

Hardenhuish Governing Body Report to Parents 2019-20

Introduction

This report to parents reflects the activities of the governing body across the academic year. The aim is to provide parents and the wider community with better information about the work of the governing body in providing oversight, support and challenge to Hardenhuish School.

The report is in three parts. The first explains the structure and function of the governing body, the second reflects on changes to the governing body and the third describes the work of the governors during the course of the last year.

The coronavirus pandemic dramatically impacted on the work of the school and governor activities and is described in the third part.

Part One – Structure and Function

During the course of 2018-19 a review of governance was held resulting in a new structure for 2019.

The Governing body of Hardenhuish school is made up of a mix of community, parent and co-opted staff 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:

- ensuring clarity of vision, ethos, and strategic direction;
- holding the headteacher to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the performance management of staff; and
- overseeing and ensuring effective financial performance.

The full governing body meets six times a year at the end of a cycle of Resources, Education, and Community committee meetings. A Strategy committee sits three times a year. The governors also form panels to deal with matters such as admissions, pay, and the Headteacher's appraisal.

Outside the meeting cycle, governors visit faculties within the school, attend events, interview potential staff, and liaise on finance, attendance, equalities, and other areas. There are also governors dedicated to Special Educational Needs, Pupil Premium, Child Protection, and Health and Safety.

Governors work closely with the headteacher and senior leadership team and also play a key role in monitoring the school finances with the Chair of Resources actively involved in the audit and preparation of the annual report. The Responsible Officer, an appropriately qualified governor, also carries out internal audit checks and reports those to governors, although with the change in government regulation, that role is being transferred to an external organisation.

An additional tier of governance provides oversight of the work of the governing body. This tier is comprised of the Members of Hardenhuish School and was established when the school became an academy in 2010. Documents explaining their role more fully can be found in the Governor section of the school website.

Part Two – Changes to the Governing Body and Members in 2019-20

In October, Kirsty Martin was re-elected Chair of Governors and Rob Head was re-elected Vice Chair.

Two community governors were recruited with regard to their specific skills:

- Sophia Swatton joined the board at the end of the year to replace Anneliese Hillyer-Thake who was relocating for work. Sophia is the safeguarding governor and has many years of experience in safeguarding. She was also previously a governor at a primary in Chippenham.
- Michael Smyth, a deputy headteacher at St Mary's in Calne joined the board right at the end of the year and will start his term in the autumn of 2020.

An election was held for parent governors. Sheila Copeman and Spencer Shaw were both re-elected and Steve Elsbay also joined the board.

Sally Dellar became the named link governor to Special Educational Needs and contributed significantly to the department.

The board now has fewer full governors than since it became an academy and the intention is to shrink the number smaller over time. The governors recognise the importance of hearing from the staff and co-opted two staff to help with the work of the committees but they will no longer be expected to attend full governing board meetings. David Mayo, Curriculum Leader for Science, joined the board and Jackie Todd became a co-opted governor in her role as Sixth Form pastoral manager. The intention is that co-opted staff will serve for one year but David Mayo will remain for a second year due to the disruption caused by the pandemic. At the final meeting the board also agreed to Adam Ovens joining in the autumn of 2020 as a co-opted staff governor.

During the year 2018-19 the governors restructured the Members in line with government guidelines. When Hardenhuish converted to an academy in 2010 it was accepted that five governors could also act as members and this was standard practice in the whole sector. The Department for Education says there should be a degree of separation between the members and governors with the majority being non-governors. This separation allows the members to have independent oversight of the work of the governing body. As the members have oversight but are almost entirely hands-off and serve an indefinite term it was deemed critical to replace three governor members with people who understood the school and who had the appropriate level of skills to provide effective oversight.

The members in place at the beginning of the academic year were:

- John Cairns – Hardenhuish deputy head who retired in 2010
- Linda Stuart – retired School Business Manager
- Naomi Tomlin – company director with many years' experience of school governance
- Kirsty Martin – Chair of Governors
- Trevor Eddolls – long-standing governor and original signatory to the Articles of Association of Hardenhuish Academy.

Towards the end of the year Naomi resigned as a Member and was replaced by former governor and past parent Kirsty Clark just before the end of the summer term.

Part 3 – Impact Statement

The work of the governing body has been measured against the three core functions of governance and the additional key features of effective governance outlined in section 1 of the [Governance Handbook](#). There is a final section to capture some of the other work governors have undertaken. The coronavirus pandemic has dominated the work of the governing body

since early 2020 and is dealt with in a separate section as this work covered all the core functions.

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

The single most significant event which has affected the work of the school has been the coronavirus pandemic which led to the school closing.

