

# **External Review of Governance Blakedown Primary School**

October 2017

Reviewer: Anna Streater

Report Issued to:

Headteacher  
Chair of Governors

## Context of Initial Report:

An External Review of Governance was commissioned by the Headteacher following an Ofsted Monitoring visit in September 2017 as part of a package of support put in place by a local multi academy trust following the June 2016 Ofsted inspection.

The School is under the leadership of Mrs Helen Beckford-Bond, the Chair of Governors is Ms Freda Griffith.

This Review will examine evidence, including face-to-face talks with the Headteacher, Chair of Governors, and other governors to formulate recommendations for improvement.

An External Review of Governance is not an Inspection or Judgement but a tool for improvement.

## Evidence Base

The following was reviewed during this Review of Governance:

- School Website
- Ofsted Inspection Report June 2016
- External review of Governance Report September 2016
- Monitoring Inspection September 2017
- Full Governing Body Minutes from Meetings
- Committee minutes from meetings
- Committee Structures
- Headteacher's reports
- Performance Management Information
- Governor Strategic Plan

## Interviews and Meetings:

Face-to-Face meetings have taken place with:

- Headteacher
- Governors: Chair of Governors, two Vice-Chairs of Governors and a Foundation Governor

The Governing Body comprises a total of 11 Governors including the Headteacher.

## Review of Documentation

### Website

As part of this Review of Governance, the School Website was scrutinised to investigate whether Governors have ensured that it is fully compliant with DfE requirements by law and also good practice. The School Website is the first source of information for all external bodies including Parents and Ofsted.

The Statutory requirements are:

- School contact details: These are clearly visible. As well as details for the Headteacher and office staff the name and contact details of the SEN co-ordinator is also on this page, this is helpful for parents.
- Admission arrangements: All information regarding admissions are in place and compliant. The page provides a link to the LA site. The school website does not offer support from school should parents/carers have difficulty in accessing the LA information, this may be helpful for parents.
- Ofsted reports: There are clear links to the Ofsted website and Parent View. There is a link for the May 2017 'Outstanding' SIAMS report.
- Exam & Assessment results: The correct information is on the website for KS2 results (2016) with regards to progress data. 2017 data is not on the website yet.
- Performance tables: There is a link to these.
- Curriculum: There is a very comprehensive curriculum section on the website with a clear curriculum statement. Information about the curriculum each year group follows in core or foundation subjects is also available. Half termly topic webs are found on the individual classes page.
- Behaviour policy / School Complaints procedure: Easily found and compliant. The Behaviour Policy was very clear and comprehensive.
- Pupil Premium: Information regarding Pupil Premium is easily found. There is a clear breakdown of expenditure and impact for the Pupil Premium spending for 2016-2017, however there is no information for the current year of spending. The guidance for what schools should publish online does state that "Pupil premium funding is allocated for each financial year, but the information you publish online should refer to the academic year, as this is how parents understand the school system". There is no date for the next review of the Pupil Premium strategy.
- PE and sport premium for primary schools: The Primary Sports Grant information did not give a full breakdown of spend as requested by DfE. The report does not give an indication of the number of pupils accessing the many sporting opportunities provided as a result of this funding. There is no information as to how much money was received for this grant in 2016-2017.
- SEN and disability information: There is a comprehensive SEN Report.
- Equality objectives: There is information about how the school is complying with the public sector equality duty, however the school's equality objectives could not be found.
- Governors' information and duties: The Governors page provides the statutory information regarding names and terms of office. Although there are photos of each governor there is no governor profile for each member of the Governing Body and Governors with responsibility for areas such as PREVENT, SEND, Health & Safety, DDA etc. are not identified, this would be

useful information for parents. The information regarding the Constitution of the Governing Body is out of date. The overview of the remit for the different Committees is provided. Details of attendance records at Governing Body meetings are provided. There is information provided about how to contact the Governing Body. There is a link to the Governor Code of Conduct, however this is dated 2011. Dates of Governing Body meetings for the year are not provided. Information is available with regards to declared interests and other governance.

- Charging and remissions policies: Easily found and compliant.
- Values and ethos: The School Vision and Values are stated very clearly.
- Requests for paper copies: This could not be found.

#### Other aspects of the website:

- The Website is mobile friendly.
- The Safeguarding policy is easily found.
- There is a comprehensive British Values Statement indicating evidence and impact of measures taken in school to support pupils' understanding.
- The parents page has comprehensive information with easy access to the calendar, newsletters, and letters home. There is a link to a Parents Forum page, with general information about this group. Dates and agenda items for 2017-2018 for this group have not yet been uploaded onto the website.
- Photographs of the staff are present, with information regarding their roles and responsibilities.

