

## **Review of Governance – Progress and Impact Report: Oswald Road Primary School, Manchester**

Date of original external review of governance: June-October 2015

Date of performance and impact review: 15<sup>th</sup> March 2016

### **1. Reviewer's Details**

- 1.1 Ruth Agnew is the chair of governors of two primary schools, a former secondary governor and chair and a former LA governor service manager. She was designated a National Leader of Governance in April 2012 and supported the Ofsted / National College pilot of external reviews of governance during the autumn and spring terms 2012-13. She is an experienced reviewer and Governor Mark assessor.
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### **2. Background and Context**

- 2.1 The original external review of governance, in summer/autumn 2015, followed a challenging period for the school and for the governing body, which included a series of complaints, including allegations of breach of confidentiality by governors, and the resignation of chair and vice chair.
- 2.2 Since the review was undertaken complaints to Ofsted about safeguarding arrangements and the leadership and management of the school have triggered a Section 8 monitoring inspection. The inspection found the school's safeguarding procedures to be effective and spoke positively about the leadership and governance of the school, and the actions taken by the governing body following the external review.
- 2.3 The recommendations of the original review were as follows:
  1. Further training and support are needed to ensure that every governor understands the role, including the importance of confidentiality.
  2. Recruitment should continue to be prioritised and a new chair must be identified. This individual may need additional training and support.
  3. Governors need to reflect on whether they feel able to continue on the governing body, and if so, commit to protecting confidentiality and upholding the reputation of the school, and to developing trust on the governing body.
  4. A communications strategy should be developed, which incorporates a clear and agreed way of dealing with complaints, including a transparent approach to identifying and dealing with vexatious and anonymous complaints.

5. Governors need to ensure that they only involve themselves in complaints processes when required to do so by the complaints procedure, and should not allow day to day involvement to divert them from their strategic priorities.

### **3. Process of the Progress and Impact Review**

- 3.1 The progress and impact review meeting took place on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2016. The reviewer conducted a scrutiny of recent governing body paperwork, had a telephone conversation with the chair, and met with a group of governors to discuss actions taken since the review and the impact of these. The focus of the meetings was on progress against the action plan from the original review. The action plan, colour coded according to the governing body's own rag-rating, is attached as an appendix to this report.

### **4. Main Findings**

- 4.1 The governing body has taken on board the recommendations of the review and has worked hard to ensure that the actions have been followed up.
- 4.2 The unusual step of publishing the review report on the school website demonstrates the commitment of the governing body to moving forward in a relationship of transparency and openness with parents and other stakeholders.
- 4.3 All the vacancies on the governing body have now been filled. A thoughtful and thorough approach has been taken to recruitment, ensuring that new governors are bringing relevant skills and experience. One of the new governors has been appointed as vice chair.
- 4.4 The training governor has developed a new induction pack and process. New governors speak highly of the induction they have received. New governors are being encouraged to access training and most have already done so. The skills audit is being kept up to date and being used in relation to appointing governors and identifying potential training needs.
- 4.5 To ensure that all governors had a role in the actions following the review the governing body met only as a full board during the autumn term. It has very recently re-established a committee structure with updated terms of reference and newly appointed chairs – neither committee being chaired by the chair or vice chair.
- 4.6 Governors have started to visit school more frequently and are developing a more co-ordinated approach to visits. This is still a work in progress and will need commitment from all governors to ensure that they are able to compare the monitoring information they receive with first-hand information from their own visits to school.

