

Annual governance statement

Date: 2021-22

Governing bodies are not required to produce an annual report; however, at Sphere Federation we believe communicating with our school community is important.

Our role as a governing body is to provide strategic leadership and to create robust accountability, oversight and assurance for educational and financial performance. Our three core functions are:

- ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction;
- holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of each school and its pupils, and the performance management of staff;
- overseeing the financial performance of each school and ensuring money is well spent.

The day-to-day management of the schools is the responsibility of Mr Roundtree, the Head of Federation. We work closely with Mr Roundtree, the Heads of School, and the Senior Leadership Team to ensure the schools achieve our vision of being a happy and healthy place to learn (St James': a happy and healthy place to believe and achieve). This vision extends to our ethos for the federation as a place to work, and to ensure that Sphere Federation staff are valued and supported.

Composition of the governing body and meetings

All governors are volunteers who give up their time to contribute and are appointed on a skills basis. The governing body currently has an excellent balance of skills and experience required to carry out its work, including financial management, legal expertise, education and understanding of national education policy, governance and third-sector experience, estates management, and health and safety. During this academic year, two governors have stepped down, and there has been the appointment of a new Foundation governor and reappointment of the Local Authority governor.

The full governing body normally meet four times a year and these meetings are clerked by an external and independent governance professional. There are also three governing body committees which normally meet termly and other committees and groups which meet less frequently. Some governors also have specific roles and responsibilities. They have the delegated authority to make decisions on behalf of the governing body. The work of the governing body is planned in advance by the Chair and agreed by all governors. This ensures our core functions are met.

Governors are committed to training and development and have very good attendance at all meetings. Apologies for non-attendance are considered on an individual basis; governors are aware through the agreed code of conduct that non-attendance may result in their removal.

Further details about the composition of the governing body, committee structure, and governor attendance at meetings during the year are on the school website.

The effectiveness and impact of the governing body 2021-22

As we learn to live with Covid and the effects of the pandemic, governors have moved to a hybrid of face-to-face and online meetings and monitoring activity to ensure the three core functions of governance are met.

The Teaching, Learning, and Children Committee focused on the school improvement priorities. Subject leaders attended meetings to demonstrate how a broad and balanced curriculum was being delivered, and the Early Years leader outlined how the new Early Years statutory framework and baseline assessments were being implemented. Questions were asked about the ongoing impact of the pandemic and how recovery funding and other additional funding was being used to

support the children. Committee members also undertook regular monitoring, including reviewing the implementation of the new phonics and early reading scheme, and how leaders were ensuring all our children remain safe, happy, and healthy.

The Resources Committee continued to review funding, budgets, health and safety, and safeguarding arrangements amongst other areas. These areas were reviewed, and school leaders were challenged to ensure continued improvement across the schools, with the pupils and stakeholders at the forefront of all decisions. The budgets have been closely monitored throughout the year, with prudent and sensible decisions made in challenging economic times. Highlights of the committee's work over the year include very positive feedback following external Health and Safety audits across the federation, and a greater focus on data protection procedures.

In June 2022, St James' CE Primary had a SIAMS (Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools), which focuses on the impact of the Christian vision on pupils and the school community. During the year, the Christian Distinctiveness Committee had evaluated the Christian Distinctiveness plan and undertaken monitoring visits to evidence how this was implemented, so were able to meet the SIAMS inspectors alongside school leaders with confidence. The school received a good judgement, with the inspector praising the nurturing support provided by leaders as 'transformational' and stating that the 'impact of the school vision (across the federation) is exemplary'.

The Policy Committee reviewed numerous policies in line with statutory guidance including equality and accessibility policies. Governors queried how the school was ensuring new legislation was being implemented and followed, including around the cost of school uniform.

Stakeholder engagement is important for the governing body, and we were pleased to meet a number of parents from all three schools virtually during our 'Meet the Governors' session in May. As well as hearing from parents and carers via the Zoom meeting and reviewing the annual survey results, we listened to the children's voices when visiting school and through the Junior Leadership Council feedback and surveys, and reviewed staff survey results.

Future plans

We will continue to ensure that all our statutory duties are met, in particular relating to children's safety and wellbeing, and our priorities for the coming year include:

- Returning to a full cycle of monitoring post-pandemic restrictions and ensure all good work such as that relating to the new curriculum is embedded.
- Welcoming our new teachers and staff and ensuring all staff including our school leaders are well supported.
- Implementing a new governing body structure and ensuring ongoing development and succession planning is in place.
- Continuing to keep abreast of national government education policy.

Above all we will continue to challenge school leaders on our vision that all the schools are a happy and healthy place to learn (St James' CE: a happy and healthy place to achieve and believe).

Thank you

As ever, it has been an immense privilege to work with the children, parents and carers over the past year, and thank you for all your support in helping and encouraging the children to stay happy and healthy and ready to learn. Thank you too to all our staff and the school leaders for their hard work and a huge thank you to my fellow governors.

Rachel Greenhalgh, Chair of Governors

25 June 2022