

**External Review of Governance  
Roach Vale Primary School**

<p><b>Completed By:</b></p> <p>Stephen Adamson on behalf of Governor Services, Essex Education Services</p> <p><b>On:</b> 6<sup>th</sup> February 2015</p>	<p><b>Who seen/working with:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Headteacher</li> <li>• CoG and the governing body</li> </ul>	<p><b>Sources of evidence:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews and discussion with the HT and governors</li> <li>• Scrutiny of documentation, including governing body minutes, committee minutes, headteacher reports, Ofsted report (June 2013) and school website</li> </ul>
<p><b>Judgements made:</b> Governance is very good with no significant weaknesses. Governors are highly committed and ambitious both for the school and for the quality of their own work.</p>		
<p><b>Objective/purpose of visit:</b> To review the effectiveness and capacity of the governing body (GB) in meeting the nine criteria for the effectiveness of governance (Ofsted) and to enable the GB to identify priorities and actions for further improvement.</p>		
<p><b>Context of review:</b> The review was commissioned by the governing body in order to assess the quality of its practice. The last Ofsted inspection was June 2013, when the school was rated good overall and good in all categories, apart from behaviour which was outstanding. Comments on the governing body were very favourable.</p> <p>The chair is new to the post, and the previous chair is still active on the governing body.</p> <p>The school is slightly smaller than average for a primary school, but the roll is growing. It draws a large number of its pupils from a socially disadvantaged area of Colchester. The school's experienced deputy headteacher left last year and two attempts to fill the vacancy failed to identify a suitable candidate. Instead, two of the existing staff have been promoted to assistant head.</p>		
<p><b>Observations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The GB is led by a highly committed CoG who has only been chair since September 2014, though he was vice chair prior to becoming chair. He regularly attends training courses, including completing the Chairs of Governors Development Programme, and encourages the active participation of other governors. His expectations of himself and for</li> </ul>		

the school are high.

- The GB recognises that it is currently very effective but is keen to continue to improve. Most governors attended the afternoon session of this review.
- The GB conducts an annual governors' day, and has two whole-governing body training sessions per year. Other than the chair and one other governor, attendance at other, external training sessions is low. The governing body's level of knowledge is high, but it needs to ensure that it remains fully skilled and abreast with developments affecting governance.
- The headteacher is very experienced and committed, and works very well with the governing body. She has regular diarised meetings with the chair and they meet frequently at other times. The GB is aware of the need for succession planning and should ensure that it is prepared for the possibility of eventually working with a less experienced headteacher who may not be so supportive of the governing body.
- The GB has recently conducted a skills audit, which identified no significant areas of weakness. It reconstituted in the autumn, reducing from 14 to 12. It currently has two parent governor vacancies (although two of the co-opted governors are parents at the school). The school has difficulty in getting parents involved at all levels other than with their own children. The GB should review its membership at the end of the year and consider whether it needs to continue trying to get four parent members or whether to use two places to gain representation from the community.
- The governing body has not conducted self-assessment, this review being intended to fulfil that purpose. Governors are advised to conduct an annual self-review, either as a whole body or, as recommended in the APPG 20 Questions, by the chair reviewing the contribution of each governor and the GB conducting a 360 degree review of the chair.
- The clerk provides professional and knowledgeable support to the governing body and to all its committees. She is part of the Essex clerking service and is currently secretary to the Essex Clerks' Association.
- Pupils eligible for the Pupil Premium work to a high level of achievement, and last year those in Key Stage 1 outperformed the non-Pupil Premium children. The school has been ranked among the top 100 schools in the country for sustained improvement in attainment at L4 or above by disadvantaged pupils in Reading, Writing and Maths each year from 2012-2014.
- There are three committees: Curriculum, Finance and Personnel. Although two is common for a school of this size, there is no recommendation for change as the committees work effectively with one meeting per term, and business is fully reported to the full GB.

#### **Review of documentation:**

- All documentation is very well presented and organised. Minutes clearly record challenge provided by governors. However, there is not always a record of probing follow-up questions being asked.
- Full governing body meetings conclude with reflection on the impact of the meeting on the school's children.
- Papers are sent out in advance of meetings.
- Induction is provided for new governors.
- Governors regularly visit the school and submit visit reports.
- The governing body has a code of conduct based on the NGA model and standing orders.
- The website contains a good range of information about the school and the governing body. Not all the statutory policies have been posted on it. It is currently being redesigned.

**Recommendations:**

- The school's ethos and vision are strong and repeated on GB documents. The GB is advised to keep these fresh by revisiting them with the senior leadership team within the next two years, or earlier if there is a significant change in personnel.
- The GB should also find time every two years to consider with the headteacher where the school sees itself in the next three to five years, in the light of anticipated threats and opportunities.
- Governors involved in looking at staff appraisal and pay decisions should satisfy themselves that the process is working well by looking at a small sample of appraisal reports with the teachers' names and other identifying information removed.
- The school's self evaluation document is presented by the headteacher to governors each term. Governors should scrutinise it at least annually so as to challenge and formally endorse the judgements made in the document.
- The Pupil Premium is used very effectively, but the GB needs to approve the statement before it is put on the website and ensure that it meets the statutory requirement to include the planned uses for the current year's funding.
- Governors are responsible for the approving the school's planned use of the PE and Sports Premium and should see that the statement on its use on the website includes what the last year's fund was spent on and the impact it had, and how this year's will be spent.
- Unless it were to contain a personal item that should be confidential, the headteacher's objectives (but not the review of performance) should be shared by the GB.
- The safeguarding governor should check the central record of recruitment checks once or twice a year to ensure that it is complete and up to date.
- Confidential items should be minuted separately from non-confidential ones, rather than all the minutes of a meeting being marked as confidential. This applies particularly to the Personnel committee.
- The GB, or Curriculum committee, should approve the pupil performance targets set for the end of KS2 before they are submitted to the LA, agreeing with the headteacher the appropriate level of "stretch" and challenge to be contained in the targets.
- The current budget surplus is 9 percent. Governors should see that the surplus does not rise above this amount unless there are clearly identified medium-term needs planned for which a surplus is necessary.