

Review of Governance

Supporting school self-evaluation and improvement

Accurate school self-evaluation is key to successful school improvement planning. Knowing your starting point will enable you to appropriately prioritise areas for improvement with measurable targets and clear outcomes. This axiom will remain true whatever school inspection framework prevails and is also fundamental to achieving successful and cohesive school leadership – everyone working together to the same ends. This review is designed for governors and headteachers to support accurate school self-evaluation. It aims to give you the confidence that, whatever specific goals you are working towards and whatever standards you need to prove, your priorities are the right ones and you are therefore focusing your time and energy in the appropriate areas to achieve success.

School: The Otter Valley Federation	DfE no: 3312
Name of Adviser: Jane Lucas	Date of visit: 28 April 2016
Headteacher: Colin Butler	Chair of Governors: John Sherwood

	Evidence/Comment The comments in colour relate to the 2016 Review. The comments in black are from the 2014 review and have been left in so that governors can monitor progress. The adviser has used the new terminology, governing 'board', for the 2016 Review.	RAG
1. The Governing Body		
<p>1.1 There is a full or nearly full complement of governors and there are no long standing vacancies.</p> <p>A balance of skills is considered when appointing community governors and associate members. New governors attend training and there is a clear induction process for them. (GM standards (see key below): 2a,2b)</p>	<p>There is a full complement of governors with two associate governors. As vacancies arise new governors are quickly identified.</p> <p>There are currently 2 vacancies although possible candidates have been identified for these. As a governing board of aided schools, filling foundation governor vacancies can be a struggle.</p> <p>A skills audit has been distributed, this needs updating and collating to identify skills gaps which enable the Federation and the Diocese to identify and recruit governors with the required skills set.</p> <p>As a governing board that aspires to 'outstanding' practice, it should ensure that it proactively seeks skills to enable it to develop and demonstrate this. Although the board has posted some criteria on the website relating to skills and experience it would like to attract, it could consider making proactive approaches to businesses in the Honiton area, outlining the benefits of school governance to the local business community.</p> <p>New governors attend Diocese and LDP Babcock training. There is an induction checklist and documentation but this process needs implementation.</p> <p>The new governors attend training and there is a new induction process in place which is being actively trialled by the newest governor. It is important that his feedback is used to make any further improvements to the process. Currently the expectation is that a new governor will take six months to complete the induction process which may be slightly on the long side for governors who have skills and expertise which the governing board needs to make immediate use of.</p>	<p>G</p> <p>A</p> <p>A</p> <p>A</p> <p>A</p> <p>G</p>
<p>1.2 The governing body is an effective, well organised team and there is a high level of commitment. There is a commitment to training and a culture self improvement.</p>	<p>The governing body is committed and attend training. The clerk, head teacher and the chair ensure the GB is well organised.</p>	<p>G</p>

<p>Governors understand their role and lead by example. (GM standards: 1a,1b,1c,2c,2d,3a)</p>	<p>The governing board has improved because it has devoted time, energy and resources to its own improvement. Since the last Governance Review it has systematically focused on improving its own practice, using the mechanism of the school's development plan to identify its own priorities for improvement.</p> <p>Not all governors are clear of their role. As a result the workload rests with a small number of governors.</p> <p>This area is still marked as amber because some governors are still in the process of updating their understanding of the current expectations of school governance.</p>	<p>G</p> <p>A</p> <p>A</p>
<p>2. The Leadership of the Governing Body</p>		
<p>2.1 The leadership of the governing body is effective. The governing body is well chaired and the chair has received training and support for the role.</p> <p>The chair is well supported by the vice chair and there are other governors taking a leadership role on the governing body.</p>	<p>Governors spoke of the effective skills of the chair. The chair is well trained and very knowledgeable.</p> <p>Evidence suggests that the current leadership of the governing board is focused and working hard and effectively to support the development of the team. The governing board's leadership is sensitive to the needs of the federation and supports a strong federation leadership team.</p> <p>There is some doubling up of governors' key roles which is addressed in 2.3 below.</p> <p>There is currently no vice chair and one governor is chairing more than one committee. There is a reluctance form governors to take on roles and responsibilities within the governing body.</p>	<p>G</p> <p>G</p> <p>R</p>
<p>2.2 The headteacher takes an active role in supporting and developing the governing body.</p>	<p>The head teacher attends all meetings and has been very active and effective in developing the federation governing body.</p> <p>The headteacher works extremely positively and proactively with the governing board in helping governors to develop their practice. He has a clear understanding of the role of the governing board and sets unambiguous expectations to help governors work within clear boundaries.</p>	<p>G</p> <p>G</p>
<p>2.3 There is clear succession planning for the future leadership of the governing body. (GM standard: 2d)</p>	<p>This is an area that needs addressing the chair has been in role for a number of years and at present there is no clear succession plan.</p> <p>Succession planning is a priority for the governing board. The first task is to ensure that all key roles are undertaken by different governors, supporting any governors that need help with taking more active roles within the team. The governing board needs to identify generic leadership skills and ensure that these are adequately represented or developed across</p>	<p>R</p> <p>R</p>

