number trained in

safer recruitment or for every appointment panel to have at least one person who has undertaken safer recruitment training. The Acting Head is now acting DSL. She appears not to have a job description for that role. Governors and staff have been trained in Prevent. Two referrals were made to Channel and neither was taken further by the police.

Although I had included 'safeguarding audit' on the list of documents I would need to see, this was not presented.

Recommendations

- Ensure that at least one member of the board and at least one member of staff undertakes safer recruitment training ASAP. **HIGH PRIORITY**
- Commission a review of Safeguarding to ascertain the current position policy, practice and training of staff. **HIGH PRIORITY**
- Use the Clerking Competency Framework to inform the review of the job description. **Resource: Clerking competency framework HIGH PRIORITY**
- Downsize the board to 14 or 15. Governor Services will be able to advise re composition. Explain the scale of the task to all existing governors and give those that do not feel able to commit to their share of the work the opportunity to resign. No board can carry passengers and that is particularly important given the current circumstances. Use SGOSS <https://www.sgoos.org.uk/> and Inspiring Governance <http://inspiringgovernance.org/> to help recruit to fill skills gaps and ensure a wider range of community involvement. **HIGH PRIORITY**
- Establish an induction policy and identify the role of the clerk and the role of a buddy/mentor governor. **Resource: Induction protocol**
- Establish a code of conduct that makes explicit the expectations of governors. **Resources NGA code of conduct; Competency framework for governance**
- Consider reconfiguring to a 3 committee structure –Resources: Children, Families and Community; and Teaching and Learning. Review terms of reference for committees and assign lead responsibilities for each committee member linked to the terms of reference. **Resources: Terms of reference for committees; Framework for linking Ofsted to committees. HIGH PRIORITY**
- Work with SLT and the clerk to draw up a schedule of work for the board and its committees for the year. **Resource: Generic schedule of work**
- There is no requirement to have a safeguarding policy (See KCSiE Sept 2016, page 14). Consider agreeing SG principles and then separate policies for all that are statutory/important because of the context e.g. E Safety, staff code of conduct (distinct from staff handbook). **Resource: Example of safeguarding principles plus information re relevant issues/policies**
- Establish a job description for the Designated Safeguarding Lead. There is one in an annex in Keeping Children Safe in Education. Ensure that the Acting head and at least one governor complete the Safer recruitment training. The Acting Head also needs to do L3 Child protection training ASAP. If there's nothing imminent in the LA, Achieving for Children (Richmond and Kingston) may have something early in the term.
- Appoint 2 safeguarding governors and ensure that they monitor, systematically, safeguarding policies and practices in the school. I also advise them attending the LA training course on 12/10/17 13.00-16.00. **Resource. Safeguarding governors' job description; Safeguarding audit; Keeping children safe in Education. HIGH PRIORITY**
- Allocate statutory policies to committees and ensure that governors monitor implementation and evaluate impact, in line with their areas of lead responsibility, before deciding with staff what needs to be changed. **Resource: Policies checklist; framework for distributing leadership**

- Governors need to be informed of referrals to Channel so that the impact of the staff training can be evaluated.

4. **The extent to which governors' understanding of the strengths of the school and the areas requiring improvement, results in them providing a balance of challenge and support to leaders.**
5. **The effectiveness of the actions leaders take to secure and sustain improvements to teaching, learning and assessment and how effectively governors hold them to account for this, asking probing questions to ensure that they understand performance data and the impact of teaching, learning and assessment on the progress of pupils currently in the school**
6. **How effectively leaders and governors monitor the progress of groups of pupils to ensure that none falls behind and underachieve, and how effectively governors hold them to account for this.**

Ofsted found that the school's judgements of performance were overly optimistic. In the SEF provided for my visit there was data about EYs attainment in the outcomes section of the SEF but EYFS it was not covered separately in line with the Ofsted Evaluation Schedule. Neither did the school's SEF note a grade for Overall effectiveness. The school graded all other areas good. Each section of the SEF has a lengthy list of targets which cannot be tracked easily to the SIP. There is insufficient reference to impact. It includes several positive quotes from various reports by a school improvement partner one of whom had predicted Good for overall effectiveness. Governors were not aware of their responsibility for validating or challenging grades in the SEF and ensuring that action points were taken forward to the SIP.

