

***REVIEW OF GOVERNANCE***  
***MEADOWFIELD PRIMARY SCHOOL***  
***FINAL REPORT – 19<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2015***

## **THE PROCESS**

Our Review of Governance is a non-threatening, developmental process involving guided discussions rather than questionnaire answer, supported by reviewing a number of key school documents to further inform our conversations and understanding of the school.

Qualitative analysis of the content of discussions is triangulated and forms the basis of this report structured to meet the needs of the school and raise suggestions for further action and development.

Following an initial scoping meeting with the Headteacher and the Chair of Governors on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2015, a document review was undertaken. The documents reviewed included:

- Latest Ofsted report
- Ofsted data dashboard
- School website
- Governance structures, committee work programmes and terms of reference
- Governing Body and committee agendas & minutes
- Headteacher's reports to Governing Body
- School Development Plan and related papers
- Governing Body Development Plan
- Governing Body Skills Audit
- Governing Body Self-review (2014)
- Governor Induction Pack
- Papers relating to Governors' visits to school

The document review was accompanied on 19<sup>th</sup> May by guided discussions with 12 of the 14 current members of the Governing Body (two of them Associate Members), including the Headteacher.

## **VISION, ETHOS & STRATEGIC DIRECTION**

### ***Strengths***

1. Governors are very aware that their role is strategic rather than operational and identify the School Improvement Plan as a key driver of their work, particularly at committee level.
2. The Headteacher and Chair provide strong direction for the work of the Governing Body and ensure that agendas and documentation are focused on strategic issues relating to school improvement.
3. Governors share a common purpose for the school.
4. Governors are invited to staff meetings and training sessions to identify development priorities for the coming school year and several take up this opportunity.
5. The Governing Body considers progress in implementing the School Improvement Plan on a regular basis and benefits from clear and detailed evaluations of progress presented by the Headteacher.

### ***Areas for Development***

6. The school is engaged in reviewing its Vision and Values in a process led by one of the Governors, drawing on her professional expertise. As this process continues, the Governing Body should ensure that it feels ownership of the Vision and Values and, in particular, has a clear, shared understanding of its role in putting these into effect.
7. Although Governors are clear that their role is strategic, there is not always a shared understanding of what this means in practice. The Governing Body should consider a structured activity to enable Governors to explore this issue together, as part of its continued development.
8. There is scope for further alignment of Governing Body activity along the priorities of the School Improvement Plan, particularly link governor roles and arrangements for visits to school.

## **EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE & STATUTORY DUTIES**

### ***Strengths***

9. The Chair and the Headteacher share a commitment to effective governance based on the strategic role of the Governing Body. This is recognised and valued by other Governors.
10. There is a Governing Body Action Plan, based on the self-review carried out by the Governing Body in 2014 and focused on well-chosen priorities (reconstitution; monitoring the School Improvement Plan; and engagement with parents). However, the Strategic Committee drew up this plan and not all Governors could speak with confidence about it.
11. The Governing Body has developed a robust process for inducting new governors, including an induction pack and meetings with the Chair to discuss the role of Governors and the school's expectations. The induction pack draws on a good model produced on behalf of the Temple Newsam Learning Partnership.
12. There is a good record of governor involvement in development and training activities covering a range of key governance issues. Governors report that this has contributed to better questioning at meetings.
13. Governors reported that agendas and papers were normally issued in a timely fashion prior to meetings.
14. Governors reported that meetings provided good focus on school issues and were not dominated by "business" items.
15. Governing Body minutes (including those for committees) provide clear evidence of challenge.

16. Governors noted the significant contribution that the Clerk had made to increasing the effectiveness of governance at the school.
17. Governors have established a coherent committee structure with clear and appropriate terms of reference, to enable business to be dealt with effectively and efficiently.
18. An audit of governor skills has been undertaken; this has been used to inform governor recruitment and future training.
19. A list of policies approved by the Governing Body is maintained, with dates for review clearly identified.
20. The Governing Body has taken advantage of Associate Member status to retain the involvement of a colleague with expertise in legal matters.

### ***Areas for Development***

21. The Governing Body has developed very effective structures and systems and these are likely to become even more effective in practice as Governors become more experienced in using them and also identify any minor refinements that may be required.
22. In order to sustain the development of the Governing Body, an explicit process for Governing Body self-review and skills audit, drafting of the Governing Body Action Plan (including a training plan) and review of that plan should be embedded in the medium-term planning of the Governing Body's work. Governor leaders should take ownership of this process.
23. As part of the next stage in its development, the Governing Body may wish to consider developing one or more "impact statements", showing how they identified a particular priority in school, what they decided to do about it, the action taken by the school, how the Governing Body monitored progress and the impact that the action had.
24. Although training on the use of pupil data has been provided by the school, some Governors considered that further training was needed to develop their confidence and understanding further.
25. Governors should continue to develop the e-communication of papers to increase their effectiveness.
26. The Pupil Committee is chaired by a governor who is employed at the school. Although this is no longer illegal and it is important to emphasise that the review did not produce any suggestion of impropriety, the advice of the National Governors' Association is against a governor employed at the school chairing a committee of this sort, due to potential conflicts of interest "which while not being significant enough for them not to be members of the committee, may compromise their position as chair".

