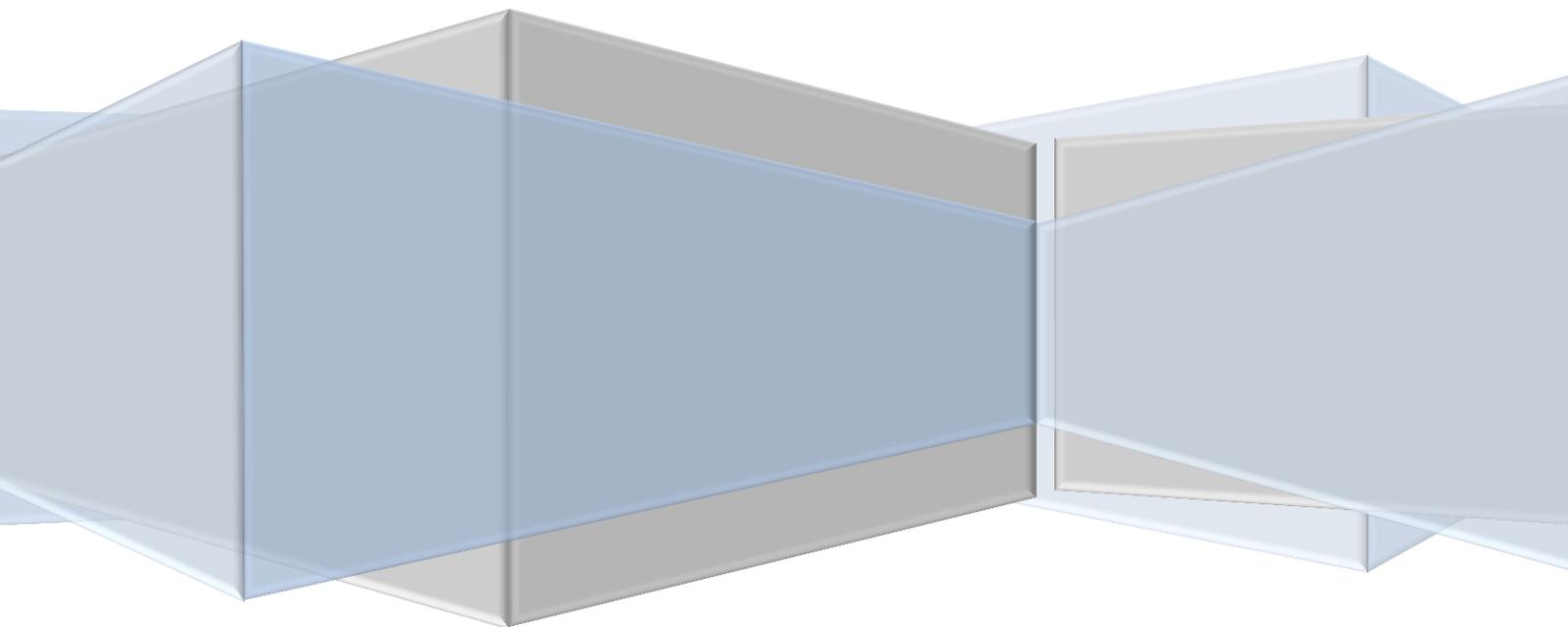


Review of governance

**English Martyrs Catholic Primary School, A
Voluntary Academy, January 2016**



Introduction

The external review of governance is intended to be a supportive process. Through a series of meetings with stakeholders and the review of evidence presented by the Academy Council, the LA Officers aim to provide Governors with an overview of identified strengths, areas for development and, finally, a list of recommendations for the Academy Council to take forward.

The Officers have attempted to triangulate information from various sources to prepare this report to Governors. The Officers have tried to avoid using an individual's perspective; rather they have sought to verify the views and opinions with other stakeholders and/or documentation. Individuals have not been named.

The Officers have tried to paint an accurate picture of governance at the school, including highlighting concerns if appropriate. The Officers have sought to provide an appropriate level of challenge where it was felt to be in the best interests of the school. The Officers sought to ensure the Academy Council has a clear understanding of its strengths and areas for development – without an honest review of governance the school will not be able to maximise the effectiveness of subsequent actions.