#### **Ofsted Inspection Reports & External Review of Governance**

##### Ofsted Inspection: June 2016

This was carried out by HMI Heather Simpson. Findings were:

- *Governors are provided with a diverse and vast range of information by the headteacher. They are extremely dedicated and committed to ensuring that pupils develop into thoughtful, sensible and caring citizens. However, some of the information presented is overly complex or ambiguous. As a result, governors are not always clear about the school's key priorities or the school's effectiveness.*
- *Governors have some understanding of assessment information as this is presented by the headteacher in her termly reports. They are also aware of the context of individual pupils, who on occasion do not achieve well, due to the small numbers on roll. However, this information is*

*not summarised to give governors the headlines as to which groups are achieving well and if any cohorts are falling behind in reading, writing or mathematics.*

***Areas to improve pertinent to Governors:***

*Improve the quality of leadership and management by ensuring that:–*

- *the priorities identified in the school development plan are clear and known by all leaders, including governors*
- *assessment information is filtered to provide an overview for governors and staff as to how well different groups are achieving, including boys, girls, disadvantaged pupils, those who have special educational needs or a disability and the most able.*

External Review of Governance Report September 2016

This review was carried out by Barry Newton and Carol Gregory.  
Key areas for action were identified as being;

*Developmental areas for GB:*

- *Ensuring absolute clarity about the objectives within the school development plan and the key priorities;*
- *To take ownership of strategic planning;*
- *Reduced reliance on the Headteacher;*
- *Raise the profile of the clerk to assist in planning for timely and effective governance;*
- *Improve the format for providing governors with information, essentially through the headteacher's report;*
- *Consider external research information to be able to make informed decisions about pupil premium expenditure and preparing for the new requirements on the website.*

Monitoring Inspection: September 2017

This inspection, carried out by HMI Sandra Haynes, identified that:

- *Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.*
- *All leaders, including governors, have a shared understanding of what the priorities are and what is being done to address them.*

- *Governors hold middle leaders to account for this work, for example by expecting them to provide detailed reports which show what difference they are making to their subject.*
- *Governors have been proactive in reviewing and improving the quality of their work. The external review of governance identified positive changes that governors had made to their own practice. Governors have a strong understanding of their strategic role and are able to balance this with a more hands-on approach, which ensures that they are now better informed about the school's strengths and weaknesses.*

It was clear from the meeting with the Governors and the Headteacher that the Governing Body has made very good progress in addressing the developmental areas identified in the September 2016 External Review. The meeting also demonstrated that the Governors understood their strategic role and are well informed about the school's strengths and weaknesses, this being supported by their monitoring systems.

#### **Governing Body Minutes of Meetings**

Minutes were reviewed for the following meetings:

- Full Governing Body Terms of reference September 2015
- Full Governing Body Meeting 19/10/16
- Full Governing Body Meeting 23/11/16
- Full Governing Body Meeting 25/01/17
- Full Governing Body Meeting 5/7/17

#### **Committee minutes of meetings**

- Strategic Team terms of reference September 2016
- Strategic Team Minutes 13/9/16
- Strategic Team Minutes 06/10/16
- Strategic Team Minutes 10/11/16
- Strategic Team Minutes 05/01/17
- Strategic Team Minutes 01/02/17
- Strategic Team Minutes 09/03/17
- Strategic Team Minutes 06/04/17
- Strategic Team Minutes 08/06/17
- Strategic Team Minutes 07/09/17
  
- Learning and Development terms of reference September 2016
- Learning and Development Minutes 14/09/16
- Learning and Development Minutes 01/02/17
  
- Resources Team terms of reference September 2016
- Resources Team Minutes 12/10/16
- Resources Team Minutes 25/01/17
- Resources Team Minutes 05/04/17
- Resources Team Minutes 07/06/17

- Headteacher's Report Oct 2016
- Headteacher's Report Mar 2017 (Provided but unable to access)
- Headteacher's Report Apr 2017 (Provided but unable to access)
- Headteacher's Report Sept 2017

Terms of Reference are in place for all of these Committees although evidence was not found that these have been reviewed by the Governing Body or committees for 2017-2018.

The minutes show very few apologies, which is a very good indication of the commitment that Governors show towards the School.

