

## **Annual Governance Statement 2023 – 2024**

As the governing board of Cross Gates School, our three core functions are to:

- ensure clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction;
- hold the head teacher to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the effective and efficient performance management of staff; and
- oversee the financial performance of the organisation, making sure its money is well spent

The governing board also ensures that the school complies fully with statutory safeguarding procedures and works with the safeguarding lead in school to complete an annual safeguarding self-assessment.

The governing board comprises entirely of volunteers from a variety of backgrounds with a wide range of skills and experiences, which are reviewed annually via a skills audit.

We perform a strategic role in relation to school improvement and the discharge of statutory duties; the day to day management of the school is the responsibility of the head teacher and senior leadership team.

### **The composition of the governing board**

Our school website has a governor section containing information about our governance arrangements including our structure and responsibilities.

This year we appointed one new governor – as a co-opted governor, there are currently no vacancies on the governing board. All new governors attend the 2 induction training modules run by the Local Authority's governor support service to support them in understanding the strategic nature of the role and the responsibility of challenging and monitoring aspects of school. Each new governor also attends part of the school's quality assurance and monitoring programme with the chair, who then discusses the visit with the new governor and provides guidance on the follow up visit report.

### **Meetings**

In 23/24 we moved from three full governing board (FGB) meetings once per term to two FGB meetings per term. Whilst maintaining a strategic lead governor for Resources and one for Teaching, Learning and Pupil Support, there were no separate committees for these two areas so, aside from the occasional topic, specific meeting related issues were covered in the FGB meetings as standing agenda items; all meetings are clerked by a trained professional clerk.

This new structure was reviewed by the FGB at the final meeting of the school academic year and it was agreed unanimously to continue with this structure and schedule of meetings for the year 24/25. The majority of governors have very good attendance at meetings. Apologies for non-attendance are considered on an individual basis as is repeated non-attendance. We appreciate the commitment governors give to the school in a voluntary capacity and therefore we always take account of personal and extenuating circumstances. However if governors cannot commit to

attendance at meetings and visits to school over a sustained period we would discuss this with the governor concerned and the governing board to agree a way forward.

We can also have informal, non clerked workshops and training sessions for particular issues.

### **Strategic oversight**

In September 2023 we held a workshop to discuss our aims for the children's education and well-being. This resulted in our vision for the school, which still stands and which was shared with the school community; this now forms the basis for school effectiveness and improvement as outlined in our 3 year school improvement plan. The plan aims to give children the knowledge, skills and cultural capital to succeed in life. It is written by the senior leadership team and is the result of a detailed evaluation of the school's effectiveness based on the governors' vision and a wide range of quantitative and qualitative evidence. Governors are regularly part of the quality assurance and monitoring process on which the evidence is based.

Staff members are invited to attend governor meetings to provide us with an opportunity to find out about specific areas of responsibility, so that the information we receive is not restricted to the head teacher. Meetings between individual governors and members of staff focus on specific school priorities and often result in agreed actions, as evidenced in governor visit reports.

The new meetings structure has worked well for the Teaching, Learning and Pupil Support governors as it has enabled everyone to have a voice in TLPS matters. Meetings between the strategic governor lead and the school's Early Years lead provided a comprehensive overview of developments and confirmed the progress that children were making; the governor also attended a farm visit to see the broader experiences provided for our children. Using outdoor space and recognising its importance in enhancing learning and health and well-being has been a key development for Early Years. Ofsted graded Early Years 'Outstanding' in April 2024, an overwhelmingly positive experience for the Early Years Team.

The Ofsted inspection acknowledged the emphasis that the school places on reading development, the way in which it uses phonics to develop the skills of learners in the early years and the strong culture of reading across the school. The subsequent SATS results confirmed the progress made in reading and writing. The partnership with KPMG and the National Literacy Trust has meant that 100 new books are sent to school every term, helping to broaden the range of material available, especially in the areas of diversity and equality.