## **MONITORING & EVALUATION**

### ***Strengths***

27. All Governors report that the Governing Body has a culture in which it is easy to ask questions to challenge the school and that Governors are challenging more consistently than previously.
28. Governors are provided with a wide range of relevant, honest and transparent data and information by the Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher, including half-termly data on pupil progress and quality of teaching. The Governing Body also invites members of staff to attend meetings on a regular basis, to explain the school's work in implementing particular priorities (such as Restorative Practice or More Able Pupils). Some external triangulation of school judgements is provided by reports of the School Improvement Adviser which are shared with Governors.

29. The Governing Body discusses the Ofsted Data Dashboard and several Governors have access to RAISE online.
30. There are plans for Governors to participate in book scrutinies, in response to changing Ofsted inspection practice.
31. There is good documentation to support Governors' visits to school, including a Visits Policy, Protocol for Visits and a standard form to record and report upon visits. The record form includes prompts that make explicit links to the School Improvement Plan.
32. Governors make frequent visits to school. A Governors' Participation Day has proved particularly successful.

### ***Areas for Development***

33. Governors are linked to a year group and most are also linked to a specific aspect of the school (e.g. Mathematics). Although there is some very good practice, the effectiveness of these arrangements, particularly those linking Governors to aspects of the school, is inconsistent. The Governing Body is recommended to review these arrangements so as to provide greater clarity of expectation in relation to the focus of the role and how often it should be carried out.
34. There may be a case for reducing the number of Governors linked to aspects of the school and focusing Governors' availability into their class-linked roles.
35. Governors' class-linked roles and the Governors' Participation Day should be linked more strongly to an annual programme of monitoring and evaluation of school improvement priorities.
36. Some Governors would prefer to visit school in pairs, to provide mutual support.
37. The Governing Body should consider making greater use of external reviews of aspects of the school, to provide triangulation of judgements.
38. More developed engagement with stakeholders (see below) would provide further evidence for triangulating evaluations of the school, by identifying the perceptions of parents and pupils.

## **STRENGTHENING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP (SUPPORT & CHALLENGE)**

### ***Strengths (see also section 3 above)***

39. The Headteacher and the Chair provide very effective leadership for the Governing Body, with a consistent focus on strategic issues.
40. Governors were confident that neither the Head nor the Chair would allow the focus on school improvement to slip.
41. Meetings are chaired very effectively to ensure proper focus on school issues, rather than "business" items.

### ***Areas for Development (see also section 3 above)***

42. The development of the Governing Body in the medium term would be strengthened and made more sustainable by developing the role of the Vice-chair and Committee Chairs so that the Governing Body was less dependent on the leadership of the Head and Chair.
43. To this end, and to further improve the strategic leadership of the Governing Body, regular, structured meetings of Governor leaders (the Strategic Committee) to plan agendas and ensure strategic co-ordination of the Governing Body's work should be considered – meeting perhaps three times a year.

## **PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT OF THE HEADTEACHER & STAFF**

### ***Strengths***

44. The Governing Body has set up a Pay and Appraisal (PA) Committee to carry out the Headteacher's performance management, maintain an overview of the wider staff appraisal process and make decisions on teacher pay under the new arrangements for performance-related pay. This is an effective way of carrying out the Governing Body's responsibilities for these sensitive but important processes.
45. The performance management of the Headteacher is carried out in line with statutory requirements, including appropriate support by an external adviser. The Committee meets with the Headteacher during the year, to review progress.
46. The PA Committee sees anonymised teacher objectives to ensure that these are focused on pupil progress.

### ***Areas for Development***

47. The PA Committee has identified lessons from the first year of the performance-related pay (PRP) process. These should be taken forward as planned.
48. There is a need for wider awareness of the PRP process amongst governors not on the PA Committee.

