

Review of Governance- report on All Saints Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, Runcorn

Date of review: 5/10/15

1. Reviewer's Details

- 1.1 Andy Kent is a recently retired senior Local Authority officer, whose responsibilities included governor services, and who has many years of involvement in regional and national governor networks, including currently as chair of the National Co-ordinators of Governor Services network (NCOGS), in which capacity he is a member of the DfE advisory group on governance (AGOG). An experienced governor, he currently is chair of a community primary school and a Church of England primary school interim executive board, and a member and trustee of a multi-academy trust, as well as being an national leader of governance, designated in April 2013.
- 1.2 Reviewer's contact details: andy@rmagovernance.com

2. Background and context

- 2.2 The school is significantly smaller than most primary schools, with 93 pupils on roll at the time of the last Ofsted inspection in March 2014, when the judgement was "requires improvement". Ofsted noted there is a private preschool provision on site, which is separately inspected. Pupils are largely White British, with a well above average proportion with special educational needs, and also a well above average proportion eligible for pupil premium funding. There is also above average pupil mobility. All associated judgements were "requires improvement", save for behaviour and safety, which was judged "good", but there was no recommendation there be an external review of governance, and governors were praised for their commitment and understanding of school strengths and areas for improvement. An identified strength of the school was the "strong leadership" of the headteacher.
- 2.3 The key school improvement issues identified were for teaching to be at least consistently good or better so as to raise achievement and

attainment, especially for the most able; to strengthen middle leadership; and in the curriculum aspects of the teaching of maths, ICT and reading were also noted as requiring improvement .

- 2.4 A monitoring visit in June 2014 judged effective action was being taken to tackle the identified areas for improvement, recommending that the governors’ monitoring role was detailed in the school improvement plan, and additionally that the governing body’s links with the Local Authority be strengthened so that governors own knowledge of the detail and changing context in which school leaders were driving improvements be further developed. A subsequent HMI support visit at the end of January 2015, noted the Local Authority (LA) link officer was now attending governing body meetings, and made several specific recommendations around governance aimed at increasing capacity, efficiency and scrutiny, support and challenge, and additionally recommended an autumn term external review of governance, to consider the progress that had been made, and to identify any further development needs. Although not explicit in the written summary note of this meeting, the minutes of the February 2015 governing body meeting record that HMI had “extreme concerns about governance”, further recording these concerns included the number of vacancies and “too much falling on the Chair and one other governor” . The headteacher advised governors they were at the start of the improvement journey the school as a whole had begun two years previously, and that urgent improvement of governing body effectiveness was required. HMI stated an intention to check with both the school and LA on how their advice had been taken forward towards the end of the summer term 2015, particularly as it related to governance.

3. Process of the review

- 3.3 The review took place on 5th October 2015. The reviewer conducted a scrutiny of relevant governing body paperwork, reviewed the governance aspects of the school website, and held one-to-one meetings with the headteacher, assistant headteacher (also the staff governor), chair and vice chair of governors, four other governors, a

Diocesan Officer, and a Local Authority school improvement officer, who had been appointed as an associate member of the governing body the previous October. The reviewer also met with a group of governors to undertake a self-review exercise based around the Twenty Key Questions for a Governing Board, produced by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Governance and Leadership.

4. Summary of Findings

- 4.1 The governing body is emerging from a difficult period, and a number of actions have been taken to improve governors' understanding of their role, and, especially, to develop a culture where individual governors are able and feel confident to question and challenge. The governing body reconstituted in May 2015 and, with the support of both the Diocese (especially in terms of recruitment), and the Local Authority (LA), via the associate member (one of its officers) has now reorganised its structure to one of two main committees, Resources, and Curriculum and Standards. Additionally, the Chair and Vice Chair, Headteacher and associate member, have formed a steering group to oversee the work of the governing body as a whole, and have an agreed governing body action plan in place. This group has become a key driving force in shaping the focus and work of the governing body, which is now better placed than previously to provide appropriate challenge and support.
- 4.2 Most governors understand the performance data presented to them, and some have a more in-depth knowledge and understanding. Efforts have been made to engage with parents, with feedback from a questionnaire leading to the establishment of a breakfast club, which is well supported and governors see as having contributed to improved pupil attendance and punctuality. Relationships with the parish are strong, especially so as parochial church council (PCC) officers are part of the core leadership group of the governing body itself. The governing body is now satisfied with the quality of clerking support provide via their LA service level agreement (SLA), although acknowledges it needs to resolve who clerks, or at least minutes, committee meetings, which the headteacher or staff governor has previously undertaken.

