

Annual Governance Statement

Date: 2023-24

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

Overview

Our role as a governing board is to provide strategic leadership and to create robust accountability, oversight and assurance for educational and financial performance. Our core functions are set out in regulation and include, but are not limited to ensuring:

- that the vision, ethos and strategic direction of the schools are clearly defined
- that the Head of Federation performs their responsibilities for the educational performance of the schools
- the sound, proper and effective use of the federation's financial resources

Each governor has specific responsibilities. Below are summaries from each of the governors from the last 12 months.

Safeguarding

Governors: Sue Hayward-Giles, Rachel Cooper

Sue Hayward-Giles and I are the two safeguarding governors. I do this alongside my Chair of Governors role, demonstrating the importance the governing board places on safeguarding.

As both Sue and I are new to this role, we have each undertaken specific and essential training for safeguarding governors including safer recruitment training. We have met each half term with Clare Weekes, Sphere Federation Senior Safeguarding Lead, and each school's Designated Safeguarding Leads to understand and provide challenge around aspects of safeguarding. We have focused on measures in place for online safety with an emphasis on filtering and monitoring. We regularly discuss staff training. In each meeting, we review an aspect of the Single Central Register as well as review essential documents. I have had the opportunity to meet with pupils across Sphere Federation and have been impressed by their knowledge and understanding of safeguarding.

Having developed a clear understanding of our role over the last academic year, we have agreed that over the next 12 months there should be a repeat external audit and we look forward to reviewing this with the Designated Safeguarding Leads.

Assessment

Equality and Inclusion

Governor: Andrew Gibson

To investigate and challenge Equality and Inclusion, I have focused my visits on the difference that Pupil Premium is making to our children. I was pleased to note that we invest this additional funding to benefit disadvantaged children in ways which ensure that those who need the greatest help receive it in a beneficial and inclusive way.

I continue to review our assessment tracking system with David Roundtree on a regular basis, and we look at data published by the Department of Education. Pupil outcomes are typically in line or better than national averages, and there was a notable improvement in Phonics at Scholes (Elmet) compared to the previous year. The adoption and embedding of the Little Wandle programme has had a significant impact, and this was recognised by a letter of commendation from the Secretary of State for Education. The comprehensive nature of the tracking system enables me to challenge the allocation of resources such as Pupil Premium, and to view the impact of changes such as the introduction of Little Wandle across the Federation. I will continue to investigate and challenge next year.

Early Years Foundation Stage

Early Reading

Governor: Matt Hick

I've undertaken three governor visits, one each term, to explore Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and Early Reading. Due to the close relationship between these areas, I've combined the visits, meeting with both Gayle Beesley, Early Years Leader, and Vicky Latham, Early Reading and Phonics Leader. The visits have been a mix of in-person and online.

The meetings have explored our approach to EYFS and the teaching of Early Reading across Sphere Federation. They provide a space to examine areas like monitoring pupil progress, our use of adaptive teaching to ensure all pupils fulfil their potential, and our approach to teacher development.

This year has seen several important areas of progress, including the development of closer links between the EYFS and Key Stage 1 curriculums; the creation of improved reading resources, like the 'rapid catch-up' box, which provide

specific support to those falling behind; and the implementation for parents and carers of Stay and Learn sessions in Early Reading and other EYFS areas.

Future visits will focus on monitoring the direct line that exists between our vision, what we teach, how we monitor pupil progress and the actions taken to help those pupils who need additional support.

Reading and Writing

Governor: Rachel Barker

My area of focus is Reading and Writing. Since I took up post in November 2023, I have met with Ollie Catherall and Jen Wilson (the Writing and Reading leads respectively). During our first meeting, they provided an overview of how these topics are delivered to pupils across the schools, before we explored the resources used, what is working and the key challenges. In the coming months we will focus on the impact of the change to the spelling focus, the teaching of Latin, and parent participation. I will also observe some teaching.

I have also undertaken a comprehensive review of the website for one of the Sphere Federation schools.