	<p>the team and that building these skills within the team are also part of the skills audit. The governing board can then start to plan for the succession of key roles, especially chair and vice chair from a strong position, considering new freedoms for a co-chair model if governors feel this would work well.</p>	
<p>3. Strategic Role</p>		
<p>3.1 The governing body is committed to undertaking a strategic rather than an operational role. It ensures that its members understand what this means and the headteacher commits to supporting the governing body working strategically (GM standards: 1b, 4a, 4b).</p>	<p>This is emerging governors are beginning to understand the need to focus on strategic, monitoring and accountability issues. There are a few strategic hijackers in meetings (e.g. village planning). A change to the agenda could assist the development of more strategic meetings.</p> <p>The board has made considerable improvement in this area and meetings are consistently focused at a strategic level. The headteacher supports the governing board in achieving this by providing strategic level information for governors and not routinely drawing governors into operational matters. Continuing to monitor this is important to ensure that the board does not slip back into operational 'territory'!</p>	<p>A</p> <p>G</p>
<p>3.2 The governing body ensures clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction and communicates high expectations and ambition. (GM standards: 4a)</p>	<p>There is a strong vision, values and ethos for the federation. The schools took time to develop this before federating.</p> <p>As before, the governing board continues to have a strong vision for the federation. It has taken the step of drawing parents' attention to the recent government announcement relating to schools converting to academies and been clear that it will look at options and make a decision in the best interests of the children at the school.</p>	<p>G</p> <p>G</p>
<p>3.3 The governing body understands the schools strengths and weaknesses and the priorities for improvement in the school improvement plan and focuses its time and attention on these matters (GM standards: 3a, 4a, 4b, 4c, 4d).</p>	<p>The schools' development plans (SDP) focus only on teaching and learning in each school. As a result the Teaching and Learning Committee is focused on the SDPs but not the remaining committees nor the FGB.</p> <p>Governors do not at present contribute to the SDP nor the self evaluation</p> <p>This is an area of significant improvement since the last review. The governing board plays its full part in the school improvement cycle, including self-evaluation, and the setting, monitoring and evaluation of the school development plan. The headteacher reports that the governors are proactively engaged in setting the schools' development priorities in a way that was not the case at the time of the last review.</p> <p>Governors are now provided with a file at the beginning of the year, and on joining the governing board, with key school improvement</p>	<p>A</p> <p>R</p> <p>G</p>