- 4.7 The chair and training governor have met with all governors to ensure that they have an understanding of the role and the expectations on governors, including the requirement for confidentiality.
- 4.8 Governors have appointed a new clerk. The new arrangements are still embedding and greater clarity is still needed in relation to activities that are expected to be undertaken by the clerk and those which might sit better with staff in school.
- 4.9 The chair is leading the governing body well at the current time but does not feel able to make a commitment to the role in the long term. By filling all vacancies the governing body has ruled out the possibility – discussed during the first review – of advertising the position externally, at this point. Development of leadership capacity within the governing body and consideration of succession planning must therefore remain a priority.
- 4.10 The governing body took a lead in the recent parental survey, which received a good response (over 200 responses from parents). Feedback was largely very positive and only a small minority of parents indicated that they have on-going concerns about the school. A comprehensive action plan has been developed following the feedback received.
- 4.11 For a number of reasons, some outside the governing body’s control, the parental complaint, identified as an urgent priority in the action plan from the review, is still on-going. Despite the fact that the Department for Education has already been involved and pronounced itself satisfied with the school’s actions, the governing body remains, rightly, committed to completing the complaints process as soon as possible. Since the review a new complaints procedure has been developed that complies with current government guidance. Full implementation of this policy and training in handling complaints will follow the resolution of this issue.

## **5. Areas for on-going development**

- 5.1 The governing body has made significant progress in implementing the action plan from the review, but there are further areas for development, correctly identified by governors themselves.
- 5.2 The new committee structure is still embedding, and the new committee chairs will need to work with school leaders and the clerk to ensure the work of the committees is focused on development priorities. The chair of the resources committee is a very new governor and will need support and mentoring through his first period as chair.
- 5.3 The new approach to governor visits is not yet fully established and will need to be monitored to ensure that governors are visiting school regularly and that these

visits are informing the governing body's monitoring of the school. The chair will need to continue to hold governors to account for undertaking visits as appropriate.

- 5.4 The governing body must have a secure succession plan in place for when the current chair steps down.
- 5.5 Clear performance management arrangements need to be in place in relation to the new clerk to governors.
- 5.6 The outstanding complaint needs to be resolved as soon as possible, and the newly developed procedure fully implemented.

## **6. Conclusion**

- 6.1 Following a difficult and turbulent period the governing body has worked hard to improve communication and relationships with stakeholders. Vacancies have been filled and new governors bring a range of relevant skills and experience. Trust between governors and school leaders is being restored. No further complaints about governor conduct have been received and governors met during the review had a good understanding of the expectations of the role. The governing body is now better placed to bring effective support and challenge to school leaders.

<b>Action plan: Oswald Road Primary School</b>				
<b>Priority for improvement</b>	<b>Action required</b>	<b>By when</b>	<b>By whom</b>	<b>Success Criteria</b>
1. Further training and support are needed to ensure that every governor understands the role, including the importance of confidentiality.	Devise and implement a comprehensive governor induction programme, to include all new governors completing a skills audit, understanding and signing up to the code of conduct and governor visits policy, and undertaking training on roles and responsibilities.	End November 2015	Training governor (Ellie Russell)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A documented induction process is in place.</li> <li>2. This is consistently completed for all new governors.</li> <li>3. The skills audit is up to date and the governing body is aware of any identified skills gaps.</li> <li>4. This information has been used to ensure that new governors bring appropriate skills to the governing body.</li> <li>5. Training on complaints handling has taken place with a majority of governors in attendance.</li> <li>6. Governors have a good understanding of their role, which enables them to hold school leaders to account, and this is evidenced in meeting minutes.</li> </ol>
	Ensure analysis of skills audit is kept up to date and informs decisions about governor recruitment and development.	When new governors join the GB	Training governor	
	Commission bespoke training as needed to address identified gaps, commencing with training in complaints processes.	End December 2015 (and then on an on-going basis)	Training governor	
2. Recruitment should continue to be prioritised and a new chair must be identified. This individual may need additional training and support.	Information about the role to be produced and circulated to parents prior to advertising the parent governor vacancy.	End November 2015	Chair	
	Ensure a vice chair is elected at the next full governing body meeting.	Next FGB	All governors	
	Ensure appropriate training and development is available for the chair and vice chair, which could include support from a National Leader of Governance and/or access to the National Chairs' Development Programme.			
	To use this academic year to reflect on the requirements the governing body has for a chair, and, if no suitable individual has been identified to advertise the role in appropriate media.	May 2016	All governors	
	To identify future leaders on the governing body and to ensure that they receive appropriate training and support, to ensure a robust succession plan is in place.	End March 2016	Training governor, chair, vice chair, committee chairs	

