

Annual Governance Statement
Governing Body of Theale Church of England Primary School
Academic year 2023/2024

Our Purpose

In accordance with the Government's requirement for all governing bodies, the 3 core strategic functions of the Theale C of E Primary School Governing Body are:

1. ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction;
2. holding the Headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils;
3. overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure its money is well spent.

Our Board

Per our Instrument of Governance (reconstituted August 2015), our Governing Body consists of ten governors:

- 2 Foundation Governors (Oxford Diocese)
- 2 Parent Governors
- 1 Local Authority Governor (West Berkshire)
- 1 Staff Governor
- the Headteacher
- 3 Co-opted Governors.

During 2023/24 three governors resigned: Teresa Howard (Oxford Diocese), Paul Davey (coopted) and Kirsty Holehouse (staff). Jacinta Holmes (Oxford Diocese) and Maria Bradbury (staff) were recruited in their place. We deliberately delayed recruiting to fill the coopted governor vacancy as we wanted to know the skills and experience of the new governors first so that we can recruit someone with the skills needed to strengthen the Governing Body.

The governing body regularly reviews its skills to focus training where needed and use this information when we have vacancies to ensure we have the broad range of skills required in a Governing Body.

Information and profiles of the current Board can be found on the Governor page on the School Website. The attendance of Governors at meetings can be found at the end of this document.

What We Do

The full Governing Body (FGB) meets six times a year, and also has a number of subgroups to consider different aspects of the school in detail. At Theale, we have a Finance Committee to review the financial performance of the school and make sure its money is well spent and a Pay Committee. We also have First and Second Committees in place to deal with any complaints or disciplinary matters that may arise. Until this year we had a Nursery Committee but this is no longer needed.

We also visit the school to have more focussed meetings on our areas of expertise, such as the curriculum, the quality of teaching and learning, safeguarding, finance, H&S. Governors often support school day trips. In March each year we spend the whole day in school prior to our meeting to carry out a range of observations and meetings.

We have the privilege of having the Rev. Martin Davy on our board. His regular visits to the school to take assembly are popular with the staff and pupils, but also add to the knowledge we as a governing body have of the school.

A summary of our work in 2023/4

The Board of an 'Outstanding' school has particular challenges. The school is outstanding due to the hard work and dedication of all the staff. The Board is conscious that it needs to work in a way that enables it to gather all the evidence and information it needs to do its job well without adding unnecessarily to the workload of staff. It's a delicate balance which we keep under constant review. The Board and individual governors do this by using existing reports and information, covering several tasks in one visit, holding meetings at the end of the school day rather than in the evening, involvement in ongoing school activities such as school trips and assemblies and working alongside the school's Local Authority adviser. We also have a 'Governor Day' when many activities can be carried out simultaneously and we can do activities such as discussions with pupils. Most governors, as parents or other community members, also see aspects of the outcomes of the work of the school in other situations.

All of the minutes of the FGB meetings can be found on the school website. We have a number of items that we discuss at every meeting (safeguarding, finances, H&S, school update etc), and a number of items that we discuss are certain times of year.

At our first meeting of the school year, we agreed roles and our focus for the upcoming year. For 2022/23 we agreed this would be:

1. monitoring and supporting the school back to normal after the flood,
2. ensuring the school and the Board are fully prepared for an imminent Ofsted inspection,
3. how we ensure we remain an effective FGB, including succession planning,
4. risk identification and mitigation,
5. our future structure, including considering the implications of joining, or establishing, a Multi Academy Trust,
6. to provide continued support for the school.

Points 1, 2, 3 and 6 have been governors' highest priorities.

Point 1: It is great that the school is now back as it should be after the flood although there are a few, minor outstanding issues. The way all the staff coped with the upheaval and the challenges consequent to the flood has been amazing. At all times the focus has been on ensuring that the children's education and opportunities have been unaffected; the fact that this has been achieved successfully is remarkable and we are hugely grateful to all the staff.

Point 2: For years now, the school has known that on any Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday morning they could get a phone call from Ofsted saying, 'We're coming in tomorrow.' The strain on staff is huge and has increased as we now know that it will happen before Christmas. Ensuring all the evidence they might, or might not, want is always up to date is an unwanted and unnecessary pressure that takes time and energy that could be better deployed. The work of the Governing Body is part of what is inspected as part of the Leadership and Management of the school.

