

Review of Governance – Report on Oswald Road Primary School, Manchester, July 2015	
Reviewer	
Reviewer's name:	Ruth Agnew
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Reviewer's background	Ruth Agnew is the chair of governors of two primary schools and a secondary interim executive board, and is 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 also an experienced Governor Mark assessor.
School	
Name of contact	Helen Dobson
Role: head / chair	Chair of Governors
Name of school:	Oswald Road Primary School
Date of Review:	24 th June 2015
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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.

Background and Context

Oswald Road Primary is much larger than the average-sized primary school. Approximately half of the pupils are of White British heritage and half are from minority ethnic backgrounds, mainly of Pakistani heritage. An above average proportion speaks English as an additional

language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium, including those known to be eligible for free school meals, is below the national average. There have been significant changes to the leadership of the school in recent years, with the appointment of a new headteacher and two assistant headteachers, and a new deputy headteacher is taking up post in September.

Both the chair and vice chair of governors have recently resigned and will leave the governing body at the end of the summer term. This follows the resignation of the former vice chair from the governing body less than twelve months earlier. The school has recently received a series of complaints from parents, relating to a number of issues within the school. Some of these complaints have also been raised with the Local Authority (LA) and, on at least one occasion, also with the local press. Allegations have included breaches of confidentiality from governors, with specific examples cited. Dissatisfaction from some parents with the actions of school leaders and governors was a significant back drop to the review process.

Two parents made approaches to the reviewer requesting an opportunity to input their views into the review process. These requests were denied, as speaking directly with parents falls beyond the remit of this review.

Process of the Review

The reviewer conducted a scrutiny of relevant governing body paperwork and held one-to-one meetings with all governors, including the headteacher. The reviewer also met the full governing body to undertake a self-review exercise based around the Twenty Key Questions for the Governing Body to ask itself, produced by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Education Governance and Leadership

Main Findings

Governors bring a range of relevant skills to the governing body, and have worked hard to ensure that practices are effective. This has included recently reconstituting and restructuring the governing body, commissioning a bespoke training session on roles and responsibilities and completing a skills audit. The governing body is a member of the National Governors' Association and governors have a good awareness of the educational landscape and the current challenges facing schools. Governors have worked alongside school leaders to develop the school vision and development plan, and are enthusiastic and passionate in their commitment to the school and its community.

Despite this the governing body is not yet working effectively. It has found the recent issues within the school very challenging. There have been tensions between the governing body and school leaders and significant levels of dissatisfaction have been expressed by some parents, including dissatisfaction with the conduct of some governors and the governing body as a whole. This has manifested itself in the form of multiple complaints, including to the LA,

anonymous letters and freedom of information requests. For various reasons responses to some of these issues have been delayed and this has served only to increase parental pressure.

The way these complaints, and the situations to which they relate, have been handled by the governing body has also led to some tensions between governors, as some have felt excluded from decision-making processes, and/or have not fully supported decisions that have been made and approaches that have been taken. There have also been tensions between governors and school leaders as leaders have not always felt fully supported, and governors have not always felt that they have effectively held school leaders to account.

These issues have contributed to the high turnover of governors in leadership positions. A disproportionate amount of governing body time and individual governors' time and energy have been devoted to dealing with the issues surrounding the complaints, and governors feel a sense of frustration that this has prevented them from taking a more proactive leadership role within the school.

Governors acknowledge that governor induction has been variable, and this may have contributed to the fact that there is not yet a consistent understanding of the role of the governing body. Perhaps most significantly there is not yet a consistent understanding of the role of governors in protecting confidentiality, and in not bringing the school or the governing body into disrepute.

All these issues have contributed towards a mistrust between governors and also between governors and school leaders which needs to be addressed moving forward.

Because of the challenges in relation to parental communications the governing body has appointed a communications governor and has also established a new post of communication and marketing manager. The intention is for these individuals to work together to create a communications strategy, although this has not yet been achieved. Parental dissatisfaction has been increased by an apparent lack of clarity in the school complaints process, which has led to delays in a formal complaint being dealt with and a review panel decision that a hearing should have been held, but had not been.

Governors are not satisfied with current clerking arrangements. There is a lack of clarity with the current provider as to what the role of the clerk entails. Governors are currently minuting the teaching and learning committee themselves. Further discussions are needed with the current clerk and the organisation her services are purchased through, which should include extending clerking arrangements to the teaching and learning committee.

Some governors feel disempowered by issues being dealt with by a small number of governors, and there may be greater transparency needed around, for example, the headteacher's performance management process. However the perceived lack of

transparency may be related to the lack of trust between those involved and all governors need to be confident that all issues will be treated confidentially before such potentially sensitive information is shared.

Some governors feel that there is not a fully shared view of the school ethos between governors and school leaders. If this is the case this is clearly an issue which requires further discussion.

The governing body reconstituted to a total size of 12 and, once the current chair and vice chair have left, will have 5 co-opted governor vacancies. Recruitment is therefore rightly being considered as a high priority. As well as filling the other vacancies the governing body is seeking an experienced chair from outside the governing body to support its future development.

It should be noted that, despite the challenges outlined above, outcomes for children in the school are good and improving.

Recommendations

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.

October 2015 update

At the time this report was agreed and the action plan finalised the governing body had already begun to act on its recommendations. Three new co-opted governors have been appointed and the former vice chair has stepped up to the role of chair for a twelve month period and is seeking to build the governing body up and also to address the communication issues outlined above both within the governing body and between the governing body and parents.

Action plan: Oswald Road Primary School				
Priority for improvement	Action required	By when	By whom	Success Criteria
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"> 1. A documented induction process is in place. 2. This is consistently completed for all new governors. 3. The skills audit is up to date and the governing body is aware of any identified skills gaps. 4. This information has been used to ensure that new governors bring appropriate skills to the governing body. 5. Training on complaints handling has taken place with a majority of governors in attendance. 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.
	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	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A chair and vice chair are in place and understand their role. 2. The chair and vice chair have accessed appropriate support. 3. By the end of this academic year a suitable new chair has been identified. 4. A succession plan is in place which identifies future leaders and the support and development they will receive. 5. Vacancies have been filled.
	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"> 1. All governors have committed to continuing in the role under current expectations. 2. The code of conduct is understood and has been signed by all governors. There are no further breaches of confidentiality attributable to governors. 3. Governors visit school regularly, understand the purpose of these visits and report back to the full governing body. 4. The governing body is well informed about the school, and about progress against the school development plan. 5. Governors are well prepared for meetings and meetings are both efficient and effective.
	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"> Governors understand the complaints policy and undertake their role in relation to any complaints in a way that is consistent with the policy. Complaints and freedom of information requests are dealt with in a timely way. Governors and school leaders have a clear and consistent understanding of the role of the Communications Manager. The outstanding complaints process has been completed. Governors have a clear understanding of the views of parents and have regard to these when making decisions. The number of complaints received has reduced.
	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	