General comments:

- The Officers would like to thank the Headteacher and Governors who participated in the review for their time and open discussion about governance at the school.
- The review consisted of analysis of twelve months of minutes of meetings of the full Academy Council, the latest Ofsted report, LA primary data profile, Headteacher's reports and Governor training records, a meeting with the Headteacher, a review of additional documentation presented by the school including minutes of committee meetings and a meeting with 4 Governors.
- In reflecting on their current practice all Governors would benefit from reviewing the LAs 'Further Developing Effective Governance' resource: <http://tinyurl.com/FDEGpdf>
- The school was inspected by Ofsted on 27 November 2012 with an overall judgement of good. Comments within the report around governance included:

“ The governing body has improved their ways of working since the last inspection by ensuring that they have a more detailed understanding of the school's effectiveness. Governors are taking much greater account of the range of data and monitoring information available to them.

They are informed about the quality of teaching and salary progression of staff. This ensures that they are able to ask more challenging questions of senior leaders than previously. They are now able to hold staff to account for the standards achieved and the use of pupil premium funding. Governors have established a clear focus on development planning.

They are keen to extend their programme of focussed visits to ensure that they have an even better first-hand understanding of the areas for improvement and are not as dependent on staff for detailed information.”

- The latest Section 48 inspection was undertaken on 17 and 18 January 2013 with an overall judgement of outstanding. Comments within the report around governance included:

“The governors and headteacher, supported by the caretaker and cleaners have ensured that the physical environment of the school is extremely comfortable, clean and safe.

The governors of the school have well established systems in place to identify strengths and areas for improvement. They know the school well and have built a solid foundation on which to continue to drive the school forward. All canonical and statutory responsibilities are fulfilled”.

Areas identified as strengths:

- There are good relationships amongst the Academy Council and with school staff.
- Governors are aware of their roles and responsibilities and they are “eyes on, hands off”.
- The Headteacher and Chair meet regularly to discuss school related issues.
- Meetings of the Academy Council are chaired well and all voices are heard at meetings.
- Meetings are scheduled for the full academic year to support Governors in planning their time and committing to attend.
- Governors have an informal awareness of the skills of individual Governors including legal, building and HR skills. They have used this informal intelligence to help identify Governors to sit on committees and undertake key roles.
- Governors are supportive of the school and the direction of travel.
- Governors have accessed Diocesan and LA Governor Training to enhance their knowledge and skills. New Governors are encouraged to attend Induction training.
- A Governor signing-in book has been introduced to capture Governor dates, times and focus of visits to school which is helpful in supporting Governors in tracking their engagement with the school.
- Governors have adopted a Code of Conduct in meetings which sets out the expectation of Governors and seeks their commitment to the role and to upholding confidentiality. The Code of Conduct has been adapted from a National Governors Association (NGA) model.
- The Headteacher welcomes challenge within full Academy Council and Committee meetings.
- The Academy Council has a well-established committee structure, membership and terms of reference in place. The framework for committees supports the Academy Council in managing its work effectively and it uses committees as the “engine room of governance” where detailed discussion and deeper exploration of data and information takes place. The committees appear to work effectively. The main committees are: Resources and Environment, Standards and Pupils and Admissions Committees. There are secondary committees established which enable specific issues to be considered in a timely manner, for example, should a parental complaint arise. The Chairs of committees plan the agendas and they are circulated in advance of the meeting.
- Minutes of committee meetings capture the key points of the discussion, actions, decision and challenge at the meeting. This supports Governors in evidencing their monitoring activities and how they are holding senior leaders to account through asking searching and probing questions.
- Committee Chairs are different from the Chair/Vice-Chair of the Academy Council. Sharing of leadership roles adds capacity and supports succession planning.
- The Chair of the Academy Council has developed a Business Plan which sets out the strategic objectives for the year, items for the agendas of full Academy Council meetings, whole Academy Council in-house training, dates of Academy Council and Committee meetings and meetings with the School Improvement Adviser. This supports the Academy Council in its own development and strategic planning over the year and aids Governors in managing their commitments.
- Governors undertake an annual self-evaluation which is collated by the Chair and areas for development inform the Business Plan. At meetings in Summer Term (2),

the Chair feeds back his analysis of the self-evaluation and Governors agree how this should feed into the Business Plan.