	information and this is an excellent way for them to stay focused and to have the right information at their fingertips at meetings and at other times when they are engaged in governor work.	
4. The Governing Body Supports and Challenges (critical friend)		
4.1 The headteacher and governors work together in partnership to achieve the best outcomes for the children and young people in both schools. The relationship is one of openness, mutual trust and respect, working together for a common purpose.	<p>This is an area of strength. There is a culture within the governing body of openness, trust, cohesiveness and governors have a common purpose of improving the quality education for all pupils.</p> <p>The relationship between the headteacher and the governing board is appropriate and good humoured, based on mutual respect and openness. This enables the leadership of the federation to be strong and purposeful and is an excellent base from which governors can continue to build their challenge role, including and working more closely with the heads of school in this strong partnership.</p>	<p>G</p> <p>G</p>
<p>4.2 Governors support the headteacher and other school staff but systematically challenge the school by actively monitoring and evaluating the progress of the school improvement plan during the course of the year, asking questions, seeking information, setting targets, considering data and other information as appropriate.</p> <p>There is a strong culture of rigorous performance management throughout the school. (GM standards: 4c,4d,4e,6a,6b,7a,7b,7c)</p>	<p>This is starting to emerge. In the Teaching and Learning Committee meetings governors offer appropriate challenge. This needs developing across all committees.</p> <p>The learning and teaching (T&L) committee appropriately leads on monitoring and evaluating the school development plan but challenge is now well embedded across all areas of the governing board. The headteacher's report provides and the school development plan provide excellent opportunities for governors to ask questions and these are carefully noted as part of the body of evidence the board maintains to demonstrate how it provides challenge and holds the headteacher and other senior leaders to account.</p> <p>This is embedded across the staff team but the full governing body (FGB) do not focus on T&L, teaching performance and the relationship to pay progression.</p> <p>There is now a pay committee in place which oversees matters of pay and performance throughout the federation. This enables pay and performance to have its own separately identified annual cycle of business throughout the year and for governors to continue to build their understanding and confidence in setting high expectations of the staff body and ensuring rigour and consistency. Evidence suggests that it is still relatively early days for this committee and that it still needs to be monitored for impact and effectiveness.</p>	<p>A</p> <p>G</p> <p>A</p> <p>A</p>

<p>4.3 Governors visit the school to build relationships with school staff, to learn about the school and to gather information to aid with their monitoring role. (GM standard: 6d)</p>	<p>Governors visit the school and there is an excellent process called 'Pupil Talk'. However not all governors are involved with meeting and developing relationships with the staff.</p> <p>The visiting programme continues to be well supported by governors however, as a governing board that aspires to excellent practice there is still room for further improvement by ensuring that a programme of focused visits (which do not have to be long) is embedded in the whole team's work with timely reports to the governing board following visits.</p>	<p>A</p> <p>A</p>
<p>5. The Governing Body Ensures Accountability</p>		
<p>5.1 The governing body robustly holds senior leaders to account for the performance of the school including the quality of teaching and learning and the deployment of resources.</p> <p>The headteacher reports to the governing body via written reports which provide governors with key information and data and are circulated to governors ahead of meetings.</p> <p>At the meeting the reports are discussed and any further questions arising are addressed. (GM standards: 6a,6b,6c)</p>	<p>This is emerging. There is a report on the T&L observations but this needs to include the % of good and outstanding lessons and the impact of continuing professional development (CPD) on pupil performance.</p> <p>The head teacher report is a key strength. Governors receive information and data on a wide range of issues.</p> <p>At present there are a few governors who appropriately question the HT report. A question bank for governors could assist governors in their monitoring and accountability role.</p> <p>Overall the quality of accountability has significantly improved and is rigorous and consistent. This is because the governing board is now fully engaged in the school improvement cycle and is more knowledgeable and confident in asking questions. The vehicle of the headteacher's report has been widened to include reports from the heads of school and much of the questioning at teaching and learning is directed towards these two members of staff with the headteacher contributing proactively to challenge. This helpfully models questioning for governors and ensures that the quality of discussion and challenge is continuing to improve.</p>	<p>A</p> <p>G</p> <p>A</p> <p>G</p>
<p>5.2 The governing body itself is reflective on its own practice, has a high profile and publishes clear information about itself to parents and staff.</p>	<p>The governing body publish a termly newsletter, a gallery of photos is in each school and there is a governor page on the federation website.</p> <p>The newsletters continue to provide parents with clear information from governors and enable governors to have their own leadership 'voice' within the parent body and the wider community. Staff are used to seeing most governors in school and have a positive and constructive relationship with governors.</p>	<p>G</p> <p>G</p>

