

Annual Governance Statement 2019/2020

Welcome to the Governors' annual review of an academic year which has turned out to be a year like no other. Here are some of the key issues affecting the school and the roles the governors have played in addressing them. It is not a comprehensive report but rather picks up on key developments and matters of interest to the wider school community.

The year began in a fairly predictable way with governors focusing on their three core functions:

- Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction
- Holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils
- Overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure its money is well spent

The governors carry out these functions by meeting six times a year as a Full Governing Body and additionally as three smaller committees focusing on Premises, Finance and Performance and Strategy. At these meetings we review and analyse data, share information and expertise, and question and support the work of the school and its leaders to ensure we are continually striving to achieve the best possible outcomes for all our pupils.

We also make visits into school to monitor practices and progress on the ground. Policies are regularly reviewed to ensure they are fit for purpose and that we are meeting our legal responsibilities. We are supported by a professional clerk who aids our ability to carry out our roles whilst ensuring we are well informed and compliant in our work.

We had some changes in the make up of the Governing Body with a new Chair and Vice-Chair elected and we welcomed two new parent governors and one co-opted governor on to the Board. Two governors, Tina Freedman and Richard Edge-McKenna, who had made extremely valuable contributions to the Board left us early in the academic year, but we are pleased to say that their expertise will not be lost as they will remain with us as Associate Members. Hugh Stirk, our former Chair, also remained with us as a member of the board so we continued to benefit from his knowledge and experience. We therefore continue to be a strong Governing Body with a wide range of skills which works well together.

As the year developed we obviously had to adjust some of our working practices, but we continued to meet regularly by zoom and were in frequent contact with the Head Teacher.

School Improvement

Our focus at the beginning of 2019 was to oversee school improvement led by our School Development Plan. Some of the main areas to be addressed were:

Raising the standard and enjoyment of reading throughout the school

Ensuring the most able pupils were challenged and stretched throughout the whole curriculum.

To further enhance the highly positive, tangible contribution to the life of the school and the wider community by the pupils.

To develop a staff and pupil wellbeing policy.

We also reviewed our strengths and weaknesses by carrying out a skills audit, something we regularly do as a governing board. Governors then identified and attended relevant training courses such as: Safeguarding, Questions and Challenge, Local Authority Governor Briefings, Understanding Primary Data and Safer Recruitment training. This ensured we were able to carry out our roles effectively. Some governors have more involvement in specific areas –

Safeguarding and Health and Safety for example. This allows them to spend time achieving a more in-depth understanding of any of the issues faced which are then reported back to the Full Governing Body.

Ofsted:

We were visited by Ofsted in early March and were delighted that our view of the School was reflected in their report. The hard work and dedication of the staff was acknowledged and the School was awarded a grading of Outstanding in all areas of inspection. We were the first primary school in Kent to attain Outstanding under the new inspection framework brought in by Ofsted in September 2019. Many congratulations once again to the whole school community on this achievement.

Coronavirus Pandemic

20th March 2020 saw the closure of schools to the majority of pupils. At this point our priorities as governors necessarily had to shift. With only two days' notice we found ourselves in a new world of rapidly changing advice and requirements. Governors did their best to support the school leaders and staff trying to interpret and implement government guidance whilst ensuring everything that could be done was being done to keep pupils, staff and the wider community safe. This has been an extremely challenging time and the school should be commended for its achievements in remaining open to vulnerable children and those of Key Workers throughout the last four months of the academic year. In addition to this, and with only two days' notice, teachers adapted to a new way of working and were also supporting learning for those who had to stay at home. Thanks to the efforts of the staff, the school was then able to reopen to Reception and Year 1 followed by Year 6 before the end of the school year. This was not the case for all schools across England. Governors witnessed, and were very grateful for, the huge amount of work undertaken by staff in order to make this possible. The community is extremely fortunate to have such a committed and selfless staff team at the school. We have monitored the situation, made sure risk assessments are robust and effective, and are keeping a close watch on the health and wellbeing of the school community. Our duties to safeguarding remain a priority.

Finance

Balancing a budget where costs continue to rise and funding is ever squeezed is never easy and this year was no different. There were many necessary repairs and other works to be carried out around the school site; fence repairs, tree works, sinks and plumbing replacements, boiler repairs and roof work to fix a leak to name but a few. In addition to this, there were extra costs associated with the pandemic not covered by or contributed towards by any government funding; equipment for pupils, cleaning supplies, PPE and staff overtime for example. We are grateful to the work of the PSA whose funds continue to be so important to the running of the school, however we also accept that their financial contributions were far lower than in previous years due to the effects of the pandemic on their fundraising activities. Despite all this, the end of the financial year was reached without a deficit. We continue to monitor the budget and scrutinise spending.

In summary

Nobody could have planned for the 2019/20 academic year that was! That said governors have adapted and worked with the school and our vision that 'pupils should leave Ightham Primary School with their understanding deepened, their minds enriched, and their hearts inspired, so that they love learning and embrace the challenges of the future' remains central to the work we do. We hope that in the coming year we will once again be able to take part and excel in the huge variety of sporting activities we have been used to at Ightham Primary School. We also look forward to school performances and community activities as well as academic enjoyment and excellence.