Governors recognised the volume of work facing the school in trying to move in line with government guidance. They adapted their way of working to support the fundamental strategic changes that needed to be made. Meetings in Term 5 were suspended to allow the leadership team time to deal with operational matters. A core committee of Chairs was established and met twice to approve the central assessment methodology and consider other matters such as the coronavirus risk assessment. This committee also signed off the return to school plans.

Essential committee work was carried out in Microsoft Teams. The Chair held regular meetings with the Head to discuss and support decisions and the Chair and Vice Chair contributed to the coronavirus risk register and this was also updated by meetings and by the Chair until the return to school. The Chair also joined a regular review group set up by Wiltshire Council to ensure effective strategic governance during this period.

Throughout the period of lock-down the Head was in regular contact with the Chair regarding the operation of the school, how lessons were being held and plans for pupils coming back into school.

At the final Education committee meeting of the year governors requested a full discussion on how pupils had been taught during the coronavirus lockdown and how some were now returning to school. There was particular emphasis on the work of the SEND team. The committee also looked ahead at primary transition for pupils joining in the Autumn and at the possible options for school returning. The committee also requested and considered both parental surveys from March and May.

Once the results of the A levels were published the Head and Chair worked together to look at the implications of the algorithm. The Chair contacted and spoke to MP Michelle Donelan and the Head had a follow-up call.

Governors requested more information regarding the return to school and provided feedback.

CORE FUNCTIONS OF GOVERNANCE

Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction

Governors scrutinised the school development plan and received updates until the pandemic paused the successful continuance of the plan for this academic year. The plan is the roadmap for all development of Hardenhuish and contains the core objectives for the school which encompass teaching and learning; pupil progress; wellbeing, leadership and sustainability.

For more detail in relation to teaching and learning and pupil progress see the core function, below, relating to educational performance. Similarly for leadership and sustainability see further comments below.

Regarding the Wellbeing objective - support continued to be provided following the death of Ellie Gould. Governors continued to provide ongoing pastoral and strategic support drawing on their professional and personal experiences. The Wellbeing governor continued to work

with the Assistant Headteacher leading on wellbeing and was part of the assessment process for the Wellbeing Award. The SMSCE governor was involved in lessons. The Resources Committee has provided ongoing consideration of staff wellbeing. This can be evidenced by a lack of stress-related absence. The committee has also scrutinised exit questionnaires in relation to wellbeing. Workload is a constant consideration in committees and private conversations with staff and the Senior Leadership Team and governors try to ensure their work does not add unnecessarily to that load. Progress in Wellbeing was monitored throughout the year by the Community Committee.

Governors have paused their active work in the Ethical Leadership Pathfinder project but continue to embrace the ethical principles. This year these were written into the codes of conduct and continue to permeate our work.

The governors have also undertaken a number of leadership objectives within the School Development Plan as follows:

- Governors to consider their work in monitoring SEN to improve understanding of challenges, provision and delivery.
- Utilise the Wellbeing Award framework to ensure the schools' culture has a clear vision and strategy for promoting emotional wellbeing and positive mental health across the whole-school community (staff and pupils) including Governor input
- Evaluate the impact of new processes and practices, following the governance review, in order to enhance the effectiveness of the Governing Body.

The newly formed Strategy Committee has provided a useful space for discussion about strategic matters and to act as a springboard for governor-led projects. This has prompted, for example, some ongoing work around parental engagement which has led to a breakout group of governors working outside the committee structure.

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

The Headteacher was appraised by a panel of governors in the autumn. The Staffing panel also considered pay awards following staff appraisal.

Departmental and School Development Plans – governors attended meetings with their linked faculties across the school. This included a curriculum leader or Learning Manager and the Head. The Education Committee monitored progress and reports were also given to the full governing body. The Head has taken questions at the full governing body meetings about progress.

Link Governors made visits throughout the year to evaluate progress in their faculties.

The Education committee scrutinised the exam results to identify any issues arising and sought reassurance that there had been no inappropriate off-rolling in order to enhance the results. A number of governors training sessions on the new Ofsted Framework and this prompted a lot of discussion especially around the objective of demonstrating Curriculum Intent. The governors and school do not believe in teaching towards Ofsted inspection but it was clear that intent needed to be evident in the rewriting of policies and the committee provided assistance to that aim. They also asked ensured Wellbeing was added to all relevant policies.

The inclusion of EPQ in A level results figures was also discussed. The committee approved the introduction of Spanish in Year 7 in addition to French.

Overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent.

The Chair of the Resources committee attended an auditors' seminar and played a role in the auditing of the accounts. The Responsible Officer, a governor, conducted and reported on inspection visits until the role became one for external checking.