A significant part of the governor role is to observe the school's own QA process and attendance at Pupil Progress meetings is a key part of this process. A number of governors have attended these meetings including the strategic lead. The staff involved in the meetings looked in depth at the pupils in each class and aside from the data, also discussed their needs holistically. The senior leaders involved had an excellent knowledge of all the pupils discussed. The meetings were both challenging and supportive and included advice and next steps to ensure there was consistency of provision and daily interventions for some pupils to build their skills and confidence, all done in the spirit of sharing good practice and providing support where needed

There was governor attendance at all the SATs to ensure the school complied with the expectations and procedures for conducting the tests.

Safeguarding visits were conducted throughout the year and the Annual Safeguarding Return for 2023-24 was completed by the Safeguarding governor.

### **The impact of the governing board**

Our monitoring takes into account external reports and feedback from stakeholders including pupil, staff and parent surveys. Together with formal Governing Board meetings, our training and development sessions, our insight into what life is like for our children and parents, from our parent governors and our visits to school, we believe we have a clear strategic oversight of the way the school is led and managed as well as a clear picture of the day to day life of the school.

We evaluate the evidence we have from a range of sources to follow lines of enquiry in order to support the school's development. For example the results of a parental survey led us to raise our profile as governors by attending parents' evenings and introducing ourselves to parents so that we were more visible and our role more widely understood. We have continued this practice, with governors represented at every parents evening; our role now is not to recruit, but to engage with parents to establish better relationships and open two way communication. We have two parent governors who have proved to be significant assets to the governing board in terms of their skills and knowledge of the school community.

Whilst this is not an exhaustive list of our work over the past year, the board has worked together in our strategic role on:

**Attendance:**

As a key issue for us we are all secure in the knowledge that our children are happy and safe in school and that procedures for dealing with poor attendance are rigorous. We monitored rates of pupil attendance, we observed pupil progress meetings between senior leaders and class teachers where attendance is addressed, and we are satisfied that staff members do all in their power to ensure good attendance.

However attendance remains a key issue for us and one that Ofsted inspectors felt they had to include as an area for improvement, despite acknowledging all the strategies the school had in place.

**Staffing:**

We support the senior leadership team in recruiting new staff and we are regularly part of the interview process. This year a number of governors have supported the interview process for the recruitment of teachers, teaching assistants and support staff.

We have an experienced and very competent strategic lead for Resources who provides clear direction in the feasibility of staff recruitment, capital spend and use of resources.

We receive information on the impact of whole school professional development.

The wellbeing of staff and the head teacher is very important to us. We are very aware of the range of demands of a one form entry school on the head teacher in particular and regularly review our expectations in terms of reports to governors. Whilst we have moved from 3 to 6 FGB meetings per year we still only expect a report from the head teacher once per term. We have made it clear that we expect other leaders in school to provide information to governors as this both reduces demands on the head teacher, enables us to meet first-hand the members of staff with specific responsibilities and provides experience for these leaders in presenting to governors. We have questions and guidance on our visit report template to alert governors to well being issues when they visit school.

We receive the results of staff surveys and staff attendance data.

**Performance management:**

Governors hold the head teacher and teaching staff to account for their performance. A panel of governors, with HT performance management training, carried out the head teacher's annual appraisal, supported by an external adviser; the objectives were reviewed with the head teacher midway in the year.

**Policies:**

Governors have approved policies and procedures and publish statutory policies on the school website. To support compliance, all statutory policies are recorded on a review schedule which indicates the date of the last review and next scheduled review. We have audited the school website for assurance that all statutory policies are available and up to date and we are well supported by the Local Authority and largely use their model policies. The governing board has a statement of behaviour principles, which is published on the school website, and is the basis for the school behaviour policy. Unfortunately due to some unreasonable parental expectations on staff we felt it necessary to make clear our expectations of behaviour and communications with school in a school policy which has proved useful this year.