- Governors are proactive in asking for information that they want to support them in knowing the school and in gaining a deeper understanding of specific areas. The Headteacher has adapted her reports to Governors as appropriate in response to Governors' requests.
- Staff have attended meetings of committees to give presentations. This reduces Governors' reliance on the Headteacher for information and supports them in triangulating and validating information and data. This activity also supports Governor engagement with staff and builds positive relationships.
- The School Improvement Adviser has provided information to the Standards and Pupils Committee to support Governors in gaining a deeper knowledge of the school, the data and key priorities. It is beneficial for Governors to gain an external view of the school to support them in validating information received directly from the school.
- Governors have attended MRE meetings with the School Improvement Adviser and senior leaders. This is a powerful way to gain an external view of the school and a deep understanding of the school.
- The Headteacher is on the BKCAT Trust Board and she feeds back key information to the Academy Council to keep them in the loop.
- The Chairs of Academy Councils have been invited to meet to share key messages which supports their partnership working and networking opportunities.
- Some Governors have a secure understanding of the data. The RAISEonline data is presented to Governors by the Headteacher each year. A presentation is planned once the validated data is received.
- The Headteacher provides key headline information and data within her report to the Academy Council. The report includes information on the profile of teaching.
- The Headteacher leads on the formulation of the School Development Plan (SDP) and presents it to Governors for their views and comments. They receive regular updates on progress against the SDP at meetings of the Academy Council.
- Governors have introduced a Governor Newsletter to share key information and support engagement with parents and the community. They are looking to produce this on a termly basis and a Governor takes a lead role in its production.
- Governor links have been established and Governors are aware of the remit of the link roles including the expectation that they meet with their link subject leader. Some Governors have embraced the link role which supports them in their monitoring and evaluation activities.
- The Health and Safety Governor walks the school on a termly basis independently and her view feeds into the Health and Safety Action Plan. The action plan is updated to reflect the Governor comments to aid tracking and monitoring.
- Governors who are members of the Standards and Pupils Committee are aware of the profile of teaching and they understand the links between performance and pay.
- Governors have been invited to join meetings in school looking at the development of middle leaders, which is a key priority. This supports them in gaining first-hand information about the steps being taken by the school to address this priority.
- Governors are aware of the amount of Pupil Premium monies received by the school, how it is spent and the impact. They are aware that this information is published on the website.
- The Academy Council reviews and adopts policies in a timely manner. This supports the school in implementing policies that are up to date and meet the latest legal and Trust requirements.
- The Academy Council has appointed a Safeguarding Link person. The Safeguarding Link meets with SENCo and Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead to review procedures and update the action plan. Minutes of their meetings are produced and these provide evidence of the monitoring activity undertaken by the Link Governor.

The Headteacher provides an update on health and safety and safeguarding at each meeting of the Academy Council and reference is captured briefly within the minutes.

- The Academy Council upholds the religious ethos of the school and there are strong links with the Church. There is evidence in minutes that a Governor has observed pupil-led collective worship (see minutes 23 March 2015).
- The Headteacher performance management has been undertaken by Governors and with the support of an external adviser before the statutory deadline.

Areas for development:

- Governors should undertake a formal skills audit to identify the skills of Governors and any gaps. The audit can be used to support recruitment, identify training needs and signpost Governors to committees.
- “Declarations of Interest” appears as a standard item on the agenda of meetings. It is not clear from minutes whether interests have been declared and to which item they relate (for example see minutes 1 December 2014).
- Whilst Governors state that they challenge senior leaders and the Headteacher encourages challenge, there is little evidence in minutes of meetings of the full Academy Council that this is happening in practice, however there is some evidence within minutes of the main committee meetings. Governors are recommended to prompt the Clerk to capture challenging and probing questions within minutes of the meeting together with the answer that is provided by senior leaders. This will support the Academy Council in evidencing its monitoring activities and aid its tracking. The minutes should show the “journey of the school” and “direction of travel” to aid Governors in their tracking and monitoring and to showcase the work that they and the school are doing to drive forward improvement.
- The Headteacher’s report is sent to Governors in advance of the meeting. This allows time for Governors to read the report and prepare questions for the meeting. However, it appears that the report is received passively in meetings and there is little or no questioning (see minutes 1 December 2014, 23 March, 11 May and 6 July 2015). The report should scaffold discussion and be a key agenda item rather than passive information.
- The Headteacher shares external reports with Governors which supports them in validating the data and information received from the school. For example, the peer review and self-evaluation was shared at the meeting on 23 March 2015. The School Improvement Partner update was shared at the meeting on 11 May 2015. However, there were no questions or challenge on the reports received.
- Whilst committees operate effectively, it is not always clear that they are reporting back on the decisions made to the Academy Council. This would support Governors who are not members of the committee in maintaining a strategic focus of decisions being taken on their behalf.
- Governors are recommended to produce a focussed monitoring and evaluation schedule linked to the School Development Plan key priorities. Some Governing Bodies align their own monitoring schedule with the school’s monitoring calendar. Governors should complete a visits form to capture the focus and purpose of the visit, what they saw and the impact on governance at the school. They should feedback briefly to the next meeting of the Academy Council to share their monitoring activity with fellow Governors and ensure that evidence of the visits is recorded within the minutes to aid them in their tracking and monitoring.
- The Business Plan provides an excellent basis on which the Academy Council can plan its work over the year. It is recommended that the plan is further developed to include named lead persons, timescales, monitoring activities and Governor training and development opportunities. The LA’s Governing Body Annual Planner document would support the Governing Body in developing this aspect of its work.

