



## **Hardenhuish Governing Body Report to Parents - 2020-21**

### **Introduction**

This report to parents reflects the activities of the governing body in the academic year 2020-21. 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. It is to ensure governors have been performing their statutory tasks and that they have had an impact in supporting the 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**

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 departments within the school, attend events, interview potential staff, and liaise on finance, attendance, equalities, and other areas. Due to the pandemic all meetings and visits were held via Teams with some attendance at school for recruitment etc. 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.

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 2020-21**

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

Michael Smyth, a deputy headteacher at St Mary's in Calne, began his term as a Community Governor at the start of the school year.

A new clerk, Claire Brown, was recruited to replace Tina Deedigan who stepped down after several years.

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, had a second year in role and was joined by fellow teacher Adam Ovens.

## **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 hit in early 2020 and has impacted the work of the school ever since.

Governors recognised the ongoing and increased volume of work facing the school, and especially the senior staff, in trying to adapt with constantly changing government guidance. Due to restrictions on meeting face to face all meetings continued via Teams.

The fundamental change in comparison to the previous year was that the pandemic became normalised and, although there was another period of closure, the school and governors settled into the rhythm of the changed ways of working.

Governors set themselves the task of reviewing lessons learned from COVID in terms of the working of the board and the practices of the school. The former is underway, and the latter will be looked at more closely in 2021-22.

Due to the normalising of the pandemic the work of the governing body in relation to coronavirus is threaded through the elements of this report.

### **CORE FUNCTIONS OF GOVERNANCE**

#### **Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction**

Governors scrutinised the school development plan and received updates. 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.

The Governors set themselves three objectives which can be summarised as

- considering their work in monitoring Special Educational Needs to improve understanding of the challenges, provision, and delivery.
- Governors to continue monitoring the wellbeing of staff and pupils.
- COVID Lessons for Future

The latter is briefly discussed in the previous section. Regarding the SEN objective, several governors attended a session offered by the Wiltshire Governors' Association where the speaker was from NASEN (The National Association for Special Educational Needs). The SENCO, Debbie Bennett attended an Education Committee meeting to present and followed this with another presentation to the board. She and the SEN link governor, Sally Dellar, then went on to compile a SEN report to governors which will be a living document going forwards and maintained by the board, so that there is a better and ongoing understanding of issues facing the department. Mrs Dellar and Mrs Bennett also report to every meeting of the Education Committee where SEN is a standing item. Mrs Dellar has played an integral role in helping establish learning maps for SEN pupils.

Regarding the Wellbeing initiative, Hardenhuish gained the Wellbeing Award for Schools. Wellbeing is raised at every committee meeting and the main board and forms a part of conversations between link governors and their school links and the chair and headteacher. The governors make sure that discussions regarding wellbeing are centred on the whole school community.

The issue of mental health goes hand in hand with wellbeing and governors have been appraised of and are fully supportive of the work the school is doing in dealing with this under exceedingly difficult circumstances.

Governors have been concerned about leadership team workload and have been encouraging a rethink in the leadership structure. A new Assistant Headteacher with a focus on wellbeing is now to be recruited.

The Strategy Committee has provided a useful space for discussion about strategic matters but reduced the number of meetings due to school workload. A number of projects have been identified for next year including continuing the work on 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 and a midyear review was held with the Chair. The Staffing panel also considered pay awards following staff appraisal.

Governors normally attend review and target setting meetings with their linked faculties across the school in Term 1. Regrettably this was not possible this year due to the pandemic, but link governors were made aware of their relevant Departmental Development Plans and could use them to frame conversations with their school links. The Education Committee monitored progress and reports on the School Development Plan were also given to the full governing body.

The committee received a report of the results generated through Centre Assessed Grades for pupils in the 2020 exam cycle. Governors examined data which showed the results were broadly in line with those predicted by the Fisher Family Trust and the continued monitoring of individual pupil progress at Hardenhuish.

Additional meetings, outside the normal cycle, were held with governors regarding the Tutor Assessed Grades so that governors could be assured that the school was applying the correct methodology and was seeking to provide the most accurate and fair grades in a climate where public exams have not been possible. The Head has taken questions at the full governing body meetings about progress and tutor assessed grades have been discussed at length by the Education Committee.

Attention has also been focussed on the delivery of teaching and how pupils will be able to catch up their lost learning. The committee chair, Sheila Copeman, sought assurances that a member of the leadership team was responsible for learning and that all necessary information would be on the website by set deadlines.

The board is extremely dissatisfied that the exam boards appear to be intending not to refund any of the cost of the summer series despite the school doing all of the work and will be writing to the boards to try to seek a refund.

Governor, Michael Smyth, who is an external teaching professional (see the Effective Governance section) met with Dr Bassford to compare approaches and share ideas.

