

Annual Governance Statement 2020/2021

Welcome to the Governors' annual review of an academic year which has once again been far from normal due to the ongoing pandemic. Whilst there have been some necessary adjustments to ordinary business, Governors have worked together with the school to achieve their three core functions of:

- **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.**

During the 2020/2021 academic year, Governors carried out the majority of meetings and business via Zoom. We met seven times as a Full Governing Body; one of these was an extraordinary meeting called to consider the Government's decision to close schools to the majority of pupils at very short notice in January 2021. In addition to this, Governors also met as three sub-committees focusing on Premises, Finance and Performance and Strategy.

Governors would normally make visits into school to monitor practices and progress on the ground. For the majority of the 2020/2021 academic year we followed Government advice and adhered to the school risk assessment and adapted to virtual visits where possible to keep in touch with life at school. Our priorities throughout the year were safeguarding, health and safety and wellbeing of the staff and pupils. Rodney Chartres, the Vice Chair, and I had regular meetings with the Head Teacher to offer support and to monitor the school's ongoing response to the pandemic. In addition to the normal schedule of review of whole school policies there were some updates, amendments and additions that were made in response to the pandemic, for example the Remote Education Policy and the Catch Up Premium Plan. Governors also reviewed these to ensure they were fit for purpose and that our legal responsibilities were met. Thankfully our professional clerk was also there to help us carry out our roles whilst ensuring we were well informed and compliant in our work.

By the end of the year we had welcomed two new Governors onto the board, Stacey McAdie (Parent Governor) and Cedric Read (Co-opted Governor). We are now a strong board of twelve Governors and two associate members.

Vision, ethos, strategic direction.

The uncertainty of the pandemic and the ever-changing advice and guidance from Government has made it difficult to plan very far into the future. However, we are fortunate to have a dedicated staff team who have not lost sight of the aims the school holds for its pupils despite the challenging difficulties and obstacles of the last academic year (and before). Governors have witnessed the tireless efforts of the team to keep the school a happy place to be where pupils want to come and feel safe and want to learn even in spite of the virus. It is a triumph and a credit to the School/Governor partnership that 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.

Performance

Whilst the traditional hard data was not available last year (no SATs took place for example) Governors reviewed a wide variety of indicators to measure performance. As previously mentioned, and as expected in the circumstances, we focused heavily on the health and safety and wellbeing of staff and pupils. We monitored risk assessments to ensure they were robust and effective, evaluated wellbeing through surveys and by being attentive to indicators such as staff and pupil absences and turnover. Safeguarding remained a priority and monitoring visits to review safeguarding continued throughout the year, albeit remotely for the most part.

We were also responsible for ensuring the school's remote education offer was in line with Government guidance and we were grateful for the efforts of the whole school team who adapted to a new way of working and continually strived to improve the home schooling experience for pupils and their families.

At the end of the year we began monitoring the school's delivery of a recovery curriculum designed to address areas of need and to help pupils once again achieve to the best of their abilities with appropriate use of the Catch-up premium.

We also reviewed our own performance as Governors by spending a morning considering how we carry our roles and how best to improve our work in the future. We reviewed our strengths and weaknesses by carrying out a skills audit, something we regularly do as a Governing Board. Governors attended online training and briefings in order to stay abreast of national and local issues and of course to be guided as we navigated our way as Governors in a pandemic.

Finance

Once again the balancing of the budget was not made any easier this year by the extra costs associated with the pandemic; additional equipment for pupils, cleaning supplies, PPE and staff overtime for example. This extra expenditure was not unfortunately covered by an equal injection in funding from the Government.

On a positive note, the school was able to expand its space by taking on the new Oldbury Annexe. This building, which was once the old scout hut, was refurbished and revamped into three new rooms by the Parish Council. The School now has wonderful new space for break out rooms, quiet study, staff planning and preparation and an office for our new Family Liaison Officer (FLO). We are extremely grateful to the Parish Council who gave the school the funds to make this possible. We must also acknowledge the work of The Friends of Ightham School (FOIS) charity which has funded the FLO, a role the school has never been able to employ in the past and which stands to improve school experiences for many of our families.

There were also the usual costs associated with the maintenance of the buildings and premises too. However with careful budgeting, much handywork from our caretaker Mr Payne, and with thanks to the PSA whose funds continue to be so important to the running of the school, the School broke even at the end of the financial year. We continue to monitor the budget and scrutinise spending.

In summary

Throughout the changing phases of the pandemic over the last academic year, Governors have strived to find the right balance between challenge and support when carrying out our role. This has been an undeniably difficult period for all schools, made all the more so by the endurance test it has turned out to be, and Governors have once again witnessed a monumental effort by the whole Ightham School team to continue to make sure the school gives the best possible experience to all its pupils, whatever the circumstances. The community is extremely fortunate to have such a committed and selfless staff team at the school.

As we move into the new academic year with many of the restrictions and controls of last year relaxed, governors will continue to support the school as it endeavours to provide a rich and varied curriculum for its pupils whilst also keeping them and the school community as safe as possible. Our hope is that in addition to achieving academic enjoyment and excellence the school will once again be able to enjoy taking part in more sporting activities and school trips, and will be welcoming visitors back into school and taking part in community activities as well.

However, experience prepares us for more disruption. The school has an Outbreak Management Plan in place and is ready to reintroduce a range of safety measures if necessary.