

Governance Impact Statement 2023/25

What were the significant challenges for the governing body during the last eighteen months?

One of the most significant challenges that the governing body has faced over the last academic year and a half has been the loss of the Chair, and with it the loss of a huge amount of expertise, experience and institutional memory. We would like to offer her our very best wishes for the future and thanks for the many years of service to Felsted Primary School. At the same time the Vice Chair also resigned which left a huge hole in the team, and I would also like to thank her for her huge contribution. Since then we have also lost several other members of the governing board as their years of service have come to an end. I wish them well and thank them for their very valuable contributions to both the governing body and the school.

The second most significant challenge was an Ofsted inspection rapidly following the loss of our Chair. We started the academic year 2023-4 with a team that was quite inexperienced compared with previous years. This meant that there was an urgent need to re-build a new team that could take on the challenges faced by Ofsted and other challenges faced during our first academic year. The new team rapidly came together as a cohesive unit and this was acknowledged by the Ofsted inspectors.

Like with many schools across the country, the governing board currently still has vacancies, but it is hoped within the next couple of months we will be without any vacancies and have new members with a variety of invaluable experience joining us.

A further challenge we faced as a Board and as a school was the loss of our experienced SENCo who had provided invaluable support and expertise over the last few years to children with SEN, their parents, staff and the whole school community. Her contribution was recognised at the Ofsted visit last academic year. A new and very experienced SENCo has now been appointed and is meeting the challenges of working within a limited budget. She is bringing new ideas to the table and is settling into her role well.

The financial position of the school is, as with many schools, a growing cause for concern as the budgets provided for schools are squeezed. Funding to support children with SEND continues to be a struggle. Managing the estate and the associated costs continues to be problematic; energy costs rising astronomically, staff pay awards and building repairs have put an incredible stress on school finances. The role of the Finance and Premises Committee and subsequently the Full Governing Board (FGB) to follow the money, and ensure that the budget works hard for every child and aspect of their education will be paramount in this current academic year.

How were the challenges met?

Monitoring the implementation of the strategy

Against the backdrop of the Strategic Plan which was adopted by the school in 2022 and remains current, the governing body has continued to uphold the Vision and Ethos of the school. The governing body has taken steps to revisit and review the key pillars that make up the strategic plan and is implementing measures to more effectively scrutinise and monitor progress against each of these priority areas. This work will be on-going in this academic year. As a governing body we are lucky to have a wide range of expertise to support this work.

Safeguarding

The introduction of 'Safeguard', a software system, as a means of managing reporting, monitoring and training has embedded an effective safeguarding culture in the school more deeply. The Headteacher works closely with safeguarding governors in relation to monitoring, and a new structure to safeguarding visits is being used to good effect. Absenteeism is being closely monitored, as is the situation where parents remove children for the purpose of taking a holiday. The Chair of Governors who is also one of the safeguarding leads meets fortnightly with the Headteacher to monitor any safeguarding issues as well as address any other areas of concern. An annual Health and Safety tour of the school is also undertaken by the safeguarding leads. Governor monitoring visits, which are conducted by most school governors on a termly basis, also include a focus around safeguarding.

Curriculum, teaching and learning

The first strategic pillar that the governing body is focussing on is around teaching and learning. The governing body is gathering, analysing and reviewing a range of data that will enable the board to have a greater insight and understanding of academic performance in the school. The Board will be able to disaggregate the data to measure the progress for example of pupil premium children, children with SEN, more able children and other data sets. This might help the board to support the school in refocusing efforts where needed and celebrate its successes. A focus of the board will also be around 'added value' and 'exit velocity'.

Learning Walks where governors visit the school with a specific focus, have been introduced over the last eighteen months. The learning walks have enabled governor's to monitor aspects of the curriculum, or specific areas linked to the School Improvement Plan. These learning walks have been successful in providing more information in relation to the strengths and weaknesses of different schemes that have been introduced, for example they have provided an invaluable opportunity for governors to engage children in conversation to discover their thoughts and opinions about their school environment and the learning opportunities offered to them.

The school has also just been accepted for another research programme in relation to Science education. The Teacher Assessment in Primary Science (TAPS) project is based in Bath Spa University and funded by the Primary Science Teaching Trust (PSTT). TAPS aims to develop support for a valid, reliable and manageable system of primary school science assessment which will have a positive impact on children's learning.

Special Educational Needs

The school has recently been accepted on a programme called 'Partnership for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools' (PINS).

Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS) will bring health and education specialists and expert parent carers into mainstream primary settings to:

- Help shape whole school SEND provision.*
- Provide early interventions at a whole school level.*
- Up-skill school staff.*
- Support strengthening of partnerships between schools and parent carers.*

Questionnaires have been completed by the school and governing body and it is hoped that this programme will enhance the high quality of SEND provision already in existence.

The governing body welcomes these new initiatives and will be monitoring outcomes over the academic year. The importance of evidence-based practice in education should be at the heart of everything the school does and the governing body are exploring research based tools to monitor quality.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

The governing body takes the mental health and wellbeing of staff and pupils extremely seriously and strives to monitor and support the school's work in this area carefully. Surveys now use an evidence-based tool from the Anna Freud centre and the results of a staff survey have been presented and discussed at a recent FGB meeting. One of the learning walks focuses around child mental health and well-being.