## **ENGAGEMENT WITH STAKEHOLDERS**

### ***Strengths***

49. The school website includes excellent information, supported by photographs of "Governors in action", on the role and membership of the Governing Body and its planning for its own development.
50. The views of pupils and parents/carers are surveyed by the school and the results considered by the Governing Body.
51. Staff are surveyed by the Chair of Governors and have exit interviews; the results are considered by the Governing Body.
52. Governors employed at the school report that Governors now have a higher profile within school and that staff trust them to have the best interests of the school at heart.
53. The School Council meets the Governing Body on a regular basis to report on its work (including its spending of its budget) and its perceptions of particular issues. For example, their responses on catering issues have contributed to a review of school dinner arrangements.
54. The Governing Body recognises that it needs to improve communication and engagement with parents and carers and this is one of the three priorities in the Governing Body Action Plan. For example, Governors have been present at parent consultation meetings and asked for feedback on what parents like about the school and "what drives them mad" – the collated responses from these sessions have been considered by the Governing Body and actions taken as a result. There is also a half termly newsletter.

### ***Areas for Development***

55. Governors recognise that engaging effectively with parents remains an issue, although this is not an easy task given local circumstances.
56. Governors should consider a more systematic approach to communicating/engaging with stakeholders, including pupils. This should involve pro-actively collecting information about perceptions of the school that can be considered as part of school planning as well as responding to issues raised; forward planning identifying why engagement is needed, with whom and when.

## **MATCHING RESOURCES TO VISION & PRIORITIES**

### ***Strengths***

57. Governors are well-informed about spending on the Pupil Premium and have considered the impact of this funding.
58. The Resources Committee benchmarks school spending against similar schools. This process has deepened Governors' understanding of the rationale behind the pattern of expenditure at the school and its link to school priorities.
59. Governors are beginning to focus on the impact of spending alongside ensuring that the budget is managed efficiently.

### ***Areas for Development***

60. Governors are beginning to apply the thinking that they have developed in relation to the impact of Pupil Premium, to other areas of expenditure. This practice requires further development to ensure that the link between investment and impact is evaluated consistently.

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## **KEY AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT – SUMMARY**

The Governing Body has developed well over recent months. It has good systems and structures, is made up of committed and energetic Governors and is well-led by the Chair and the Headteacher.

Looking ahead, there are areas where improvement can be made but perhaps the main overall priority should be to continue to work along current lines, building up confidence and expertise across the Governing Body through experience, training, and opportunities for self-review and reflection. This should result in further improvements in practice and also make such improvements more sustainable.

### **Key Areas for Development**

(Numbers in brackets below are references to paragraphs in the report).

- (a) Maintain the existing direction and pace of progress and make it more sustainable:
  - Ensure that, as a result of the current review process, it feels ownership of the Vision and Values and, in particular, has a clear, shared understanding of its role in putting these into effect (para. 6).
  - Deepen its shared understanding of its strategic role by means of a structured activity to enable Governors to explore the distinction between strategic and operational (para. 7).
  - Develop an explicit process for Governing Body self-review and skills audit, drafting of the Governing Body Development Plan (including a training plan) and review of that plan that is embedded in the medium-term planning of the Governing Body's work (para. 22).
  - Consider developing one or more "impact statements" to further develop its understanding of the relationship between its work and school improvement (para. 23).
  - Arrange further training on the use of pupil data as some Governors considered that this was needed to develop their confidence and understanding further (para. 24).

- Develop the role of the Vice-chair and Committee Chairs so that the Governing Body is less dependent on the Head and Chair and leadership perhaps, for example, by arranging regular, structured meetings of Governor leaders (the Strategy Group) to plan agendas and ensure strategic co-ordination of the Governing Body's work – meeting perhaps twice a year (paras. 42, 43).
  - Make greater use of external reviews of aspects of the school, to provide triangulation of judgements (para. 37).
  - Apply the thinking that they have developed in relation to the Pupil Premium, with a focus on the impact of expenditure, to other areas of expenditure (para. 60).
  - Take forward as planned the lessons from the first year of the performance-related pay process that have been identified by the Pay and Appraisal Committee (para. 47).
  - Develop wider awareness of the performance-related pay process amongst governors (para. 48).
  - Continue to develop e-communication of papers (para. 25).
  - Review arrangements for chairing the Pupil Committee (para. 26).
- (b) Make best use of Governors' commitment to visiting school:
- Review link governor arrangements to:
    - Clarify expectations of the focus of the role and how often it should be carried out (para. 33);
    - Consider whether there is scope for reducing the number of Governors linked to aspects of the school, so focusing Governors' availability into their class-linked roles (para. 34);
    - Linking Governors' class-linked roles and the Governors' Participation Day more strongly to an annual programme of monitoring and evaluation of school improvement priorities (paras. 8, 35).
  - Consider whether there is scope for some Governors to visit school in pairs, to provide mutual support (para. 36).
- (c) Develop engagement with stakeholders:
- Continue to prioritise engagement with parents as an area for development (para. 55);
  - Consider a more systematic approach to communicating/engaging with stakeholders, including pupils so that such consultations are linked more firmly to the school's strategic planning process (paras. 38, 56).