The committee has also discussed the challenges and effective use of remote learning including allowing breaks between lessons so pupils and staff did not have to sit all day.

The Education Committee has, among other matters, discussed the challenges in behaviours in some year groups and the use of ACES and rewards. It has also looked at the use of the Key Centre and the Year 9 options. The committee also provided support input to the new Aspirations Policy which replaces AGAT and better reflects the whole school vision for all children to reach their potential.

Mrs Copeman sits on the group ensuring that pupil premium funding is being spent appropriately with the aim of providing the best support to allow disadvantage young people to progress. The governor ensured a review took place during the year to assess that progress.

Although it was not possible to go into school, link governors met online with their school links and reported back to full board.

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

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 still holds a reserve. The governing body has decided to monitor the reserve to ensure it is spent if it builds up past a certain point. This led to the governors authorising the surfacing of the footpath running the length of the drive.

Governors took part in the preparation of the annual accounts and ensured they were provided to the Members and filed prior to the deadline. New internal auditors were appointed to provide monitoring during the fiscal year.

The Resources Committee also has an audit function and work began on a system for governors to benchmark the school against various comparators in order to provide assurance. Kirsty Martin joined a training session on the View my Financial Insights government website and access to the website was arranged for governors. Rob Head attended a workshop by our auditors, Bishop Fleming and a further session hosted by Lloyds Bank.

The committee reviewed compliance and the risk register. All governors were given information on Fraud Awareness.

A new finance system was also agreed.

The Resources Committee scrutinises the Pay Policy prior to approval by the full board. The committee was involved in supporting decisions concerning both the recruitment and non-replacement of staff to ensure adequate staffing.

#### **EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE**

##### **People with the right skills, experience, qualities and capacity**

Kirsty Martin was re-elected Chair of Governors and underwent a full suitability check which was a legal requirement introduced this year.

Governors have undertaken the annual skills audit to identify gaps and training needs. Targeted recruitment has been used where appropriate such as Michael Smyth who joined the board in September. Mr Smyth is a deputy headteacher at St Mary's Calne and brings valuable professional educational experience to the board from outside Hardenhuish.

Succession planning is now fundamental to the operation of the board and vice chairs are being appointed to all committees. The current Vice Chair has given notice that he will not stand again when his term ends next year, and this has permitted a gradual handover of his duties to enable a smooth transition. Two governors have also swapped committee to make the best use of their experience.

Governors are offered training opportunities to improve the quality of governance and one, Nicola Wood, has now successfully completed a chair of governors training course and participated in the Schools and Academies roadshow, Wiltshire Governors' Conference and Wiltshire Governors' Association Open meeting.

Isabelle Semichon attended Wellbeing training and Phil Townsend attended a Developing Innovative Career Programme.

##### **Structures that reinforce clearly defined roles and responsibilities**

The Codes of Conduct which clearly spell out the function of the distinct role of governors and members were signed.

The Scheme of Delegation has been reviewed and revised for 2021-22.

A new clerk, Claire Brown, has been recruited externally providing a separation from school. She was fully inducted during a phased handover and is participating in ongoing training.

##### **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 reviewed.

The Clerk has ensured Companies House has been updated when necessary.

In September governors approved the Safeguarding Children Policy and undertook the required training.

During the year Wiltshire Council asked all schools to complete an internal safeguarding review. A review panel was established to look at the findings of a review group set up within the school. This panel included Sophia Swatton, the Safeguarding link governor and a safeguarding professional in her own right. She ensured a presentation of the findings to the board.

A review of statutory and essential policies has been completed with the rebadging of some policies. This has reduced the amount of time spent discussing policies and a new schedule has been drawn up to spread them more evenly through the cycle to enable meetings to have more room for discussion of key topics. Throughout the year governors have contributed to policy review at committee and full board.

The Resources Committee has ensured the school has appropriately conducted staff review and appraisal and has provided careful consideration to flexible working requests. Governors play an active role in all teaching staff recruitment and, when appropriate, for support staff roles. This continued with interviews held online and in person as the restrictions allowed.

They have also taken part in a panel hearing and Mrs Martin took part in the Admissions Appeals process.

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

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

The board continues to build on the internal review of governance with minor tweaks to refine the major overhaul last year.

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 and has instigated an offshoot group purely for secondary school chairs from single academy trusts and maintained schools. She has participated in Wiltshire Council-led chairs groups and training as well as numerous National Governors' Association meetings. She has also joined a learning set established by the Regional Schools' Commissioner. She is currently working on a project to improve governor recruitment in Wiltshire.

#### **Additional items**

Governors have not been able to attend events this year due to the pandemic although Trevor Eddolls took part in The Internet of Everything.

In their link roles various governors met with key Sixth Form staff, Science, Geography, PSHCE, MFL, History, Maths and Years 8/9.