Ash, Cartwright & Kelsey VA Primary School

External Review of Governance

Report

March 2017

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NLG

Methodology

The methods used to undertake this review were as follows:

- Examination of key documents used in governance (e.g. agenda and minutes of meetings, visit reports, improvement plans, etc.) (*A list of documents reviewed is contained in Appendix 1 to this report*).
- Discussion with the Chair of Governors
- 50 minute focused interview with selected governors. *The framework for the focused governor interviews is contained in Appendix 2*).
- Use of "core areas" from the National College's External Review of Governance Guidance (2015) grid/evidence form to collect self –assessment of governance. *The responses to this are contained in Appendix 3.*

These actions took place mainly between December 2016 and March 2017.

1. Observations & Evidence
(Taken from Annex 2 in the External Review of Governance Guidance (2015)

2.1 Skills and effectiveness of governance

2.1.1 There is clear evidence from the documentation and discussion with governors that there has been a conscious and successful effort to ensure that the appropriate skills balance now exists across the governing board. However, it will be important to use the new DfE Competency Framework to ensure that these are kept up to date.

2.1.2 Governors have been undertaking planned CPD since September 2016. There is a clear system in the form of a table which requires governors to undertake 2 targeted courses per academic year. Most governors have already completed their agreed courses.

2.1.3 A robust succession plan is in operation which prepares the Vice Chair for accession to Chair in a 3 year cycle.

2.2 HOW does the board govern?

2.2.1 The governors now have a clear vision for the school and are pursuing this with vigour and determination

2.2.2 The "Circle Model" of governance that has been adopted has been successfully implemented. Monitoring pairs have distinct areas of responsibility on which to focus and are reviewing these systematically within the context of the School Plan that which is the process of being agreed for 2016-17 based on review and recommendations from the Local Leader of Education Headteacher with whom the school is working. This includes effective monitoring of the budget.

2.2.3 Governors have clear responsibilities which have been matched to a recent Skills Audit. Training has been undertaken to strengthen these (*see 1.2* above). This is an ongoing process because it is difficult to find a range of expertise within a small village. A newly-appointed staff governor is being considered for the critical role Training and Development Governor. The monitoring of the specific responsibilities are supported by a "monitoring register" which logs the monitoring of each within a required timescale.

2.2.4 There are structures in place that are enabling governors to focus on key milestones and the progress towards the attainment of these. The School Plan is in the process of being reviewed in order to redraft it in such a way as to provide an effective framework for the regular monitoring of these and subsequent discussion in meetings. The update is due for final approval shortly. Termly Milestones and the criteria for assessing progress with these are included. These clearly require tying into the monitoring schedule but currently do reference important identified areas for the improvement of the school and make the priorities for rapid improvement clear.

2.2.5 There are some internal concerns for the need for "independent" governors who do not come from a parental background or from the immediately locality. However, recruiting governors of that kind for a small village school such as this is proving difficult.

2.3 WHAT is the board paying attention to?

2.3.1 The Board is very data competent. One of the governors has this skill from his business and the process for analysing and reporting data have been greatly enhanced because of this. This has enabled a great depth of analysis in respect of the progress and attainment of pupils which is now increasing being used to hold SLT to account. Requirements for data presentation are decided and are made clear to SLT. Governors expressed the desire to make sure that all governors at least understood the implications from the data analyses in order to support the required rapid progress, especially for the more able disadvantaged pupils across the school.

2.3.2 Statutory responsibilities/duties are being effectively fulfilled. Safeguarding practice and provision appears robust. All governors have received recent and relevant update training. Financial procedures are very strong notably because the lead finance governor has considerable experience in this area.

2.3.3   Performance   Management/Appraisal   is   a   weak   area   because   governors were not appropriately involved in the process. This is a focus for attention in Governor Action Plan and within the School Plan there is the expectation that appropriately challenging   appraisal   objectives   linked   to   the   learning   needs   to   accelerate pupil   progress   will   be   set.   This   will   need   to   be   monitored   carefully   in relation   to   pupil   progress   and   outcomes   and   with   regard   to   value   for money.

2.4   FEEDBACK - how good is it?

2.4.1   Communication   within   the   Governing   Board   is   good.   Governors discuss   matters   in   a   variety   of   contexts   in   and   outside   school   and   act upon areas that require attention.