The Pre Inspection visit report written by the school's then LA Adviser, judged that a follow up visit was not required. The Acting Head was very positive in interview about the initiatives she has introduced since the head's leave began. However minutes of the Challenge Task group meeting on 6/6/17 present a different picture. The Chair represented governors at that meeting. The report of the Termly Learning Conversation Summer 2016 stated that the likely outcome of inspection would be Good but that the school would have to produce evidence that 2016 KS results were atypical and standards across the rest of the school were atypical. The report was positive about the assessment system but it has since been decided to change to another package. Two governors were involved in the process. I was subsequently advised that the July meeting of the CTG was much more positive about progress.

There were two governors' days during the year. A significant number of governors' visits reports, in a variety of formats, were presented as part of the evidence base. The structure of the plan led some governors to make judgemental statements such as 'behaviour is excellent!!' That type of judgement should not be made by one governor on the basis of one visit. Nothing in the format of the report prompted links to SEF, SIP or statutory policies. Visits were largely class based and more attention should be devoted to meetings with lead members of staff, pupils and the school council and more attention to statutory policies, safeguarding, the SEF, the SIP.

The substantive head was not present at the post Ofsted full board meeting. Minutes indicated governors' anxiety re asking questions and holding the head to account. Opportunities for questions that were missed included 'What support has been provided for middle leaders requiring support? Impact on practice/outcomes for pupils?

Evidence indicates that data provided for committees is reproduced in the head's report to full board. This is neither efficient nor effective use of time. Performance data is not presented consistently in the same format, sometimes not in table form, therefore it is difficult to see trends and comparisons with National Averages. There were very few questions in the School Improvement Committee minutes of September 2016. Opportunities to question were missed. E.g. 5 lessons cause for concern should have prompted questions around the % of lessons observed, trend, the response

and whether there has been any progress. In response to the head's report to the full board meeting on 23/1/17, only 1 question was recorded, a basic one re FSM eligibility.

Reports often include 10-12 annexes, are frequently tabled on the night or just 2/3 days in advance of meetings.

Recommendations

- All governors need to be trained about the practical implications of the core functions of governance. This should include input re need to refer to the Ofsted Evaluation schedule when working on the SEF. **Resource: Ofsted handbook. See part 2. HIGH PRIORITY once board reconfigured.**
- If it's not already happening ensure that minutes of task group meetings are shared with all governors. **HIGH PRIORITY**
- Establish a visits policy that is agreed by staff and governors. **Resource: Visits policy which includes a proforma for reporting.**
- Review the structure and content of the head's reports. Consider making the committees the main forum for discussion. It is crucial that the governors are able to see patterns and trends over time. **Resources: Guidance on heads' reports; Head's report from a Junior school that was graded outstanding for leadership and management. HIGH PRIORITY**
- Governors are entitled to receive reports 7 days in advance of meetings. This needs to become standard practice. If each committee dealt with relevant documentation this should result in less being presented to full board meetings. **HIGH PRIORITY**
- Ensure that all governors receive training on the new assessment framework – Route Map. Negotiate with the head/Acting head re the data required, the frequency and formatting. **HIGH PRIORITY**

7. **How well leaders ensure that the school has a motivated, respected and effective teaching staff to deliver a high quality education for all pupils and how effectively governors hold them to account for this, ensuring that decisions about salary progression are explicitly linked to performance**
8. **The quality of continuing professional development for teachers at the start and middle of their careers and later, including developing leadership capacity, and how leaders and governors use performance management to promote effective practice across the school**
9. **The effectiveness of governors' performance management of the headteacher and the extent to which they provide support for an effective headteacher.**

The website has a strong statement praising the commitment and attributes of staff. However the Acting Head stated in the Task group meeting 6/6/17 that no one on the staff had the capacity to step up to Acting Assistant Head to cover maternity leave. That has since been reviewed and an appropriate appointment has been made.

There are known areas of concern in the school. Three teachers are leaving at the end of this term. I saw no evidence of this having been discussed in the Resources Committee. The Acting Head has been successful in recruiting to fill six vacancies. There is still one vacancy.

The board has a pay panel. Evidence indicates that the external adviser who advised on the head's appraisal was also paid to attend and advise the Pay panel. All staff who were eligible for an uplift received one.