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3. Governors need to reflect on whether they feel able to continue on the governing body, and if so, commit to protecting confidentiality and upholding the reputation of the school, and to developing trust on the governing body.	The chair will meet with all governors on a one to one basis to discuss their role and contribution.	Already commenced. Completed for new governors spring term 2016	Chair	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. All governors have committed to continuing in the role under current expectations.</li> <li>2. The code of conduct is understood and has been signed by all governors. There are no further breaches of confidentiality attributable to governors.</li> <li>3. Governors visit school regularly, understand the purpose of these visits and report back to the full governing body.</li> <li>4. The governing body is well informed about the school, and about progress against the school development plan.</li> <li>5. Governors are well prepared for meetings and meetings are both efficient and effective.</li> </ol>
	All governors will sign the code of conduct when they join the governing body (existing governors have already done so) and will abide by it.	On appointment of new governors	Chair	
	All governors will visit school during the school day on a regular basis (at least once per term) in line with the governor visits policy. A schedule of dates will be drawn up by the headteacher to facilitate this.	Commencing in autumn term 2015 (spring term for recently appointed governors)	Headteacher. All governors	
	Each governor will be linked to an area of the school improvement plan and will make arrangements to monitor this and feed back to the governing body.	Autumn FGB meeting and on-going	All governors	
	Governors will sign in to school in a governors' log book and will complete a brief record of their visit to be fed back to the governing body.	Every time governors make a formal visit	All governors	
	Meeting agendas will be carefully planned to reflect school priorities; agendas and papers will be distributed in advance in line with statutory timescales (seven clear days in advance). Governors will prepare themselves well for meetings, which will include having read all of the documentation in advance.	From autumn term 2015 FGB meeting	All governors	

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<p>4. A communications strategy should be developed, which incorporates a clear and agreed way of dealing with complaints, including a transparent approach to identifying and dealing with vexatious and anonymous complaints. AND</p> <p>5. Governors need to ensure that they only involve themselves in complaints processes when required to do so by the complaints procedure, and should not allow day to day involvement to divert them from their strategic priorities.</p>	The school policy has been adapted, practice now needs to reflect policy. Training on handling complaints will take place during the autumn term (as above).	Immediately and on-going	All governors	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Governors understand the complaints policy and undertake their role in relation to any complaints in a way that is consistent with the policy.</li> <li>Complaints and freedom of information requests are dealt with in a timely way.</li> <li>Governors and school leaders have a clear and consistent understanding of the role of the Communications Manager.</li> <li>The outstanding complaints process has been completed.</li> <li>Governors have a clear understanding of the views of parents and have regard to these when making decisions.</li> <li>The number of complaints received has reduced.</li> </ol>
	A paper on the role of the Communications Manager will be brought to the next governors' meeting to ensure a common understanding of the role, and to aid consideration of its future within the school.	Next FGB meeting	Headteacher	
	The Communications Manager will contribute to termly headteacher's report to ensure governors are well-informed about the impact of his role.	Each FGB meeting	Headteacher and Communications Manager	
	Governors and school leaders will work together to ensure that the school is proactive and clear in its communications with parents.	With immediate effect	All governors and school leaders	
	The governing body will ensure that those dealing with aspects of the complaints process, including the clerk to governors and the Communications Manager, have a clear understanding of the part they play in ensuring effective resolution of complaints.	By end October 2015	Chair	
	A governing body working group will be formed to develop and undertake a comprehensive survey of the parental community, to ensure parental views of the school and any concerns are well understood by governors and inform future decision-making.	End December 2016	Working group (identified as Jo, Simon, Richard, John and Alex)	
	Governors receive regular monitoring information about complaints received and how they have been resolved.	Each FGB meeting	Headteacher	
	One outstanding complaint to be rapidly resolved.	End Nov 2015	James	