2.4.2   In   addition,   they   take   advice   from   external   sources   such   as   the   Local Authority   and   the   link   Local   Leader   of   Education   Headteacher   this   has,   for example,   resulted   in   a   greatly   improved   draft   School   Plan.   They   keep up   to   date   with   educational   changes   and   pressures   and   are   attempting   to respond as effectively as they can to these.

2.4.3   Mechanisms   and   processes   are   in   place   to   collect   and   analyse   responses from   stakeholder   groups.   Pupils   are   engaged   in   discussion   during   class visits.   Governors   appear   to   work   well   with   the   local   village   community because the majority of them are members of this.

2.5   HOW does the board know?
(Its ability to reflect, adapt and improve including):

2.5.1   Governors   undertake   an   annual   skills   audit   and   use   this   to   address   skills gaps.   They   review   their   own   performance   and   have   produced   a Governor   Action   Plan   which   is   focused   on   strengthening   the   impact   of   the Governing Board.

2.5.2   Governors   work   with   other   schools   (4   at   present)   which   provide   a valuable network for both support and challenge.

2.5.3   Their   knowledge   of   the   strengths   and   weakness   of   their   school   is   very good;   as   evidenced   in   the   questions/discussions   recorded   in   the   minutes of   meetings;   their   analysis   of   data   and   subsequent   challenges   and   in   the

changes that they have made to both governance and leadership of the school in recent months.

2.5.4   As a result of the circumstances surrounding the last OfSTED inspection outcomes and the change of headteacher, governors have not only reflected upon the impact of events but have also taken notable steps to begin to rectify issues and deficiencies that existed during that time. They have changed their way of working and are now much more focused and confident in governance.   They are planning more effectively for the development of the school which will be shortly taken forward on the next part of its journey with the appointment of a new headteacher. As mentioned in 2 above, governors have a clear, shared vision which is driving improvements and facilitating the longer-term strategic planning which is now gradually increasing in confidence and focus.

2.5.5   The minutes of meetings are beginning to demonstrate the increasing effectiveness and focus of challenges in holding senior leaders to account. The appointment and induction of the new Clerk is obviously critical in order to ensure that challenges and follow ups are effectively recorded.   Governors are clear about their own accountability and constantly review their performance in relation to this. In addition, they have made arrangements with the Local Authority Area Governance Officer that she will also provide an external review of their performance on a regular basis. This has been incorporated into the new School Plan.

3. Recommendations

3.1   Review and update the Terms of Reference (TORs) to reflect current membership and responsibilities.

3.2   Governors would benefit from seeing a breakdown of the progress and attainment of all vulnerable groups. It could also be useful to compare "home grown" pupils with those who are inwardly mobile.

3.3   Monitor the impact of focused expenditure on booster teachers (Yrs 2 & 6) and relate this to Pupil Premium expenditure and overall impact

3.5   Convert the Governor Action List into a Governor Development Plan focused on the mid- to longer-term development of governors.

3.6   Review the impact of governor training courses/activities and note these in minutes and visit reports.

3.7   Ensure that visit reports have clear consideration or action points for the Governing Board and that these are subsequently followed up in monitoring reports and/or minutes.

List of documents reviewed:

ACK CE (Aided) Primary School TORs and SOs - 2016-17
ACK FGB Agenda 21 Sept 2016
ACK FGB Agenda 25 Jan 2017
ACK FGB Mins 21 Sept 16 (5)
Action List 2015-2017 (Sept16)
C & K Training Courses 2016-17
3351 Ash Cartwright & Kelsey Draft Report (1)
GB-skills-matrix-2016 (1)
Gov visit 7.12.16 teaching and learning
Gov visit 15.7.16 (NG-NH)
Instrument of Government
Monitoring Pairs & Classroom register of visits 16 - 17
school plan 2016 2017
SEF Oct 2016
SIAMS readiness visit report

Appendix 2: Framework Questions for Governor Interview

Ash, Cartwright & Kelsey – ERG governor interview 19:00, 02.03.17

Structured Questions:

1. **Reflection on impact of recent past developments in governance in the school**

2. **Judgement of current effectiveness of structure of Governing Board**

3. **Current capacity of Governing Board**

4. **Current state of GB (skills, knowledge, commitment, capacity)**

5. **Major points for development over next couple of years**

6. **Potential blockages to further development**

7. **Anything not covered above**