

Annual Governance Statement 2020-21

Governing bodies are not required to produce an annual report; however, at Sphere Federation we believe communicating with our school community is vital.

Our role as a governing body is to provide strategic leadership and to create robust accountability, oversight and assurance for educational and financial performance. Our three core functions are:

- 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.

The day-to-day management of the schools is the responsibility of Mr Roundtree, the Head of Federation. We work closely with Mr Roundtree, the Heads of School, and the Senior Leadership Team to ensure the schools achieve our vision of being a happy and healthy place to learn (St James': a happy and healthy place to believe and achieve). This vision extends to our ethos for the federation as a place to work, and to ensure that Sphere Federation staff are valued and supported.

Composition of the governing body and meetings

Our governors are all volunteers who give up their time to contribute and are appointed on a skills basis. The governing body currently has an excellent balance of skills and experience required to carry out its work, including financial management, legal expertise, education and understanding of national education policy, governance and third-sector experience, estates management, and health and safety. During this academic year, there have been elections for two new Parent Governors, who have subsequently joined the governing body.

The full governing body normally meet four times a year and these meetings are clerked by a trained professional external and independent clerk. There are also three governing body committees which normally meet termly. We have other committees and groups which meet less frequently, and 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.

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, and governor attendance at meetings are on the school websites.

The effectiveness and impact of the governing body 2020-21

In usual circumstances, the governing body undertakes a wide range of monitoring activity, including visiting the schools to meet with school leaders to discuss aspects of the school improvement and development plans. This year, all governing body meetings and monitoring activity took place remotely. We have had to adapt our governance to focus on the school's response to the ever-changing situation, including ensuring the availability of high-quality remote education and support

for the children during the winter lockdown and effective communication throughout. As well as continuing to ensure statutory obligations were met, including safeguarding responsibilities and compliance with the Equality Act, we have asked questions to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the school community during the year. The school websites were fully reviewed to ensure all the necessary information was available and up to date.

The Teaching, Learning and Children Committee has challenged school leaders about how the curriculum has been adapted in light of the two lockdowns, the impact the lockdowns have had on learning and attainment, how the schools are monitoring that impact, and what steps have been taken to address this. We have challenged the leadership about how online learning was planned and delivered. We understand the challenges the pandemic has created around physical and mental wellbeing, and we've asked the leadership team about these.

The Resources Committee continued to review and monitor school budgets closely, attending budget setting and review meetings remotely. Although school budgets remain challenging, Sphere Federation continues to make sensible budgetary decisions. The Committee has heavily scrutinised the Covid risk assessments to ensure the health and safety of all children and stakeholders.

Governors from the Christian Distinctiveness Group (St James' CE Primary only) have evaluated the SIAMS School Evaluation Plan and monitored Collective Worship at the school and online federation RE lessons.

The Policies Committee ensured timely review of statutory policies, including the new Relationships and Sex Education Policy, on which parent feedback was sought in line with our statutory obligations.

Future plans

We have high expectations of Sphere Federation governors, and governors also have high expectations of the school leaders. Our priorities for next academic year include:

- Continuing to ensure all pupils have not been disadvantaged by lockdown, and ensuring additional support is in place where necessary;
- Assessing the impact of the Covid Catch Up Funds to support our children;
- Challenging school leaders to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum. This will include implementation of a new phonics and reading scheme;
- Above all, ensuring that the children are happy and healthy learners.

Thank you

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 hard work they have done throughout this time.

Rachel Greenhalgh, Chair of Governors
17 June 2021