

Review of Governance Report – Newsome High School

Date of Review: 29 November 2018

1. Reviewer's Details

- 1.1 Ruth Agnew is a former LA governor services manager and an experienced governor trainer and consultant. She is the chair of the local governing body of a primary academy and governor in a maintained secondary and a maintained special school. She was designated a National Leader of Governance (NLG) in April 2012 and supported the Ofsted / National College pilot of external reviews of governance during the autumn and spring terms 2012-13 and has undertaken a substantial number of external reviews of governance since that time in a wide range of settings. She is also an experienced Governor Mark assessor.

2. Context

- 2.1 Newsome is a smaller than average maintained secondary (11-16) school in Huddersfield. The school has two resource bases, one for pupils with physical impairments and one for pupils with hearing impairments. The number of pupils eligible for pupil premium funding is above average.
- 2.2 The most recent published Ofsted report for the school is from April 2016 which judged it as “requires improvement”; a Section 5 inspection had taken place around a fortnight prior to the review but at the time of the review the outcome had not been published and was still confidential.
- 2.3 The instrument of government shows the governing body to have 12 positions: 2 staff governors including the headteacher, 1 LA governor, 2 parent governors and 7 co-opted governors. Following a recent resignation one co-opted position was vacant at the time of the review. A recent restructure has led to the governing body currently having three committees: ‘Leadership, Management, Finance and Resources’, ‘Teaching, Learning and Assessment including Outcomes’ and ‘Personal Development, Behaviour and Welfare’.
- 2.4 An external review and support from a National Leader of Governance was commissioned following the 2016 Ofsted inspection, and this earlier review report and action plan was considered as part of the background paperwork for this review, which was commissioned by the governing body to support its own development.

- 2.5 The current headteacher has been in post since April 2017; the current chair has been a member of the governing body since December 2016, and was elected as chair in September 2018.

3. Process of the Review

- 3.1 The reviewer held one to one meetings or telephone conversations with all governors including the headteacher, two members of the Kirklees clerking team and to the National Leader of Governance who has provided support to the governing body in the recent past. She also conducted a scrutiny of relevant governing body paperwork and met with the full governing body to undertake a self-review exercise based on the Twenty Key Questions for the Governing Board to ask itself, produced by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Education Governance and Leadership.

4. Main Findings

Things the governing body does well

- 4.1 The governing body has worked hard since the 2016 governance review to address the issues raised by that review. Since taking up post in September the new chair and vice chair have brought about a number of changes which are still embedding but have already improved governance practice, some of which is now exceptional (see paragraphs 4.8 and 4.14 below, for example).
- 4.2 Governor induction was previously an area of weakness but this has been identified and the most recently appointed governor spoke highly of her induction process and particularly of the support she has received from the chair.
- 4.3 Governors have a range of relevant and useful knowledge and experience. A recently completed skills audit has been used to ensure governors are allocated to the right committees and is being used to re-evaluate current link roles, to use governors' experience and skills to best effect. For example the safeguarding governor is a barrister who specialises in child protection. A number of governors also have experience of governing in other schools and settings and have brought good practice into the governing body from elsewhere.
- 4.4 A number of governors demonstrated a commitment to their own training and development. The newest governor had been given access to e-learning and completed eight induction modules via this medium. The skills audit and other discussions are being used to identify and address governor training needs.
- 4.5 Governors have worked hard with school leaders to turn round a deficit budget which has already been significantly reduced; the school currently has an in-year

underspend which is bringing the budget back into balance within agreed time frames.

- 4.6 Governors demonstrate a good understanding of the educational environment, having already invested considerable time in exploring academy conversion. Governors accept that they are now facing the likelihood of a forced conversion and are being proactive in exploring available options.
- 4.7 Governors report governing body communications as being vastly improved since the new chair has taken up post. All meeting papers are now available confidentially and securely via google drive and these are made available before each meeting with appropriate notice. There has been some confusion in the past between the school and the clerking service about when and by whom papers are being sent out, and some governors have not received papers at all. These issues appear to have been resolved.
- 4.8 With a view both to improving communications and streamlining meetings the chair produces a regular report to governors and committee chairs plan to produce meeting summaries to be circulated after meetings. This process is in very early stages but will potentially ensure that all governors are kept up to date regarding key issues, without utilising significant meeting time going through committee minutes.
- 4.9 Meetings are reported as having been overly long in the past and the chair and committee chairs are working with the clerk and head to streamline agendas and meeting paperwork.
- 4.10 The earlier governance review highlighted clerking as a concern. This has been addressed and the governing body now utilises the local authority clerking service for all its meetings including committees. There has been a period of transition with temporary clerks being allocated, and some dissatisfaction with a former clerk, but a new permanent clerk is now in place.
- 4.11 The earlier governance review also highlighted lack of evidence of governor challenge as a key concern. The headteacher is working with governors to develop governor questioning, including through inviting governors to submit challenge questions and keeping a “governor challenge tracker”, with the intention of embedding appropriate and robust questioning into the governing body’s work. Governors demonstrate a good understanding of the school and their role and would appear to be well placed to bring relevant questioning and to hold school leaders to account around the school’s key development areas. Recent minutes show a good level of engagement from governors around key issues.