Maths and Science

Governor: Steven Trangmar

It was a pleasure to be elected as parent governor, and assume the role of link governor for Maths and Science, in the Autumn term of the 2023/24 academic year. Following an intensive induction process, I was tasked with scrutinising the website of one of the Sphere Federation schools to ensure key information was accessible. In my link governor role, I met with John McGriffiths and Paul Wilks. I was expertly guided through the topics covered in the curriculum for both subject areas. I learned about the past teaching of these subjects, how recent changes to the curriculum had been well-received, how pupils were being supported to reach their potential, and how progress was being monitored. We talked about quality first and adaptive teaching, and developing mastery (in Maths) and how colleagues across the federation, through able CPD, are supported in their roles. I have future meetings planned with Paula Allaway to further discuss attainment and curriculum development in Maths across the federation. I also met with the Ofsted inspectors as part of the inspection at Moortown in the spring term.

Foundation Subjects

Health & Safety

Governor: Nolan Keep

As foundation subject governor, I have met with Mr Wilks regularly. He has demonstrated clearly the priority Sphere Federation schools place on these subjects, something which was confirmed by an Ofsted inspection of Moortown Primary in March 2024. The children evidence learning across all three schools in their exercise books and lessons. It has been a privilege to see the learning that children demonstrate across the three schools. It is clear the staff manage their teaching and outcomes to cater for their classes.

In this academic year, there has been a health and safety and site inspection across all schools. The schools' site team have been managing and improving the facilities available to the school. Sue Quirk and Robert Atkins manage the three school sites clearly and effectively, keeping pupils, staff and visitors safe at all times with the best use of space possible.

Finance

Governor: Lorna Miall

In any organisation, there is an annual rhythm around the finances. Having completed 18 months as a co-opted Finance governor, I have been able to see this first-hand within Sphere Federation and am now well placed to build on these foundations.

I continue to work closely with Sue Quirk (Head of Federation and Resources Manager) as well as David Roundtree (Head of Federation) and our local authority contacts to understand and challenge the procedures and processes in place to ensure funds are being used effectively, appropriately and in line with the schools' plans and budgets.

I attend budget setting meetings and budget review meetings to scrutinise the process and better understand the outputs. I also conduct review and challenge of the monthly financial reports to gauge progress against these budgets. I recently led the governor review of our schools' financial value statements (SFVS) to ensure accuracy, clarity and completeness. The consistency of processes across Sphere Federation is a key focus in my reviews, as well as the importance of treating each school individually where necessary.

Christian Distinctiveness

Governors: Kathryn Wenn, Sue Hayward-Giles, Matthew Peat

The purpose of this group is to support St James' CE Primary leaders developing and maintaining the school's Christian vision as a lived reality, ensuring it has impact on the ways adults and children can be supported to flourish. We use the SIAMs framework as this basis of this and in 2023 this framework was refreshed by the Church of England to highlight the key elements of theology, school context, and vision. The refreshed framework does not present schools with lists of criteria to meet. Instead, it asks a number of Inspection Questions about impact, and it allows leaders to explain the school's context and the reasons for decisions and actions.

The focus of the Christian Distinctiveness Group during the first term was on developing understanding of the refreshed SIAMs framework as a support for self-evaluation in order to be successful in achieving the Church of England's vision for education.

We also welcomed the new Priest in Charge of Wetherby Parish and a new Co-opted member.

In the second term we restructured the cadence of the Christian Distinctiveness Group meetings and the approach to governor monitoring to better focus on theological roots, vision and impact.

Monitoring and evaluation has been carried out in the areas of collective worship and website content, resulting in actions for St James' CE Primary leaders to implement. Further evaluation of the impact of the school's Christian vision is planned.

Sue Hayward-Giles and Matthew Peat have spent some time exploring Church of England schools' websites and the representation of their faith work and its theological underpinning against that of the content on St James' CE Primary website. We are using this insight to support the school leaders, specifically around spirituality.

Inevitably, given his work as vicar, Matthew's contribution towards the Governing Board has a number of different emphases closely related to the church school. These are supporting and encouraging staff both pastorally but also practically through leading collective worship and supporting the continuing work to around Christian distinctiveness. This work is often in informal conversations with members of staff and others but also through the Christian Distinctiveness Group.

The work of the Christian Distinctiveness Group focuses on St James' CE Primary, but there is scope that it will in some way enrich the life of the whole federation.