

Chair of Governors' Annual Report 2020/21

A message from the Chair of Governors – Ingrid Maher Roberts

This is my first year as Chair of Governors at St Laurence. I am both delighted and excited to be working with our new Headteacher, staff and governing body, to help our school continue to care, inspire and succeed during what has been an exceptionally challenging year.

Our duty as governors is to support and challenge the school in all that they do and in such a challenging year, it has been a heartening and at times moving experience. The dedication of our staff, teaching and non-teaching has been exceptional. The last twelve months have seen them rise to the challenges presented by Covid-19, supporting all students through hard work, dedication and a caring attitude and governors have been proud to be part of it.

Introduction

The aim of this report is to provide parents and the wider community with better information about the work of the governing body in providing oversight, support and challenge. It is to ensure governors have been performing their statutory tasks and that they have had an impact in supporting the school. The report is in three parts. The first explains the structure and function of the governing body, the second highlights changes to the governing body and the third describes the work of the governors during the last year.

1. Structure and Function

The governing body of St Laurence school is made up of a mix of parent, staff, community, Foundation, Trust governors. The Headteacher also sits on the board with full voting rights.

The governing body has three core functions determined by the Department for Education:

1. Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos, and strategic direction.
2. Holding the headteacher to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the performance management of staff.
3. Overseeing and ensuring effective financial performance.

The full governing body meets six times a year at the end of a cycle of Standards, Community and Ethos (C&E) and Finance, Facilities & Environment (FFE) committee meetings.

A Strategy committee made of the Chairs of these committees also meets six times per year to ensure each committee delivers on its strategic focus. In addition, the governors form panels to deal with matters such as pay, complaints and the Headteacher's appraisal. Outside the committee meeting cycle, governors visit departments within the school, attend events, interview potential staff, and liaise on finance, attendance, policy reviews and other areas. There are also governors dedicated to Special Educational Needs, Pupil Premium, Child Protection, and Health and Safety. Due to the continued impact of the pandemic, some meetings continued to be held via Teams. Governors also attended meetings at school for other purposes such as staff recruitment.

Governors work closely with the Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team and play a key role in monitoring the school finances with the Chair of FFE actively involved in the audit and preparation of the annual report.

An additional tier of governance provides oversight of the work of the governing body. The Academy Trust Board, made up of five members, a representative appointed by the Salisbury Diocesan Board of Education, a representative appointed by the Lord Fitzmaurice Educational Foundation, the University of Bath, Wessex Water and the Chair of the Governing Body.

2. Changes to the Governing Body and members 2020-2021

In December we bid farewell to Fergus Stewart who retired as Headteacher after eight years at the school and welcomed Tim Farrer as St Laurence's new Headteacher in January.

Robert Satterthwaite stepped down as a governor at the beginning of the year and Donal Casey's term as governor ended in July. We would like to extend our thanks to Donal for all his work as our dedicated Health & Safety governor over the years. Emma Roberts became Clerk to Governors in September, with Robert Beesley taking on the role in July.

In April, Ingrid Maher Roberts became Chair of Governors and Peter Lambert, Vice Chair after Kieran Kilgallen and Lindsay Driscoll stepped down from these roles and we thank both for their time and dedication. They continue to serve on the governing body supporting and driving through the strategic vision for the school.

We currently have one parent governor vacancy which we are seeking to fill in the new academic year.

3. The work of the Governing Body

Coronavirus Pandemic

The single most significant event which has affected the work of the school has been the coronavirus pandemic which hit in early 2020 and has impacted the work of the school ever since. Governors recognised the ongoing and increased volume of work facing the school, and especially the senior staff, in trying to adapt with constantly changing government guidance. This year however, as a governing body we have tried to normalise the challenges faced by Covid and have continued to work in an adapted way (such as holding meetings on Teams) to ensure ongoing scrutiny of the three core functions of governance outlined in section 1 of this report.

Headteacher recruitment

The coronavirus significantly impacted on the recruitment process of the new headteacher. The Governing Body had been working to a timescale of having a new headteacher in place for the beginning of the academic year. However, governors agreed that it was vital to get the right candidate and believed they would not be able to see a new headteacher's real potential when the school was not open to all students. Therefore, governors paused the recruitment process until after lockdown ended. For continuity, they asked Mr Stewart to stay on until the end of 2020, which he kindly agreed to. This allowed governors to take the time to ensure they could carry out the three-day interview process in person at school in September. All governors were involved in interviewing candidates and observing the rigorous and comprehensive recruitment process. Governors were delighted by the strong field of applicants, unanimously agreeing that Mr Farrer was the right person to build on the sustained period of improvement seen under Mr Stewart's Headship.