Point 3: Another key challenge is one that most schools are facing, and that is recruiting and keeping valuable governors. The Board needs a collection of people with a range of skills and expertise but also, and very importantly, the time to be able to carry out the role. Being a governor at this school is not a huge task but it does require timely and conscientious commitment.

The work we do on our committees and in the FGB support the vision, ethos and strategic direction of the school, working with the Headteacher to ensure we have a three-year School Development Plan

focussing on our continued efforts to provide a broad and balanced curriculum to the children of Theale, with a large variety of opportunities to support their development.

The educational impact of Covid can still be evidenced but it becomes increasingly less significant as the staff and pupils work hard to recapture lost ground. The data shows that gaps are closing and that pupil outcomes remain significantly above national and local averages.

In July 2023 we had 325 children on roll, and the school are working hard to ensure all children receive exciting opportunities to help them reach their potential and be ready for secondary.

Finance

You will be aware from the press that, with a few exceptions, schools are finding it incredibly hard to deliver high quality education on the funds allocated. Every year additional, unfunded, demands are made on school budgets.

Finance has been a headache for nearly all schools this year, and Theale is no exception. It has been almost impossible for the Board to carry out its normal work and function in this area. All the invoices associated with the flood have gone through the school's accounts to avoid VAT being paid. This is normal practice, supported by the DfE but has added massively to the burden of financial administration. In the spring term our long-serving, and incredible, School Business Manager retired. Recruiting a quality replacement was hard and we were determined to get the right person, which we have now done, rather than rush an appointment. Support from the LA was very valuable but limited and so closing last year's accounts and setting a new budget was a real challenge. We did end up with an overspend last year but have set a balanced budget for this year but not without making cuts to things we regard as important. We will keep this under review in the coming year.

Our nursery

Nursery pupil numbers have declined hugely over the last five or more years as increasingly families operate with two working parents. Our nursery has gone from two full 26-place sessions each day to one and that one with only a dozen children. While it has been an invaluable resource in the past, it has ceased to be needed by enough parents to make it viable. Reluctantly, following a consultation, the Board decided to close it at the end of the academic year.

Educational performance

We continue to monitor pupil performance and are proud of the pupils' continued positive attitudes and eagerness to embrace our broad curriculum. We continue to monitor how 'vulnerable groups' of children will be supported and how the Pupil Premium Grant is being spent by the school and what impact this has on the outcomes, and a report on this is available on the website.

Safeguarding

Governors are also responsible for safeguarding children and staff in school and we have a Nominated Governor for Safeguarding (Francoise Woolley) who regularly meets with the designated safeguarding lead and other staff members as well as providing regular updates to the governors about any safeguarding matters.

Health and Safety

Amy North leads on our Health and Safety responsibilities. She visits the school and carries out checks of the premises with the school's caretaker. This remains a big task as everything needs to be reviewed and updated for the new school building and post flood. We work closely with the School Business Manager, Caretaker and Senior Leadership on this.

Jon Houghton

September 2024

Governor Attendance at Full Governing Body meetings

Governor		2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Catherine Morley	Headteacher	6/6	6/7	6/6
Jon Houghton	Co-opted	6/6	7/7	7/7
Michael Carpenter	Co-opted	4/6	0/2	N/A
Amy North	Co-opted	N/A	2/2	5/6
Paul Davey	Co-opted	N/A	2/4	0/1
Martin Davy	Foundation	5/6	4/7	6/6
Theresa Howard	Foundation	N/A	1/2	0/1
Alice Gough	Foundation	3/5	1/4	N/A
Francoise Woolley	Parent	5/6	7/7	6/6
Sanjiv Anand	Parent	4/6	4/7	N/A
Kirsty Holehouse	Staff	N/A	7/7	3/3
Aurelia Noel	LA	N/A	4/7	5/6
Michelle Carey	Parent	N/A	N/A	1/2
Jacinta Holmes	Foundation	N/A	N/A	1/1
Lindsay Ansell	Parent	N/A	N/A	1/1
Maria Bradbury	Staff	N/A	N/A	1/1