<p>5.3 In partnership with the school staff, it seeks the views of parents through appropriate consultation. (GM standard: 5e)</p>	<p>At present governors use the findings of the school's parent questionnaires. Governors have a presence at school functions, in the playground and on the PTA.</p> <p>With decisions looming for maintained schools following the government's announcement about academy status, the governing board will need to think carefully about ensuring it is building strong mechanisms for a two way conversation with parents.</p>	<p>G</p> <p>G</p>
<p>5.4 The governing body oversees the financial performance of the school and makes sure its money is well spent</p>	<p>Due to a recent resignation at present there is only one governor who is trained in finance for governors. Some governors identified this as an area of weakness in the future.</p> <p>This is still a possible area of vulnerability as governors are doubling up on key roles to ensure that they are covered and do not yet have clearly marked succession pathways for key roles to be covered as governors leave. Mentoring is in place for new governors, but shadowing of key roles would be a useful way of ensuring seamless covering of areas of work as governors move on.</p>	<p>A</p> <p>A</p>
<p>6. Clerking Arrangements</p>		
<p>6.1 The governing body has appointed an appropriately qualified clerk who has a contract, a job description and sufficient hours to undertake the role. The clerk clerks all meetings of the governing body. He/she attends training and keeps him/herself up to date. The clerk receives support and has an annual appraisal.</p>	<p>There is an experienced clerk who has sufficient hours. She clerks all meetings and regularly attends training.</p> <p>The clerk stated she was informally well supported but has not received a formal appraisal since her appointment.</p> <p>Since the last review, appraisal for the clerk has been introduced. The clerk proactively advises and supports the governing board with its development. Because she clerks other governing boards she brings a useful perspective and breadth of experience to the role which is beneficial for governors.</p>	<p>G</p> <p>A</p> <p>G</p>
<p>7. Meetings</p>		
<p>7.1 The governing body has an appropriate pattern and number of meetings.</p>	<p>There is an appropriate pattern of meetings. A Chairs committee meets occasionally this should be used as a planning meeting rather than where monitoring and accountability is discussed. This is the role of the FGB.</p> <p>Overall the meetings pattern is appropriate, although there are quite a lot of meetings during the year. Whilst working parties represent a useful option for task and finish type matters, they should work to a clear timetable of meetings and ensure records are kept. This includes any meetings of the chairs, vice chair and chairs of committees. All business relating to the governing board should be regarded as 'formal'</p>	<p>G</p> <p>G</p>

	business and there should not be any 'informal' (ie unplanned/unminuted) business of the board.	
7.2 Meetings are effective and productive because they are well chaired, run to time, strategic in content and approach and focused on school improvement.	<p>Meetings at present do not run to time, except for the T&L Committee. They are not strategic in focus. Governors do understand the need to develop a more strategic approach and stated this was emerging.</p> <p>Overall the length and strategic focus of meetings has improved with many meetings finishing on time, having covered the workload in an appropriate manner. There is still some slippage, although events at Tipton St John over the half term break have been partly the cause. It is important that the whole team continue to work proactively towards finishing meetings within set timescales (especially given the number of meetings during the year) to support sharply focused governance and good work/life balance.</p>	A G
7.3 All governors contribute, time is used efficiently, decisions are made and actions agreed with named people taking responsibility for following up actions after the meeting.	<p>Some governors are extremely generous with their time. However, when the need for delegation and as actions arise only a few governors volunteer for these roles.</p> <p>There is still some disparity amongst members of the team in terms of attendance at meetings, contributions at meetings and general workload. This is mentioned further below in 8.3.</p>	A A
8. Workload Management and Delegation		
8.1 There is an annual cycle of governor business and a policy review cycle in place and both of these are up to date and provide a clear framework for the governing body's business.	<p>The clerk ensures the governing body meetings are informed by the comprehensive annual cycle of business and the policy review spreadsheet</p> <p>The work of the board is supported by appropriate documentation although there is further work that could be done with the annual cycle to support the development of more individualised portfolios for governors. See next steps below.</p>	G G
<p>8.2 There is a clear programme of delegation to committees and/or individual governors, clearly recorded in terms of reference which are agreed annually by the governing body.</p> <p>All governors are clear about where decisions are made and those decisions made on behalf of the governing body are clearly reported back but not gone over again. (GM standards: 1b,5a,5b,5c,5d,5f)</p>	<p>The clerk has developed a full set of terms of reference that are reviewed annually and inform the delegation process.</p> <p>As before</p> <p>There is some duplication in FGB meetings where issues and decisions made in committees are re-discussed. At times procedural issues dominate strategy.</p> <p>This has been improved and there is much less duplication between meetings and a stronger focus on strategic items rather than operational.</p>	G G A G