Core functions of governance

A key part of the way governors provide oversight and challenge is by scrutinising the school Development Plan (SDP). Governors use the SDP to bring together in a clear and simple way, the school priorities, the main measures needed to raise standards, the resources dedicated to these, and the key outcomes and targets it intends to achieve. Due to the significant impact of Covid on school activities, governors decided that the strategic priorities for 2019/20 were to be carried forward to 2020/21 and were as follows:

1. Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction

i) Develop our collective ethos and vision

The original plan was updated to ensure Governors remained strategic and responsive during the pandemic, adjusting their priorities to keep the school community safe and enabling it to significantly improve remote learning provision from the first lockdown. The nature of the pandemic necessitated a flexible approach where it was only possible to look ahead and out. Governors on the Standards Committee scrutinised models of best practise to ensure strategies for remote learning, virtual parents evenings, and the Teacher Assessed Grade (TAG) processes would continue in a more structured way.

In terms of the school's Christian vision, governors received an update on progress being made in understanding and articulating its vision. Digital presentations of collective worship enabled governors to track uptake, which was high and the appointment of student advocates supported the involvement of more students in the collective worship programme. The school's work in this area was recognised for its excellent practice with the teacher in charge of collective worship becoming a Hub leader for secondary schools in the Diocese.

ii) Develop a curriculum that meets the needs of all students

A robust remote learning plan was developed and published on the school website to ensure that in the event of further lockdowns, St Laurence was able to ensure students continued learning in all the subjects it offers. However, we cannot underestimate the ongoing impact of the pandemic on student progress and funding from the government's catch-up programme was monitored to ensure it was allocated effectively to impact on students most in need and show a positive effect on outcomes.

Governors also noted the extraordinary additional workload for teaching staff due to the Teacher Assessed Grade process. In non-Covid years when exams take place this work is completed by exam boards. This year however, teachers had to complete assessments for GCSE and A Levels results with no support from the exam board. Therefore, governors agreed to an additional training day on the 14th May to provide teaching staff with the capacity to undertake the assessments.

iii) Develop wellbeing across the school

With the challenges of Covid and extended lockdowns, this priority became even more important. Staff surveys were completed inviting feedback about workload and well-being with individual risk assessments carried out and adjustments made when needed. Regular and open communication was essential with concerns acted upon. For student wellbeing, governors monitored, analysed, and discussed 'My Concern' reports (introduced 2019-20) which were vital this year in helping identify and address issues arising in the student body in

the context of COVID. This helped create a greater focus, awareness and training on issues arising such as anxiety, eating disorders, online safety, sexual harassment and mental health. As well as regular reports on Safeguarding, Child Protection, Behaviour and Attendance, governors focused on areas of key importance in terms of safeguarding and wellbeing during COVID, such as online safety, SEND provision, counselling (through Relateen) and challenges of remote learning.

Core Function 2

Holding executive leaders to account for educational performance of organisation and its pupils and the effective and efficient performance management of staff

In a normal year, the Headteacher would be appraised by a panel of governors in the autumn term and a mid-year review carried out by the Chair. However, with Mr Stewart stepping down in December and Mr Farrer beginning in January, a Headteacher appraisal was not carried out 2020/21. Governors have worked with Mr Farrer to ensure plans are in place for this to be carried out in the first term of the new academic year.

Governors received a report of the results generated through Centre Assessed Grades for pupils in the 2020 exam cycle and examined the data which showed the results were broadly in line with those predicted by the Fisher Family Trust and the continued monitoring of individual pupil progress by the school.

As part of the cycle of subject reviews, governors on the Standards Committee received reports for Modern Foreign Languages, PHSE, History and SIAMS. Governors also monitored the Covid catch up programme to ensure government catch up funding was spent appropriately, and interventions were effective.

Core function 3

Overseeing and ensuring effective financial performance.

FFE committee governors received regular budget reports and every meeting scrutinised the accounts. Budget proposals and revisions were considered by the committee, who presented a balanced budget (of approximately £7 million) to the full governing body for approval. Due to extremely careful budget management the school still holds reserves (approximately £926K). Governors ensured there was sufficient funding for staff and student safety including Covid-19 Security, with over £101,000 spent on the installation, purchase and rental of additional classroom space, toilet blocks and hand sanitiser stations.

Governors took part in the preparation of the annual accounts and ensured they were presented to the full governing body prior to the deadline. The FFE Committee governors also attended a webinar by auditors Bishop Fleming updating them on future trends and new legal requirements relating to Academies.

Governors scrutinised the Pay Policy prior to approval by the full board and FFE Committee were also involved in supporting decisions concerning both the recruitment and non-replacement of staff to ensure adequate staffing. The Chair of Governors and Chair of FFE also took part in a pay panel hearing.

Effective governance

Governors have undertaken the annual skills audit to identify gaps and training needs and governors were offered training opportunities to improve the quality of governance. Codes of conduct which clearly outline the function and role of governors were signed. The Scheme of delegation for 2020/21, which sets out who will make decisions and carry out certain functions on the governing body was also reviewed and agreed.

In line with statutory and contractual compliance governors approved the Safeguarding Children Policy and undertook the required training.