- 4.12 Even though the current chair and vice chair are recently appointed, thought is already being given to succession planning. Governors (other than the chair) with relevant skills have been chosen to chair committees, and to take responsibility for the work of their committee. Equally the headteacher does not sit on or attend all committees but delegates this to appropriate senior leaders, supporting the development of relationships between the governing body and staff and ensuring governors hear from more than one source within the school.
- 4.13 All governors are encouraged to visit the school and undertake agreed monitoring activities. The allocation of link roles is currently under review in the light of the skills audit and governors' current availability. Some governors, and especially the chair of governors, visit school on a regular basis. The chair currently spends several days a month in school and while recognising this is not sustainable or desirable in the long term has committed to doing so for twelve months to ensure he is well informed and to strengthen relationships between the governing body and staff. This will also help support the school through the immediate and longer-term follow-up to the recent Ofsted inspection.
- 4.14 A further issue flagged up by the previous governance review was that "agendas need to align more closely to the school's key priorities and there needs to be an increased conspicuousness of development priorities in governor activity and paperwork". To ensure that this is the case the governing body is working together to develop its own strategic plan, separate from but in line with the school's development plan. The draft plan is an impressive document which identifies five key objectives, clear success criteria and the questions the governing body will need to be able to answer to evidence whether the success criteria have been met. These questions have been allocated to specific committees and/or appropriate link governors. It is still in draft while all governors are given the opportunity to comment and contribute, but provides an excellent blueprint for the governing body's monitoring activities for the next period.
- 4.15 The governing body is also highly self-reflective. It is currently undertaking a self-review exercise against the "good" elements of governance as identified in the Ofsted School Inspection Handbook to ensure that its practices are at least good. The fact that practices are kept under review is evidenced by the recent increase in the 'Teaching, Learning and Assessment including Outcomes' committee meetings to align with the school's data collection points and ensure governors are monitoring data in a timely way. A 'survey monkey' meeting review questionnaire is also being considered to ensure feedback regarding each meeting is utilised to make future meetings more effective.

- 4.16 A range of mechanisms are in place to ensure the governing body understands stakeholder views and can use these to inform its decision-making processes.
- 4.17 The headteacher is supporting the governing body well in developing its role and spoke frequently in very positive terms of the “governing team” which is part of the school’s leadership.

Areas for Development

- 4.18 The governing body is aware of the areas where practice can still be improved or needs embedding.
- 4.19 As governors’ understanding of questioning and knowledge of the school develops it is hoped the somewhat artificial process of ‘submitting challenge questions’ will not be necessary on an on-going basis.
- 4.20 Meetings are still relatively long in duration, and further streamlining of agendas may be needed along with skilful chairing. New chairs may find training in this area beneficial.
- 4.21 Levels of governor engagement are variable. This is to be expected as governors have varying levels of commitment elsewhere and time to devote to the role, but it may be possible, with careful and clear delegation, to distribute the work of the governing body more evenly. All governors are invited to take this opportunity to reflect on whether they are able to fully support the new leadership and make the necessary commitment to the governing body’s work.
- 4.22 The governors’ area of the school website is up to date and compliant with statutory guidance but governors are keen to improve it by including pen portraits of governors and further information about the governing body’s work. The governance information on the Government’s database, [Get Information About Schools](#) (GIAS), does not yet reflect the most recent membership changes or change of chair.

5. Conclusions and Summary of Recommendations

- 5.1 This is an impressive, hardworking and committed governing body. It has recently been through a turbulent period including the election/appointment of a number of new governors and a new chair and vice chair. The new leadership has introduced a number of changes to practice over a short period of time and these changes are still embedding. However some of the practices already in place are excellent and where there are further areas for improvement the governing body is already aware and working to address these.

5.2 In summary the recommendations of this review are:

- To continue with plans to review the link governor roles and ensure that expectations of these roles are clear and that each governor is in a role best suited to their skills and experience as well as their ability to commit;
- To continue to work with the clerk to streamline agendas and ensure new chairs receive training on managing meetings if appropriate
- To execute plans to conduct reviews of each meeting via survey monkey;
- To ensure that recent good practice around governor induction is embedded in an agreed written process;
- To ensure governor training needs continue to be identified and addressed, ensuring that all governors are attending appropriate training or accessing it online;
- To continue to work with the clerk to streamline meeting agendas and;
- To execute plans to improve the governors' area of the website and ensure GIAS is updated with current information.