- 4.3 The retirement late in the summer term 2015 of the vicar, who had been the very longstanding chair, alongside that of his wife, who was a foundation governor, has in the view of all spoken to, led to a different and more open style of leadership, and an atmosphere where individuals feel better able to participate in meetings. The new chair is enthusiastic and highly committed, and has developed a good working relationship with the headteacher and other governors. She is also secretary to the PCC. She has recently identified peer support from the chair of another Church of England primary school in the Borough, who has successful experience of driving improvement in a similar Ofsted context, and has registered an interest in undertaking the National College for Teaching and Leadership's Chairs' Development Programme.
- 4.4 Most, but not all, governors are aware of the range of support and training opportunities available via the SLA for governor support, although uptake has been uneven. Induction for new governors is one area as yet to be developed, although new governors stated the headteacher had been helpful in providing information about the school, and that the LA had also provide material. Another governor has booked to attend LA provide induction training later this term. All governors did show at least a general understanding of their role and responsibilities, and some a more developed knowledge and understanding.
- 4.5 Whilst there is much that is positive to report, some challenges, and additional areas for development remain. The vice chair, who took up this position in June 2015, and who was also the chair of the resources committee left the governing body in the week the review took place, understood to be because of pressure of work. Several governors commented that his experience and knowledge, particularly around finance, would be missed. His departure means there are three vacancies for foundation governors, including that of the ex-officio appointment, and there is a pressing need to identify a new vice chair. This was acknowledged by several governors, who also recognised that the governing body's options from current membership were constrained in part by the fact of the marital relationship between the chair and another governor, who has just filled the vacant chair of

resources committee position. Another governor is employed to provide sports coaching at the school, and a third is married to a member of staff. These potential conflicts of interest do need to be declared in the register of interests, which at the time of the review had yet to be published, and minuted appropriately too.

- 4.6 The chair recognises the importance of recruiting new governors with relevant skills and attributes, and is also aware of the support that may be provided again via the Diocese, in consultation as detailed in the new Instrument with the PCC. Previous attempts to secure suitable governors via SGOSS were not successful. A skills audit was undertaken in January 2015, and this will be revisited to inform both recruitment and training needs. Building the capacity of the governing body in to the medium term will be important, as it may reasonably be anticipated from one-to-one discussions the associate member and at least one other of the governors will not be able to continue much beyond the next Section 5 inspection.
- 4.7 Scrutiny of minutes of committees and the full governing body demonstrates an increased readiness since the retirement of the former chair on the part of governors to ask relevant questions, confirming what many had said in meetings with the reviewer. The headteacher's reports are fairly detailed, include summary performance and attendance data, a glossary to assist governors, and also seek to identify the impact of professional development activities. Middle leaders have begun to give short presentations to governors on their areas of responsibilities, and this has been well received. Both the governors' own action plan, and the school development plan, include success criteria, and detail a monitoring role for the governing body and the steering committee, but it is not entirely clear these consistently guide reporting or discussion at meetings in a way which fully focusses attention to key Ofsted identified improvement actions.
- 4.8 A number of governors have identified link roles. These include safeguarding, training, pupil premium and special educational needs and disability, but to date these roles are little employed in practice, and individuals spoken to were generally not clear on the purpose or

expectation of the link role, and no written role description or protocols for governor visits are in place. There is some limited information on the school website giving the names of governors and the core governance functions, and some minutes of past meetings, but the information is not consistently kept up to date and as yet does not include the information now required in statutory guidance, including a published register of interests.