Recommendations

- Well scaffolded CPD for all staff has to be priority in improvement plans. Governors need to

be given evidence of impact on outcomes for pupils. Whoever fulfils the role of head must be held to account by the board. **HIGH PRIORITY**

- At least two people should be involved in appointments and at least one of those should have completed safer recruitment training. If there are later problems with the behaviour of any of the newly appointed candidates this would be a key area of focus. **HIGH PRIORITY**
- Ensure that Andrew cascades the learning points from the training session on appraisal. The board should make the decision re who should be the external adviser. **Resources:** [headteacher appraisal pack](#); [National Standards of Excellence for Headteachers](#); [National Standards for Teachers](#). **HIGH PRIORITY**
- The pay panel should view anonymised documentation before deciding whether to approve recommendations re pay awards. This is a decision for governors. It is not usual to have an external adviser in those meetings.

10. How well leaders and governors engage with parents, carers and other stakeholders and agencies to support all pupils, ensuring that they are transparent and accountable, including in recruitment of staff, governance structures, attendance at meetings and contact with parents.

There is a parent forum and a separate fund raising body. At the May meeting of the PF the following was minuted:

'The absence of Mr Titeux on special leave had not been communicated to parents through email or letter and this was felt to be unsettling for some parents who feared the worse'. However Ofsted found that partnerships with parents were positive. 93 responded overnight to the Parent survey. about the school. I was advised that, since the inspection the SLT and governors attended the meeting with parents at the school. The post Ofsted action plan is on the website.

Staff have not been surveyed recently.

Recommendations

- Consider purchasing an externally managed staff survey, for example Keele surveys. Anecdotal evidence re staff unrest needs to be tested. **HIGH PRIORITY**
- Consider conducting governors conducting exit interviews. **HIGH PRIORITY**
- Use the website to raise the profile of the board and what it's working on.

11. The efficiency and effectiveness of leaders' use of the school's finances, including the use of the Pupil Premium budget, Y7 literacy and numeracy catch up premium, the primary PE and sport premium, and special educational needs funding, its impact on outcomes for pupils, and how effectively governors hold them to account for this.

The Business Manager is covering for the absence of the Finance Officer. Neither the Acting Head nor governors have expertise in finance.

Ofsted stated that a review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken. This has happened but the report was not available at the time of my visit.

Whilst the allocation for PPE and S is relatively small there is no breakdown of how the money was spent. Apart from numbers participating there is no evidence of impact or information about sustainability.

Variation in the number of year groups, 2/3 form entry, has not made for smooth budgeting.

The SFVS was populated by Yes to every question. However some of the answers did not address the question. For example Q. Does the school review its staffing structure regularly? A. The headteacher's report advises ongoing staff changes. Questions re budget setting and monitoring were answered with no reference to an in year deficit of £63k or the fact that an £11k unpaid bill for extending the car park is now, with interest, £19k. Further expenditure is due for the roof. The school's share of the cost is £34k. Hence although there is an overall carry forward of around £100k actual reserves are around £40k.

I found no evidence of scenario building in preparation for fairer funding although recent news from the DfE indicates that no school will be worse off.

Recommendations

- As a matter of urgency review the day to day management of finances. Recruit at least one new governor or associate member with financial skills. Perhaps an internal audit?
- As planned, make every effort to recruit at least one governor with financial expertise.
- Review the staffing structure. Explore options for building capacity at every level. **Resource:** [School workforce planning guidance](#)

12. How well leaders and governors promote all forms of equality and foster greater understanding of and respect for people of all faiths (and those of no faith), races, genders, ages, disability and sexual orientations (and other groups with protected characteristics), through their words, actions and influence within the school and more widely in the community

The information re Equality on the website is not compliant with the general and specific duties of the Equality Act. It does not address the 9 protected characteristics in relation to staff, pupils and families. This is an essential precursor to objective setting.

Recommendations

- Ensure that staff and governors are aware of the requirements of the Equality Act and that at least one SMART objective is set that relates to the profile of the school community.
Resource: [Ppt slides](#)

Conclusion

The school leadership team and the board are in urgent need of a range of expertise. The board has recognised this as has the Governance Support Service. Until the capacity of the board is enhanced a number of high priority issues such as raising standards and monitoring and evaluating safeguarding cannot be addressed. Once a viable number of effective governors are in place training to build expertise is essential. Succession planning prior to the departure of the chair is urgent.

It is crucial that the staff team work collaboratively and put the children and school above personality issues. Uncertainty remains about whether the head will be fit to return in September. Whatever happens the leadership team would benefit from mentoring by an experienced Head. This should help them to develop a more strategic view of leadership whilst developing a strong and effective whole staff team that can help to deliver the school's vision.

A whole school review of values and vision could refocus everyone on what really matters – maximising pupils' life chances and ensuring that the school becomes Good as quickly as possible.

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11 July 2017