The Chair of Governors and Chair of Resources receive monthly budget reports and every meeting scrutinises the accounts. The budget proposal and revisions have been considered by the Resources committee and taken to the full governing board. Due to extremely careful budget management the school maintains a sound financial position and still holds a suitable reserve. During the year a review of that reserve was conducted and a policy considered to ensure the reserve was managed and could be spent if it reached a certain level. This led to the approval of work to improve the 6th Form Centre in time for reopening in September 2020.

The Resources Committee scrutinises the Pay Policy. The committee was involved in supporting decisions concerning both the recruitment and non-replacement of staff in order to ensure adequate staffing. It also considered and approved a number of flexible working requests. The committee also supported structural changes to the Sixth Form.

Governors have been involved throughout the year in interviewing prospective teaching staff, often at short notice due to the pressures of recruiting in some subjects. They have also participated in a panel hearing.

EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

People with the right skills, experience, qualities and capacity

Governors have undertaken a skills audit which is being scrutinised to identify gaps and training need. Based on a previous audit, targeted recruitment, has been used for new members of the governing body.

The review of the committee structure, undertaken by a team of Governors led by the Deputy Chair of Governors, resulted in new working from the beginning of the academic year. Governors were assigned to committees and link roles to play to their strengths. Workload for some governors was adjusted. A governor with responsibility for training was established to ensure governors continued to build their skills although changing personal circumstances limited the efficacy of that role in this year.

One key improvement was moving a lot of governor working to Teams which proved fortuitous when the pandemic struck as it permitted online meetings and collaborative working.

The changes overall were not entirely unproblematic but were reviewed mid-year and adjustments were made.

During the year there were two parental vacancies. One governor was re-elected and another came forward who brought new skills to the board. A new Safeguarding governor – with professional expertise – was recruited to replace a departing governor with similar credentials.

Structures that reinforce clearly defined roles and responsibilities

The Codes of Conduct was reworked for 2019-20 and additional documents clearly spelling out the function of their separate roles were also devised.

The move to separate governors and the majority of members has been formalised and the Chair of Governors is no longer the Chair of the Members.

The Scheme of Delegation was rewritten for 2019-20 with roles and responsibilities further clarified. It has been further revised for 2020-21

A clear workflow for the improved organisation of committee meetings has been agreed between the committee chairs, Head and Clerk.

The Link Governors procedure has been redrawn and the role of link staff explained to them by the Head. A workflow is being drawn up for disciplinary and redundancy panels to add clarity to the process.

Compliance with statutory and contractual requirements

The Musts from the Governance Handbook and from the Academies Financial Handbook are subject to rolling governor and staff review and the school risk register has been rewritten.

The Clerk has ensured Companies House has been updated when necessary. As previously mentioned, the Chair of Resources was involved in the accounts audit and attended a seminar with the auditors. One governor acting as Responsible Officer carried out financial checks in school.

A general safeguarding review was conducted. The Safeguarding Governor, recruited with specialist professional expertise, provided support and guidance to the school in the re-drawing of policies. All governors have completed appropriate training.

A review of statutory and essential policies has been conducted with the rebadging of some to policies. A governor with appropriate experience has been assisting in the rewriting of some staffing policies and procedures. Throughout the year governors have contributed to policy review – one of the more major tasks being the redrawing of the Policies for Staff who are Parents into more user-friendly documents.

The Resources Committee has ensured the school has appropriately conducted staff review and appraisal and has provided careful consideration to flexible working requests.

Evaluation to monitor and improve the quality and impact of governance.

This impact statement is an opportunity to evaluate the activity of governors.

The internal review of governance, which has also involved working with other governing bodies, resulted in a full restructure and refocus of the board which came into action this year. It has been reviewed and revised during the year and a survey was conducted among the governing body. Governors are offered training opportunities to improve the quality of governance and one has participated in a leadership training course.

The Chair is a board member of the Wiltshire Governors' Association and uses this network to provide a benchmark to governance at Hardenhuish. Through the WGA she is able to offer support back to other governing bodies.

Additional items

Governors have attended a variety of events – ranging from faculty events to awards ceremonies, the Xmas Fayre, Smoothie Challenge, Poetry Slam and Open Week. This activity was curtailed this year by the pandemic.

A governor who worked with the school and applied for road improvements to Hardenhuish Lane saw that work come to fruition. She has continued this work this year by showing a

PCSO the ongoing issue with parking at key points of the day and continuing to lobby for improvements.

In their link roles various governors met with key Sixth Form staff, MFL, Sociology, RE, History, Dance, ICT, Maths, Business and Years 7-11.

Governors have attended a range of face-to-face and online training courses.

The SEND governor has spent a great deal of time getting to know that department and assisting them in their work.

Governors have undertaken a variety of online courses provided by the NGA and have also attended face to face training. This covered topics such as Ofsted, Data, School Visits, Wellbeing and Structures.