- 4.8 One other matter of concern was raised by several governors, and the headteacher, and that related to the PVI Nursery on site. There is considerable uncertainty about the relationship and responsibility of the governing body, and on the part of individual members of the governing body for the nursery, and at the time of the review this remained unresolved, despite attempts to clarify matters on the part of the head, some governors, the LA and Diocese. Whilst there is a consensus that the possibility of it becoming part of the maintained provision is not something to pursue, so far clarity around the governance of the provision as relevant documentation has as yet not been found. It is understood the nursery was established some decades ago by the associated church of Holy Trinity, which is a joint benefice with All Saints church. The new chair of the resources committee, who is also the chair of the PCC, is taking a lead in tracking down details of the trust and the head and governors are also continuing to discuss the situation with relevant LA officers.
- 4.9 Governors appreciate the school operates with significant capacity constraints as a consequence of the small numbers of pupils on roll. Some years ago there was discussion about possible academy conversion, but this was not pursued. The support received via a local teaching school, and work with another, outstanding, primary school, has been welcomed by all, but, understandably, headteacher and governors have focussed on school improvement in the light of the Ofsted judgement, and have as yet not looked at how the longer term strategic position of the school, although school leaders engage with the wider Halton and Diocesan networks.

Key Areas for action:

1. To re visit the skills audit to support recruitment to vacancies, membership of committees, the appointment of a Vice Chair and an agreed training and development plan.
2. Agree an induction process for all new and newly appointed governors, and to draw up a code of conduct for the governing body as a whole.
3. To review all link governor roles, and where such roles are confirmed, to agree a short summary role description, and an associated protocol for school visits , which applies to all governor visits to school.
4. To review the format of headteacher and other reports, and governor meetings agendas, to ensure they are focussed on school development plan key actions, outcomes and timescales.
5. To ensure the school website governor section meets both statutory requirements and good practice expectations, and is regularly updated.
6. To resolve the current uncertainties relating to the school and governing bodies responsibility for the onsite nursery, and clearly identify any continuing involvement of individual governors, so that any actual or potential conflicts of interest are identified and managed.

A suggested action plan is included below. The governing body will need to agree to adopt or amend this, confirm the timescales and determine which individuals will be responsible for each action.

Action plan: All Saints CE Primary School				
Priority for Improvement	Action required	By when	By whom	Success Criteria
1. To re visit the skills audit to support recruitment to vacancies, membership of committees, the appointment of a Vice Chair and an agreed training and development plan.	All governors to undertake the NGA skills audit	End November 2015	Steering group to identify a governor to lead	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Audit completed and any skills gaps identified 2. Vacancies filled 3. A new Vice Chair appointed 4. A timetabled plan of development activities in place. 5. A record of training undertaken, with a process agreed to assess its impact on governor effectiveness reported back to the governing body.
	New vice chair appointed	ASAP & no later than end of the autumn term	Governing Body	
	An agreed process for recruitment/ appointment to vacancies, in discussion with the Diocese and PCC.	End autumn term	Steering to recommend to governing body	
	Committee membership to be reviewed in the light of the skills audit	February 2016 half term	Steering group to recommend to governing body	
	Vacancies filled	February half term 2016	Steering group/ governing body	
	Agree on training needs of individual governors, and the governing body as whole & agree a timetabled plan for delivery. (To include use of online governor training purchased by the	February half term 2016	Steering group & development governor	

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	school) and a process agreed for recording governor engagement and impact agreed			

Action plan: All Saints CE Primary School				
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2. Agree an induction process for all new and newly appointed governors, and to draw up a code of conduct for the governing body as a whole.	Agree a formal process for induction for all recently appointed and new governors, to include relevant school information, a meeting with the head and chair NGA guide, an identified online and/or face to face training course, and consideration of an identified “buddy” governor.	End autumn term 2015	Development governor with steering group	1. A timely process is in place which feedback from individuals shows meets their needs and enables them to speedily feel part of the governing team, and able to make a positive contribution to the work of the governing body as a whole. 2. All governors have signed up to an agreed code of conduct.
	The governing body to have adopted a code of conduct which all governors sign up for (the NGA provides a model as a starting point, as does the GLP (LA) site.	End autumn term 2015	Steering group to recommend to governing body	