Leadership

The Headteacher has worked closely with the SLT, Chair of governors and governing board to meet the challenges faced over the last eighteen months. We have discussed staff development and the importance of life-long learning and she has proactively ensured that staff undertake regular CPD. There is an acknowledgement that funding is an issue for staff to progress their careers through further education, however it is hoped that more staff will want to undertake more formal further education to enhance their teaching. The Headteacher has driven improvements and is committed to investing in technology and utilising outside agencies to enhance the curriculum. The Writing for Pleasure Scheme is an example of this and is currently being evaluated. She continues to prioritise the school's Values, Vision and Ethos and works constructively with a new and challenging governing body.

The governing body reviews the performance of the Headteacher annually and the regular meetings with the Chair provide an opportunity to explore areas of concern, and offer a supportive and listening environment to explore any challenges. The governing body as a whole meet regularly to act as critical friends and challenge where necessary to improve outcomes for both pupils and staff.

Another member of the SLT attends the FGB meetings both to provide support to the Headteacher and also to make contributions to the discussions. Teachers also join the FGB on occasions, to offer information to the board about specific issues.

Inclusivity

The Headteacher's collaborative work with the SLT and excellent SENCo has increased the profile of SEND provision within the school. This was highlighted in the recent Ofsted visit. Targeted governor visits to the SENCo have asked challenging questions utilising a new structured reporting mechanism. A significant provision recently has been the establishment of a sensory room. This can make a real difference to children who suffer from sensory overload. It is hope that this provision can be developed further during the year.

Unfortunately funding for children who are neurodiverse remains a problem as do outside services to meet these children's needs. There appears to be a growing number of children in the school who are neurodiverse, have mental health issues or a combination of both that lack supporting funds. This puts a lot of pressure on existing staff to cope with these ongoing challenges. The governing body are closely monitoring this situation and the impact that this has on both pupils and staff.

Health and emotional wellbeing

All relevant policies have been reviewed and updated this year and the Policies Committee has been re-established to ensure a strong team have responsibility for undertaking this task. Governors have

monitored in person pupils mental health which appears to be a growing issue post Covid. One of the foci of the learning walks is around pupil mental health and behaviour, and this is an area that needs further work. The Headteacher has ensured that all staff are now trained in a relational behaviour model in order to promote positive management of behaviour. Evaluation of this training by staff has been very positive indicating that they feel better equipped to support children in a more positive and supportive manner.

Sustainability

We introduced a new Environment and Sustainability Strategy in 2022/23, drawn up by governors in consultation with stakeholders. A core element of the strategy was to undertake a baseline audit of our energy use which in turn would allow us to identify opportunities to improve environmental performance.

We engaged specialists from Essex County council to undertake a full baseline audit and make recommendations on sustainability actions that could be taken. This has been completed. An initial action was to replace the boiler. This took place during the summer and generated some efficiencies in terms of energy use. This year we will use the baseline report to work through further actions. The governors will continue to encourage financial moves that will ensure continued improvements to the running of the infrastructure of the school. We will also ensure that education around sustainability and the environment is driven through the curriculum and the School Parliament.

What have been the achievements of the governing body over the last 18 months?

- Establishing a functioning solid governing body following the loss of both its Chair and Vice Chair that could effectively act as a critical friend as well as effectively challenge existing practices where needed.*
- Prioritising well- being of both staff and pupils to support the learning environment and support them through a successful Ofsted inspection.*
- Developing confidence in the use of a range of strategies that are evidence based where possible for effective governance, training, monitoring and reporting.*
- Working on establishing a more rigorous reporting system.*
- Rigorous interrogation of financial spending priorities and budget setting.*
- Support for a staffing strategy which maintains confidence, continuity and wellbeing for staff and pupils.*
- Exploring and supporting life-long learning for all staff including CPD.*

- *Using validated tools for stakeholder engagement and recognising the need to improve and work on stakeholder engagement over the next year.*
- *Following a baseline audit, working with the school to instigate the replacement of the school boiler.*

How have these achievements improved areas of school life (impact)?

- *Successfully re-establishing a governing board has ensured that the School is better supported and constructively challenged.*
- *Having a positive Ofsted inspection has been good for staff and pupil morale.*
- *Ensuring that the governing board use evidence based tools for monitoring has improved the reliability and validity of the data collected and ensured a more rigorous approach.*
- *Having more rigorous reporting systems ensure a more rigorous approach to monitoring.*
- *Continued rigorous monitoring of the financial position of the School, by looking at spending priorities and budgeting.*
- *Prioritisation and monitoring of well-being should keep the School Community happier and healthier.*
- *Promoting CPD and life-long learning should impact on pupil learning and promote a learning culture for all within the school.*
- *Stakeholder engagement is becoming more effective, but needs further work.*
- *The school boiler has been replaced over the summer holiday followed by the installation of radiators etc. ensuring a better working environment for both staff and pupils.*

*Yvonne Crome
Chair of Governors
2nd March 2025*