<p>8.3 The workload is distributed equally amongst governors and governors have clear areas of interest and/or responsibility. (GM standard: 1c)</p>	<p>A number of governors sit only on one committee as a result a small number of governors have to share the workload.</p> <p>Evidence suggests that this is still a priority for improvement. Whilst some governors are busy and have other commitments, unless all governors work to the same deadlines and standards, the team is hindered in evidencing 'outstanding' practice. Sharing the workload is also linked to strong succession planning and these two aspects taken together represent one of the key priorities for the governing board in developing 'outstanding' governance.</p>	<p>R</p> <p>R</p>
<p>9. Information and Paperwork</p>		
<p>9.1 The information produced by the governing body is of a high quality.</p>	<p>The governing body produces good documentation.</p> <p>All that was seen was of a good quality and the governing board should be commended for the quality and consistency of the newsletters it produces which are particular examples of excellent practice.</p>	<p>G</p> <p>G</p>
<p>9.2 Agendas are clear, informative and explicit and circulated, with supporting papers, seven days before meetings.</p> <p>Minutes are well written and provide evidence of the governing body undertaking its role and responsibilities. They are circulated within two weeks of meetings.</p>	<p>Agendas are too long and should be radically pruned, times should be included, the agenda items should be focused on strategy and governors should receive these 7 days before all meetings.</p> <p>Minutes are good evidence of governor meetings but are often not circulated within 2 weeks.</p> <p>Overall there has been considerable improvement in this area so that practice is consistently good. Agendas are now more realistic and have timings included to help the meetings run to time and to stay focused. Governors have sufficient time to prepare for meetings overall and receive minutes reasonably soon after meetings on the whole. Whilst occasional slippage in timescales will not present a problem, it always needs monitoring to make sure it is not becoming the norm.</p>	<p>R</p> <p>A</p> <p>G</p>
<p>9.3 The clerk maintains an efficient filing system of all documents relating to governing body business.</p>	<p>The clerk keeps a paper filing system. Consideration could be given to developing an electronic cloud system which all governors could remotely access.</p> <p>The filing system used by the clerk is efficient and clear. Steps have been taken towards greater storage and retrieval of information for governors. The file that has been introduced for governors is a hard copy document however the information is also available electronically.</p>	<p>G</p> <p>G</p>

Key:

GM standards refers to the standards devised by the Governor Mark Scheme. Further details can be found at www.glmpartnership.org

RAG:

Red = Action required immediately
Amber = Less urgent action required
Green = No action or minimal change required

Comments in black relate to the 2014 Review and have been left in so that governors can monitor progress.

Comments in blue relate to the 2016 Review.

Areas of statutory non-compliance requiring immediate action*:

* Based on responses received and evidence supplied.

- The clerk should receive an annual appraisal

This has been introduced.

- HT Appraisal governors should attend training

This has been done and future governors undertaking this role will undertake training.

- Pay and Performance committee governors need to be conversant with the new performance related pay policy regulations.

Governors are more familiar with their responsibilities in this area and make decisions in line with the appropriate policies.

Questions for consideration by governing body:

- a) How does the governing body develop a culture of governance that is defined by being strategic (focused on impact and outcomes) rather than operational (focused on provision)?

The governing board has made significant progress in this area with minutes demonstrating a consistently stronger focus on strategic matters.

- b) How does the governing body develop an understanding and ownership of the schools' strength and weakness through self evaluation process and the development and monitoring of the federation and schools development plans?

The board has developed to the extent that it now takes a proactive approach to the school improvement cycle and is much more active in monitoring and evaluating the development plan and linking outcomes to school self-evaluation and the creation of the following year's development plan.

- c) How does the governing body develop the skills of all governors and ensure a more even distribution of the workload and succession planning?

The board has made some progress in this area but has not yet achieved the necessary even distribution of workload to develop fully 'outstanding' practice.

- d) How do the governing body and the diocese recruit governors with the appropriate skills and ensure they are fully inducted within the federation to fulfil their role effectively?