Recommendations:

The Officer conducting the external review would make the following recommendations to the Academy Council. However, this is presented as guidance only and decisions must be made by the governing body:

1. Produce an improvement plan for governance based on this report and the Academy Council's own reflections. This should be owned by all Governors and all Governors should contribute to its implementation. This should be shared with the LA Officer within two weeks. A template is provided (<http://tinyurl.com/kbon8we>). Alternatively, the Academy council may wish to use its own template.
2. Offer the Clerk training and development in minute writing in order to enhance the quality of the minutes of meetings of the Academy Council. The minutes are the key document to showcase the work of the Governing Body. They should record discussions in meetings, actions and decisions taken and the challenge of senior leaders through evidencing searching and probing questions.
3. Increase the level of challenge at meetings of the Academy Council by preparing in advance of the meeting and asking searching and probing questions at the meeting. The Headteacher and more experienced Governors will be able to prompt questions. Documentation is available to support Governors in shaping questions, for example, RAISEonline includes example questions that Governors may wish to ask. Initially, it may seem artificial to use prompt questions but this will support in building Governors' confidence and will prompt further questioning. However, it is important to emphasise that questions seeking clarity should be kept to a minimum.
4. Further enhance the Business Plan to include a monitoring and evaluation schedule including activities such as classroom visits, work sampling, staff presentations, and discussions with staff and pupils and key meetings. The schedule could align with the school's own monitoring calendar and should cover all priority areas. Following each focused visit, Governors should complete a visits form to capture the focus and purpose of the visit and how this has impacted on governance. Governors should provide a short verbal report back to the next meeting of the Academy Council to ensure that this evidence is captured within the minutes and to support tracking and monitoring. Governors do not have to commit a lot of time to these activities as they have to be manageable and not over burden Governors. A Governor can see an initiative in practice, a resource being used, have a short meeting with a member of staff or look at a sample of books in half an hour to an hour. The sharing of monitoring activities across the Academy Council shares the workload and adds capacity.

These actions will enhance the quality of governance. The LA Officers conducting the review risk assess governance as "requires support". School Governor Services are committed to supporting the school to address these priorities. The training programme and bespoke support is available.

Report of:

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Date: 27 January 2016

Governance risk assessment

These assessments are best fit.

- **Low risk:** Governance is deemed to be effective. For example, Governors engage in school and classroom monitoring visits, the Governing Body does not fulfil its duties just through attendance at meetings, effective committee structures are in place and committees meet regularly, and Governing Body meeting time is used efficiently. The Governing Body is aware of the use and impact of Pupil Premium funding, link pay to performance and has a secure understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Pupil performance data for the school is above national averages and national expectations and this is being sustained. Schools will typically be in Band 1 to 3.

- **Need support:** There are areas for development needing to be addressed to make governance effective. For example, Governors need to become more engaged in monitoring the schools progress and hold senior leaders to account. The Governing Body is aware of the use of Pupil Premium funding, monitor the quality of teaching and have a broad awareness of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Pupil performance data for the school is at least in line with national averages and national expectations and outcomes are improving. Schools will typically be in Band 1 to 3.

- **High risk:** Governance needs significant amounts of support and, without this; this would impact on the judgement for leadership and management during inspection. The work of the Governing Body is not sufficiently effective, e.g. the Governing Body work is conducted purely in meetings, committees are not well established and operating effectively and/or Governors lack a rigorous understanding of the school. The Governing Body are not aware of the impact of Pupil Premium funding, do not effectively link pay to performance and do not have a secure understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Pupil performance data for the school is in line or below national averages and national expectations with few signs of improvement. Schools will typically be in Band 3 to 4.