From the minutes of the FGB and the Committees there is clear evidence of the Governors carrying out the core functions of governance, namely

1. Set the strategic direction
2. Hold the Headteacher to account for the educational performance of the children
3. Hold the Headteacher to account for the financial effectiveness of the School

The minutes of meetings provided appear to be an accurate reflection of the agenda for the meetings. It is possible to get a feel for the discussions that have taken place, although there are some instances where a Governor who was absent from the meeting would not have known what was discussed, e.g. FGB 19/10/16, there was mention of Governor monitoring visits taking place but there was no indication of what was monitored, how it fitted to the SDP, any questions from other Governors as a result or any actions to be taken as a result of the monitoring visits.

Questions from governors are documented and are included in the body of the minutes. These are both "challenge" questions as well as questions for clarification. If these were to be typed in bold they would be easier to be seen and would clearly demonstrate the challenge presented by the Governors to the Senior Leadership Team of the school.

There are a few actions identified from the meetings. However, there are instances where actions have not been identified, e.g. Strategic Team 07/09/17: discussion about vacancies in Reception and Parent Mail, it is not minuted what the decision was and who would be following this up. AOB c in this meeting, no timescales have been identified in the Action column.

Evidence was seen in minutes to the Safeguarding Audit being presented by the Governor for Safeguarding. PREVENT and British Values are also mentioned in FGB minutes. Evidence of reports being presented from Governors with responsibility for SEND, Pupil Premium, PE and Sport Premium could not be found in the minutes scrutinised.

### **Headteacher's reports**

Reports from the Headteacher were analysed within the Review. Governors are aware that it is their report from the Headteacher. The Headteacher's Report is a report to Governors and should act as a 'one stop shop' for all necessary school information in readiness for an Ofsted Inspection. The Headteacher's Report should give all Governors the necessary information for an Ofsted Inspection.

The Headteacher Reports seen are a good resource for Governors. Information is present in the Reports that supports Governors in their role of holding the Headteacher to account.

### **Performance Management Information**

There was evidence that Governors have been involved with Performance Management. The Headteacher Performance Management Committee was not listed amongst the committee structure, however there was evidence in the minutes that this committee exists and is supported by the Local Authority School Improvement Adviser. A Governor Training Log was not seen so it is not known if Governors on this committee have had appropriate training.

### **Governor Vision**

It is clear that Governors are involved in the annual development of the School Development Plan and setting the Strategic Vision. This came across very clearly in discussion with the governors, and that their vision, values and ethos determined how they act and conduct their business. The Governors know the school well and were able to articulate the priorities for 2017-2018.

### **Governor Strategic Plan**

The Governors have a Strategic Development Plan which was in the process of being completed for 2017-2018. The Strategic Team, which meets monthly, is instrumental in developing this and is a strong and effective group which appears to be driving governance and the school forward.

### **Data**

Pupil Progress and Attainment Data is presented to Governors through the Headteacher's report and there is evidence of challenge to the Senior Leadership Team. Evidence was seen that Governors challenge how different groups of children perform and that Governors were challenging whether Pupil Premium was being used effectively in closing the gap.

### **Meetings**

The meetings demonstrated the commitment of the Governors to their school. They were clear in their articulation of their roles and responsibilities and how they have used the inspections and previous external review of governance to develop effective governance practices.

The Governors feel that the work they do in supporting the school is appreciated by staff and that they have good working relationships with all in school. There is a real sense of team work taking place between the governors and Senior Leaders. The relationship is clearly based on trust, openness and honesty.

Effective monitoring of the school's work ensures that the governors have a secure understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. This is through formal as well as informal monitoring programmes, including being attached to a class and following progress throughout the year, joining classes on visits, carrying out Learning walks with the Headteacher, and being able to attend pupil progress meetings. This knowledge is evidenced in the minutes of the meetings, the Governors are providing good support to the school through their challenge.

Governors use a range of sources to ensure they keep up to date with changes in education. They join with other local schools for training.

The discussions clearly indicated the willingness and desire of the governing body to continue to develop effective governance practices.



## Findings from the Review

### Ensuring Clarity of Vision, Ethos and Strategic Direction

GOVERNANCE IS JUDGED:
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COMPLIANT
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The Chair and Vice Chair of Governors described how the Governors have input into the setting of the School Development Plan as well as setting the Strategic Vision.

The committees in place to support the work of the Full Governing Body appear to be doing so effectively at the current time. The Strategic Team which meets monthly is instrumental in this. Terms of Reference are available for these committees, however these need updating.

### Holding the Headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils

GOVERNANCE IS JUDGED:
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COMPLIANT
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All Governors should have access to high quality, reliable data in order to effectively hold the Headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school. The Headteacher's reports provide Governors with data that enables the Governors to hold the Headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school.

There was clear evidence that Governors are holding the Headteacher to account for data presented. Minutes clearly identify that Governors have challenged pupil performance data, including performance of disadvantaged pupils.

### Overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure its money is well spent

GOVERNANCE IS JUDGED:
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PARTLY COMPLIANT
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The Resources committee meet regularly to discuss the finance of the school. This was evidenced in the minutes of the Resources Committee and Full Governing Body minutes.

There was no evidence that the Schools Financial Value Standards was discussed during Resources meetings as it was not seen within the minutes accessed.

There is clear minuted evidence that both Pupil Premium and PE and Sport Premium are discussed in Resources committee with the impact of their spending challenged by governors. However not all requirements for the reporting of these grants are on the website, therefore this area of financial reporting is not fully compliant.

### Effective Governance Practice

GOVERNANCE IS JUDGED:
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PARTLY COMPLIANT
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There are areas of the website that are not compliant with DfE requirements which means this area

is partly compliant.

In the face-to-face meeting there was evidence that the governors completed Skills Audits to identify gaps in skills and knowledge in the Governing Body which would support the recruitment of new Governors to ensure the Governing Body has all the necessary skills to fulfill its duties.

The Skills Audit should be reviewed annually as part of the Governor's and Governing Body's self-evaluation.

The Chair of Governors is relatively new to post so has not carried out a 360° review.

## Recommendations

It is apparent that the Governors are highly committed people who are devoted to ensuring the long-term success of the children. The governors present were very open to suggestions that would support effective governance and keen to use this review to continue to drive governance forward.

### **The following are recommendations based on the body of the report.**

#### **Website:**

There are areas of the website that need to be addressed in order for the website to be compliant. These are:

- Pupil Premium and PE and Sports funding information
- Governors' information

In the face to face meeting a governor suggested that one governor takes on the responsibility for regularly checking the website to ensure that the information on the website meets current requirements. This would be a very good idea.

#### **Effective Governance procedures:**

In discussion, it was clear that recommendations from the September 2016 External Review of Governance had raised the profile of the clerk.

The format of the minutes is consistent across the committees and documents the challenge provided by the Governors. The minutes provide a very good picture of the meetings.

Suggestions to further develop procedures and practices to support effective governance would be:

- Ensure that all terms of Reference are updated annually at the start of every academic year.
- For the clerk to highlight / bold the Governor Challenge so that this stands out in the minutes.
- There was an Action Log at the end of the Learning and Development Minutes, 14/9/2016, and Resources Committee 12/10/2016, this is good practice as it makes it easier to monitor what has been done and what needs to be done before the next meeting. This could be used at the end of every set of minutes to ensure actions are followed up.
- In discussion with the Headteacher it was mentioned that there is not a face to face

meeting with the HT, Chair of Committee and Clerk to agree the agenda for the Committee / Full Governing Body meetings. If at all possible this would support effective governance as it facilitates discussion about what needs to be included, what actions / reports need to be followed up etc. rather than communicating via email or phone. For example, it was minuted in the Resources Committee minutes of 12/10/16 that the Finance Audit would be added to the agenda for the meeting on 25/1/17. However, this was not on the agenda for the 25/1/17 and was not discussed, the School Fund was but not the Finance Audit. A face to face meeting where the action log from the previous minutes was scrutinised would ensure actions are not forgotten.

A face-to-face meeting would also support the Clerk in gathering reports from Senior Leaders to ensure that all reports are circulated to Governors in a timely fashion. There was recognition from the Headteacher that her reports were not always ready to be circulated at least a week prior to the meeting.

- The Governors need to continually review the Headteacher's report to ensure it is providing them with the information they require in order to hold the Headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils. If they require additional information on a topic that is not usually included in the report this can be raised at the pre-meeting planning meeting with the Headteacher and Clerk, with this information having a separate section in the report.
- Ensure that minutes are agreed as soon as possible after a meeting and circulated to governors to ensure that should reports / visits be required before the next meeting, governors have time to carry these actions out. The minutes will be in draft form until formally agreed at the next meeting.
- Incorporate a chair of Governors 360° review as part of the Governor's annual self-review cycle. This cycle ensures constant challenge of the effectiveness of the governance of the school. The 20 APPG Key Questions can be used annually to support this process, with the results being used to RAG rate the effectiveness of the Governing Body. These reviews can then provide information for training needs as well as identifying areas of good practice and areas where governance could be strengthened.

Sincere thanks are given to the Headteacher, Chair of Governors and Governors for providing the evidence required within the Review of Governance and for giving up their time and contributing to the process.

There will be a follow up meeting to this Review, it has been agreed that I will attend the Full Governing Body meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> March at 6.30pm.

Anna Streater  
October 2017