Induction for new governors is now in place and the newest governor will feedback observations from his experienced of being 'inducted'. There is some evidence that the governing board is using skills audits to inform recruitment but more could be done here.

What steps do we need to take to distribute the workload more evenly and ensure all governors are working to the same consistent standards of engagement and timely reporting?

What further steps do we need to take to ensure there is a future facing approach to the recruitment of skills?

What do we need to do to support succession planning of key roles to ensure that the future leadership of the governing board is stable and able to continue to work towards outstanding practice?

Next Steps:

Recruitment, induction and skills

1. Conduct a new skills and training audit, collate the findings and use them to inform both diocese and federation governor recruitment.
Ensure skills audit includes leadership skills to support succession planning. Ensure skills audit fully informs recruitment and consider a proactive approach to local business outlining what experience employees can gain by participating in school governance.
2. Ensure that both schools are equally represented on the federation GB.
This has been achieved.
3. Consider recruiting associate governors with key skills to reduce the workload.
At the moment there are vacancies that need filling and this is a priority for the board.
4. Implement in-house induction for new governors alongside allocation of an experienced governor mentor. This will enable new governors to understand their role and share the governance workload.
This has been done and is being 'piloted' by the newest governor. Ensure any feedback and observations are incorporated in a final version.
5. Develop a question bank for governors to fulfil their challenge, accountability and monitoring role. Governors have started to ask more questions and these are noted and were seen by the adviser in the governors file. It might be helpful to give further support to governors if a list of suggested questions was included at the front or inside cover of the governors file for immediate reference at meetings.
6. Revisit committee membership. All governors may need to sit on 2 committees to ensure the workload is evenly distributed.
Governors are sitting on 2 committees and this is helping to ensure that the committees are quorate and working efficiently. It is having some impact on helping to distribute the workload but because some governors have more than one role on the team, the impact on workload distribution is limited.
7. Ensure succession planning is regularly discussed and all governors should have areas of responsibility to enable them to take some leadership responsibility.
This is priority for the governing board and further steps are suggested below.

Meetings

8. Review the agenda setting process, prune the agendas of all meetings, ensure a strategic focus, and add timings to enable meetings to keep to the 2 hour limit.
No further actions needed.
9. Agendas and all papers to be circulated 7 days before meetings.
Overall good, no further action needed.
10. All meetings to have a key focus on schools' self evaluation and development plans.
Agendas and minutes suggested that these documents are now well embedded in the board's cycle of work and the introduction of the governors files has been very helpful.
11. Plan to avoid duplication and discuss strategic rather than procedural issues.
Minutes show that this is greatly improved.
12. All minutes to be distributed within 14 days of meetings.
Yes, this is usually the case.

13. Develop working parties to discuss issues such as village planning, building projects etc. This will enable governors meeting to focus on school improvement.

Working parties are working well, however, the board needs to watch its meeting load overall

Governor consultation with staff and parents

14. Consider how governors receive the view of parents such as through parent consultation evenings or electronic forums

Governors need to continue to promote a two way conversation with parents to ensure that they are strongly engaged with the parent community.

15. Consider how governors meet and develop relationships with the staff in both schools.

Governor visits promote closer working with staff and there is a stronger team approach which is continuing to grow.

16. Consider developing the excellent Pupil Talk visits into Staff or Parent Talk focus?

The adviser did not probe during the Review whether this particular action had been taken or felt to be helpful.

Next Steps following the 2016 Review

1. Identify all the key roles on the governing board and, from next term, ensure that they are filled by different governors, ie there is no doubling up of key roles. Key roles could be, for example: chair, vice chair, chair or each committee, lead governors for finance, resources, school improvement etc.
2. Using the Devon Governor magazine, plan any training that individual governors need in order to help them develop their competence in their key role
3. Review the skills audit to ensure that leadership skills are included.
4. Use completed skills audit to support the recruitment of governors and the filling of all vacancies. Discuss with representatives of the two local parishes how the governing board can develop a full range of skills and competencies when filling its vacancies

Contact:

If you have any questions about this report please contact our Helpline at Governor Support on Tel: 01392 287314 or email us on ldp-governorsservice@babcockinternational.com. Thank you.