**Admissions:**

As a trust school the board is responsible for admissions. We worked closely with the head teacher to ensure that our Admissions policy complies with the admissions code.

**Vision, ethos and strategic direction:**

We all believe our school should be inclusive and therefore support strategies to ensure that where possible we will aim to meet the needs of the children in our community. We have supported the development of our 'hub' which provides a resource for children with autism. Whilst the budget and recruitment of suitable staff have been key issues, we have ensured that the head teacher and his team feel supported by us. The governing board have regularly reviewed the progress of actions in the School Improvement Plan through monitoring visits and feedback in meetings.

**Pupil attainment:**

Detailed data on pupil attainment, particularly in relation to our vision, strategic priorities and Ofsted areas for improvement is presented to the full governing board for challenge and we were very pleased this year to find our recent SATs results showed significant improvements, in line with or above national against some key bench marks. We receive SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) reports as well as having the opportunity to discuss issues with the AHT responsible for SEND.

**Safeguarding:**

We are regularly involved in recruitment and so can see first-hand that processes and procedures to ensure all school staff have been safely recruited, are in place. We are made aware that training of staff is up to date and procedures followed to maintain a safe environment for our children, including checks to ensure that volunteers and visitors to the school are suitable, again we have first-hand evidence of this. We reviewed the safeguarding self-assessment completed by school which provided assurance to the board of the robustness of systems and procedures to keep children safe.

**Financial management:**

We ensure school funding is spent in the best interests of children and financial management procedures are robust. We have governors with financial backgrounds and long experience of the school who take responsibility for most areas of financial accountability, with key decisions put to the full governing board for discussion/agreement.

This year our budget for the financial year 23/24 was in deficit, primarily due to funding not keeping pace with the increased costs of salary inflation. We were offered the support of a member of the DfE to advise on financial management and the Resources strategic lead governor met with them with the Headteacher and no significant corrective actions were identified.

#### **Premises, health and safety:**

The site is extremely well managed by our site manager and our head teacher who not only maintain the premises to a good standard, but also seek to develop and improve areas of the site, generally the obstacle is financial. The Resources governors monitor costs of maintenance and improvement and adherence to health and safety procedures.

The annual Health & Safety inspection of the premises was carried out by a governor and the site manager, followed up by a meeting with the Business Manager. The governor was satisfied that the school's health and safety procedures and practice are fit for purpose.

#### **The effectiveness of the board:**

The governing board has a good mix of skills and experience. We each have specific roles as well as carrying out the responsibilities we expect of all governors and following appropriate behaviours. We complete an annual skills matrix to identify gaps in knowledge to be corrected by training and or new recruitment. Our new governor has been assigned a specific area to monitor as well as supporting the QA process in school.

We prepared effectively for the Ofsted Inspection which was due in the academic year 23/24. Only one member of the governing board was unable to meet with the lead inspector, which was a clear sign of our commitment to the school and community; this was commented on in the final report as was an acknowledgement of our in-depth understanding of school life and the school's effectiveness.

#### **What we plan to do next**

The children will remain at the forefront of our decisions so that we continue to provide the best possible educational and pastoral environment for them, whilst also ensuring the well being of staff. The school budget will remain an area of concern and we will do our best to ensure that staffing levels and resources do not suffer and children's learning and development continues to be of the highest standard. We will follow the development of our new hub for children with SEND and once established will monitor the impact on the school as a whole.

In concluding this report, as chair I would personally like to thank all the governors who have been members of the governing board during the academic year 2023/24, and welcome our new governor. There are significant expectations on us as governors (all of whom are volunteers) to commit time and energy to the role, and both the head teacher and I very much appreciate our governors, who have provided challenge, support and expertise, all with grace and good humour

The work with the Jerry Clay Hub has enhanced reading development across the School and this support will continue in 2024-2025. The School will be hosting one session next year with Jan Dubiel (International expert on Early Years) as part of the Leeds Early Years Curriculum Project.