

Annual Governance Statement 2024 – 2025

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. 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, and at the end of the year we had a vacancy for a second parent governor for which we will hold elections in the Autumn Term to allow new parents the opportunity to stand or nominate a parent of their choice. All new governors attend the 2 induction training modules run by the Local Authority's governor support service, which provides an understanding of 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. Further training opportunities are available through Leeds for Learning (the Local Authority's development programme).

Meetings

We have two Full Governing Board meetings per term and have a strategic lead governor for Resources and one for Teaching, Learning and Pupil Support. We believe this approach provides all governors with a broad view of all aspects of the school; all meetings are clerked by a trained professional clerk. 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 also have informal, non-clerked workshops and training sessions for particular issues.

Strategic oversight

Our vision for the school is based on a workshop we held to discuss our aims for the children's education and well-being which was then 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.

Termly meetings between the strategic governor for Teaching, Learning and Pupil Support and the School's Early Years and English lead continue to provide a comprehensive overview of developments in both areas and confirm the progress that the children are making. This was demonstrated in the excellent SATs results and the outcome of the Phonics Screening check which has improved from 60% in 2022 to 85% in 2025. The School has now graduated from the Jerry Clay English Hub, but continues to receive training and support.

Phonics workshops for parents were held in the autumn and spring terms with the aim of introducing key aspects of phonics so that parents could better help their children practise at home. This included sounding out, tricky words and blending. Weekly Reading Cafes focused on modelling phonics sessions so that parents could see how this was done. The Phonics Workshops and Reading Cafes have been well attended by parents and provided opportunities for them to ask questions in smaller, informal groups.

The governor also attended Pupil Progress meetings as these provide an opportunity to explore the detail behind the statistics and the needs of individual pupils. Staff at all levels had an excellent knowledge of all the pupils discussed, and there was evidence of good collaboration between teaching staff. Teaching staff were enthusiastic about their classes, the progress pupils were making, and the ways in which pupils could be supported. Senior Leaders challenged where necessary to ensure there was consistency of provision and daily interventions for some pupils to build their skills and confidence, whether this be in reading, writing or numeracy; the spirit of sharing good practice and providing support where needed being the main aim throughout.

Governors also attended parents' evenings in order to raise the governor profile amongst parents and to spend time with parents individually; they met new parents at a meeting in June; attended the Year 6 end of year performance and oversaw the conduct of all the SATs, from the opening of papers to the sealing of envelopes.

The impact of the governing board

Our monitoring takes into account external reports and feedback from stakeholders including pupil, staff and parent surveys. We use a wide variety of experiences both around school and from meetings with individual members of staff and parents, as well as our formal Governing Board meetings, to gain our own picture of what life is like for our children and parents, and how the school is led and managed strategically and on a day to day basis. There is always more we can do in this area and this year we intend to have an input into the questions asked in parent and staff surveys and to have a governor presence at as many parents' events as possible.

As part of the strategic direction for school improvement we support the school in ensuring all aspects of the school are the best they can be.

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 that procedures to maintain a safe environment for our children are followed, including checks to ensure that volunteers and visitors to the school are suitable; again we have first-hand evidence of this. We review annually the safeguarding self-assessment completed by school which provides assurance to the board of the robustness of systems and procedures to keep children safe.

Attendance

Whilst 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, poor attendance remains a concern for all of us. We know that good attendance at school changes life chances and can inspire children in ways that parents alone may not be able to provide, by providing a wide range of experiences, teaching new skills and changing aspirations. As a result of an attendance workshop which we ran internally, we identified strategies which we will work on this year with senior leaders.

Staffing

We support the senior leadership team in recruiting new staff and we are regularly part of the interview process.

This year we have managed the Head Teacher's absence by appointing one of our senior leaders to the role of Acting Head Teacher. The chair has met with the Acting Head Teacher regularly to ensure she has had the support she needs to carry out the role. Other governors have also provided support in their relevant roles, including finance, SEND, Teaching, Learning and Pupil Support. We are well aware of the extra work load for the Acting Head Teacher, who is also our SENDCO, and have appointed a SEND assistant to support her for the academic year 25/26.

We receive information on the impact of whole school professional development and know that staff who have attended training outside school share their learning with the rest of the staff. 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 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, and this year intend to develop more ways to establish good relationships with staff across the board. The chair's contact details are available for staff who wish to contact her.

Financial management

Together with the Finance team at Leeds City Council, we set the School Budget and ensure that funding is spent in the best interests of children.

We have two qualified accountants on the Board who take the lead on this.

The current year budget is in deficit due to costs increasing faster than available funding, but we have been audited by the DFE, who confirmed that we had done everything possible to support children and provide best value.

Throughout the year, we review actual spending against Budget and understand the reasons for any variances.

We review financial management controls to ensure that they are robust and that the School is obtaining best value from its suppliers by obtaining sufficient quotes.

Performance management

Governors hold the head teacher and teaching staff to account for their performance. A small panel of governors with the requisite training carry out the HT's performance management appraisal, supported by an external adviser. Normally the objectives set for the Head Teacher are reviewed midway in the year, but this could not happen this year due to the Head Teacher's absence. Objectives for the current Acting Head Teacher will be set for 2025/26 through the formal Performance Management process, with the support of an external adviser

Policies: Governors approve 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 revisited the review dates

and meeting agendas to ensure policies are reviewed at a point in the year that is in line with the school calendar. We have audited the school website for assurance that all statutory policies are available and up to date; 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. In line with the expectations we have of staff, we have made clear our expectations of parents in terms of their behaviour and communication with school, through a specific policy, which has proved useful as a reminder to all concerned.

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 the Nest which provides a resource for children with autism, from schools other than Cross Gates. Whilst the Nest has not operated at full capacity yet, we have had positive feedback from those schools that have bought into the provision and we have changed some of the requirements to ensure schools are not deterred from using it. The governing board receives an update on the success of Nest and a number of governors have made visits to see how it operates on a day to day basis.

Pupil attainment: The FGB receives and questions data on pupil attainment, particularly in relation to our vision, strategic priorities and Ofsted areas for improvement. The key issues are always fed back to the full governing board and we were again very pleased this year to find our SATs results showed significant improvements, in line with or above national against some key bench marks. In particular we had a key objective regarding maths where we have seen significant improvements this year. We receive SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) reports as well as having the opportunity to discuss issues with the AHT responsible for SEND, and our SEND governor who meets with the SENDCO and provides us with comprehensive follow up reports.

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:

Governors were asked to complete a survey regarding their role as a governor; the key issues arising from this indicate that governors largely feel that: they can carry out their role and contribute effectively, have a clear view of the ethos and vision for the school and that they are appreciated.

Whilst the governing board has a good mix of skills and experience, we will continue to encourage governors to take up training and development opportunities provided by the Local Authority. For example, we have a new governor who has taken on the role of safeguarding and who has completed the appropriate training for this role.

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 remains 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 continue to raise our profile with parents and staff, through attendance at events where we can be accessible to both, and supporting the revival of FOX, (Friends of Cross Gates), where parents and teachers can work together to enhance provision for our children.

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 2024/25. 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.