

Annual governance statement

Date: 2019-20

Governing bodies are not required to produce an annual report, however at Sphere Federation we believe communicating with our school community is important, and we publish an annual statement to help explain the work of the governing body over the past year.

The purpose of governance is to provide confident, strategic leadership and to create robust accountability, oversight and assurance for educational and financial performance. The day to day management of the schools is the responsibility of the Head of Federation, Heads of School, and senior leadership team.

The governing body of Sphere Federation conducts its business to take account of their three core functions:

- Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction;
- Holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of each school and its pupils, and the performance management of staff;
- Overseeing the financial performance of each school and ensuring money is well spent.

Composition of the governing body and meetings

Over the past academic year, four members stepped back and two new members have been appointed. There are currently three vacancies for governors appointed directly by the governing body. Recruitment of new governors is on hold until the new academic year. Governors are appointed on a skills basis, taking into account the current composition of the governing body. Despite the vacancies, the governing body currently has an excellent balance of the skills required to carry out its work, including financial management, legal and HR expertise, understanding of national education policy, governance professional, and health and safety specialist, and all governors have the ability to work well as a team towards a common goal whilst being able to question and listen in a supportive manner.

The full governing body normally meet four times a year and these meetings are clerked by a trained professional clerk. There are also two governing body committees which each normally meet termly, and a number of other committees and groups that meet less frequently. Some governors also have specific roles and responsibilities. They have the delegated authority to make decisions on behalf of the governing body. The work of the governing body is planned in advance by the Chair and agreed by all governors. This ensures our core functions are met. Additional meetings are held as needed.

Despite governors' workload being high and having a great deal of responsibility, all governors are volunteers. Governors are committed to training and have very good attendance at all meetings. Apologies for non-attendance are considered on an individual basis; governors are aware through the agreed code of conduct that non-attendance may result in their removal.

Further details about the composition of the governing body, committee structure, who the governors are, and governor attendance at meetings are on the school websites.

The effectiveness and impact of the governing body 2019-20

In previous years, we have reported to you on the various priorities and monitoring activities of the governing body throughout the academic year. Without exception, this past year has been the most challenging the education sector has experienced. As a governing body, we have responded by adapting our governance to cover essential business only and to ensure our school leaders are supported. When the schools closed to most pupils in March, it was no longer appropriate for the governing body to monitor the school development priorities and instead, our support has focused on the school's response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the safety and wellbeing of the school community.

In usual circumstances, the governing body undertakes a wide range of monitoring activity, including visiting the schools to meet with subject leads and to discuss aspects of the school improvement and development plans; pupil, staff and parent surveys; and inviting senior staff members to meetings to report on key areas. Much of this has taken place earlier in the year.

The governing body ensured that all its legal functions were met, in particular, monitoring that the schools fully comply with statutory safeguarding procedures. The safeguarding link governors made regular visits to all schools, and safeguarding training was provided to the governing body. Presentations from school leaders were made to the Teaching, Learning and Children Committee enabling governors to ask pertinent questions about the breadth and depth of the curriculum and how this was delivered to all groups of children. The Resources Committee continued to review and monitor school budgets closely, attending budget setting and review meetings ensuring spending is prioritised whilst the school budgets continue to be squeezed. Governors from the Christian Distinctiveness Group (St James' CE Primary only) worked with the school in regularly reviewing the Distinctiveness Improvement Plan and the SIAMS School Evaluation Plan.

Since adapting governance in response to the pandemic, the priority monitoring areas changed rapidly. The focus for the governing body included the Federation response to the pandemic and the wider reopening of the schools; safeguarding; pupil and staff wellbeing; health and safety; finance; and essential policy ratification. The governing body continues to monitor and review the safety of children and staff in school as we steadily increase the number of children attending, through regular discussion of the detailed risk assessments and plans with school leaders, whilst ensuring support for the many children (and their parents and carers) still at home.

We are extremely proud of how all our school community has pulled together throughout the pandemic. Thank you to you all for helping and encouraging the children to stay happy and healthy during this difficult time. Thank you to all our staff and the school leaders for the amazing work they have done throughout this time.

Future plans

High expectation of Sphere Federation governors continues, and governors also have very high expectations of the school leaders. We will continue to ensure that all our statutory duties are met and focus on essential areas of governance whilst supporting school leaders as the Covid-19 situation evolves in the new academic year. Our immediate areas of priority remain the safety and wellbeing of all school staff and pupils, and we will continue to challenge school leaders on our vision that all the schools are a happy and healthy place to learn, and that all our children feel safe.

The governing body will review the committee structure, membership and link roles early in the autumn term, and this will be available to view on the school website. We need to continue to ensure clarity of our roles and good succession planning is in place for this hard-working group of volunteers.

If you are interested in being a governor (not just for Sphere Federation), find out more about the role:

<https://www.nga.org.uk/Governance-Recruitment/Be-a-school-governor-or-trustee.aspx>

and sign up:

<https://www.inspiringgovernance.org>

Alternatively, contact the Chair of Governors:

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