



IGHTHAM PRIMARY SCHOOL

Annual Governance Statement 2016/17

This is the Governors' annual review of some of the key issues which the School has had to deal with in the last academic year, most of which are still important today and which will be of interest to parents. The review is not a substitute for the Website or for the Head Teacher's weekly summary of events, but is a contribution to the wider efforts to develop good communications and understanding between Governors, Staff and Parents.

Introduction

Change is a constant theme for most of us and the organisations in which we work and play in both the public and private sectors. Some institutions cope with change better than others, as a result of which some succeed and move on from strength to strength whilst others are less successful. Life in the education sector is no exception, as anyone who has kept an eye on our Head's weekly newsletter or our School website will testify. As examples; funding problems, curriculum changes, the pressure to become an academy, OFSTED inspections and, not least, the constant annual turnover of children as some 30 leave us each year and a new 30 join us, ensure that we are all kept on our toes.

It was against this background that we began the year in September 2016 with a staff which, as usual, had to face all the changes, new and old, which were thrown at them. "Nothing new here", you might say, but the question was "will these changes set back the School in its constant drive to improve performance? Will we lose some of our ability to offer such a wide range of extra curricula activities? What about our effective use of our woodlands?"

In the event, we need not have worried. The Governors and Staff were delighted in July 2017 to be told that a detailed external review of all our key activities confirmed that our new colleagues had integrated well and are playing their full part in delivering very good performance at all levels, both academically and in a wide range of sports where we are now regarded as 'the team to beat' by other schools much bigger than Ightham. Keeping this up on a consistent basis is the ongoing challenge which we believe our Staff are more than capable of meeting.

Governance and Management

Within the School the operational responsibilities rest with the Head Teacher and his Staff, led by the Senior Leadership Team. All the Staff work within a system of target setting which, in good measure, is derived from the School Development Plan. The Plan itself is a key document from which the Head's own targets are agreed with the Governors. These targets are monitored by designated Governors. Excellent progress has been made.

The Full Governing Body (FGB) has met for its 6 rostered meetings per year but a number of additional special meetings were also held to deal with some topics in more detail and for training purposes – Safeguarding and the new Maths Curriculum were two such examples. On a number of occasions, individual Staff members presented special topics to the FGB. Attendance by Governors at all these meetings was very high.

During the year, Julie Avery, the Staff Governor, was succeeded by Victoria Comber-Livesey and two new Parent Governors, Paula Freeman and Richard McKenna were elected by parents to fill vacancies arising from earlier gaps. Kevin Nolan resigned at the end of the year because of business commitments.

In addition, the Governors continue to take part in a number of sub-committees – Performance & Strategy, Premises, Finance, Staff & Marketing – where much of the more detailed work of guiding the School's progress takes place. Most of the Governors also take a more in-depth interest in a School-wide topic and they keep the FGB informed. Special attention is paid to the effective use of the Pupil and Sports Premiums which is an important basis for the legally required monitoring of progress.

Earlier in 2017 the Governors carried out a detailed assessment of their own skills and experience. The 100% responses were analysed and presented by the Governors' professional Clerk, Yolanda Tredoux. The Governors were pleased with the strengths and competences which emerged. They will use the resultant document, when vacancies occur in future, in order to maintain a substantial breadth of skills working for the School, and bringing to bear expertise which would not be otherwise available – and for free!!

The School in general, ably supported by the PSA in particular, is very happy to play an important part in the affairs of Ightham's wider community. This includes good relationships with the Parish Council and our neighbours in Oldbury Lane. By and large the arrangements for getting to and from school work well and the great majority of parents cooperate but there are still a few who seem to think that the rules do not apply to them and who can be very rude to staff who politely remind them of our responsibility towards the School and our neighbours.

School Performance

Monitoring of key academic subjects is undertaken by Governors throughout the year. Both KS1 and KS2 test results were again better than either the National or Kent results.

Work on diminishing the difference between the achievements of Pupil Premium children and others continues to produce excellent results.

A higher than average percentage of pupils gained places in Kent Grammar Schools.

Finance

Last year's review explained the importance of pupil numbers in state maintained schools' finances because the biggest single source of funding is the simple product of multiplying school headcount by roughly £3,000. This accounts for $\frac{3}{4}$ of our income, a much higher percentage than many other schools because our Pupil Premium numbers are so small. In recent years, Ightham

has been able to benefit from gradually increasing pupil numbers but that period of growth is over, now that the School is close to capacity.

The Governors' responsibility is to agree the School's budget and three-year plan, to monitor progress as each year unfolds and to take any corrective action that arises. Of particular concern is making sure that we are able to afford to maintain Ightham School's seven class structure and to sustain the wider range of sporting and other extracurricular activities for which we are known. Our Finance, Staff & Marketing Committee meets quite regularly, reports to the Full Governing Body at every meeting, recommends the budget and monitors progress on a month by month basis.

Education's financial background in the media is dominated by national Government policies which continue to seek economies by, for example, reducing the headcount grant, currently by 1½% per annum, or by passing on new costs to schools such as the new apprenticeship scheme. Even more importantly, in the short run, is the national review of school funding, but there is a danger that a school such as Ightham may lose out under the new proposals. However, Government is making more positive noises about school funding since the election but we remain cautious. Any near-term relaxation would be a welcome bonus but we have no option but to plan on the assumption that the squeeze continues.

In fact, we are doing better than many other schools in Kent. In 2016/7, we made a break-even budget which we achieved leaving a balance at the end of the year. This will help make up for some of the increasing cost pressures in the new financial year, which started in April.

To enable the School to continue providing our very wide range of activities including swimming, which is a core part of the national curriculum, reliance is placed on parents continuing to make voluntary donations when requested to do so.

Capital expenditure is a continuing worry because our modest £6,000 allowance from KCC, down from five times that in 2010, does not give us much scope for anything other than the most basic improvements. That is where the PSA is so important to us. Their ability to support the School is second to none and enables the School to do things which would otherwise be quite impossible. Their work is invaluable not only to the School but also to the Ightham community at large. A parent has raised with us the possibility of developing a 'Friends of Ightham' scheme to supplement the work of the PSA and this is under consideration. Great care will be taken to avoid duplicating the work of the PSA and to recognising other fundraising efforts that may be in progress in Ightham at the same time.

Academies

The Governors have continued to keep under review the possibility of joining with other likeminded and similar schools to form an Academy although it is still the case that the benefits for our children, staff and parents are still not very obvious. The Governors asked three of their number, including the Head, to keep a closer eye on relevant developments and to report back regularly to full Governor Meetings. The attitude of the Government is important. During the year that attitude has moved from a requirement for schools to change, to a more neutral position, but the underlying pressure to join in with a so-called MAT (multi academy trust) is still evident. Most important, from Ightham's point of view, is the management and academic support traditionally

provided by KCC to schools of our size. As more and more schools in Kent become academies, it is self-evident that KCC may have difficulty in providing the support we need, in which case there is an argument for going elsewhere. We successfully contracted-out catering some years ago and, more recently, we brought in-house the bursary service from KCC. We understand KCC is now planning to put most of its residual services into a separate organisation, leaving schools to contract or go elsewhere. That might turn out to be the trigger which speeds up Academisation, but we have not yet come across a viable long term solution. We are continuing to actively monitor developments.