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3. To review all link governor roles, and where such roles are confirmed, to agree a short summary role description, and an associated protocol for school visits, which applies to all governor visits to school.	To identify which roles provide may provide additional capacity and knowledge to the governing body in knowing the school and for which named governors have the interest, capacity and skills and knowledge to undertake such a role.	February half term 2016	Steering group to recommend to governing body	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Role descriptions for any link roles to have been written and agreed 2. Staff and governors have a clear and shared understanding of the purpose of governor visits, and that this is detailed in a written protocol adopted by the FGB 3. A schedule of visits is in place for the spring and summer terms. 4. The outcomes of visits are reported to the governing body or relevant committee as appropriate, thus ensuring that governors are better informed about the work of the school.
	To agree a written role description for the link role, which may be largely or wholly generic, and with clear expectations for how and when to report back to the governing body and where relevant its committees.	February half term 2016	Steering group to recommend to governing body	
	Ensure all staff are aware of link roles and the expectations on them and the governors concerned.	February half term 2016	chair & headteacher	
	A schedule of visits is in place for the spring and summer terms 2015	February half term 2016	chair & headteacher to liaise with individual governors	

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4. To review the format of headteacher and other reports, and governor meetings agendas, to ensure they are focussed on school development plan key actions, outcomes and timescales.	To discuss and agree the format of reports and the construction of agendas to best ensure they enable consideration & monitoring of key improvement issues, with relevant data	End autumn term 2015	Steering group	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The format of reporting and the agendas of governors’ meetings clearly identify all key priorities, actions taken, and progress towards meeting identified milestones and targets. 2. All agendas are agreed, with the chair and committee chairs taking the lead in setting them, in consultation with the headteacher and liaison with the clerk.

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5. To ensure the school website governor section meets both statutory requirements and good practice expectations, and is regularly updated.	To gather all governor information required to be published as per statutory guidance	End November 2015	Clerk, Chair	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The published information meets the requirements of statutory guidance and reflects wider improved practice in terms of transparency. 2. There is an agreed system in place for keeping information updated which places no administrative burden on the headteacher.
	To ensure this information is published on the school website	End November 2015	Chair, in discussion with the headteacher, with the administrative task of publication delegated to a member of the administrative staff	
	To expand the information about governors on the school website, to include: brief governor pen portrait; non confidential governor minutes; a written summary of the impact of governors' work; periodic updates on progress against the school development plan	February half term 2016 and ongoing	Chair to coordinate, in discussion with the steering group	

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Priority for Improvement	Action required	By when	By whom	Success Criteria
6. To resolve the current uncertainties relating to the school and governing bodies responsibility for the onsite nursery, and clearly identify any continuing involvement of individual governors, so that any actual or potential conflicts of interest are identified and managed.	The governing body to clearly establish and record the legal relationship between itself and the nursery	End of the autumn term 2015	Steering committee in the first instance, then the governing body	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The governing body and all stakeholders have established and agreed who is responsible for the governance of the nursey. 2. Any conflict of interest, actual or potential, that may have arisen as a consequence to have been noted and appropriately dealt with. 3. Arrangements regarding the future of the nursery have been agreed by all relevant parties.
	The role of any individual governor, and any employee of the governing body, is similarly established and recorded.	End of autumn term 2015	As above	
	Any potential or actual conflict of interest arising is declared, with professional advice sought where necessary.	End of autumn term 2015	Individual governors, clerk	
	The governing body to take account of any advice received, including from the Local Authority, so that it is able to take any necessary steps with regard to future arrangements for the nursery.	February half term 2016	Governing body	

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