



# External Review of Governance September 2018

**Trevor Kendrick Cert Ed ICSA**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Governing Board has an enviable mix of relevant skills, educational and commercial experience. These skills are often utilized for the benefit of the school and its key stakeholders. The Chair of Governors is highly capable and has provided direction for the Board.

The Board has demonstrated ambition for the school and continuously seeks improvement. Board members have a sound understanding of their strategic roles and responsibilities and are aware of the areas where their knowledge could be strengthened.

*The purpose of governance is to provide confident, strategic leadership and to create robust accountability, oversight and assurance for educational and financial performance.*

*Governance Handbook January 2017*

The Board has clearly demonstrated its ability to provide robust accountability in respect of educational and financial performance. An outstanding Board that is wholly capable of fulfilling its function of providing confident, strategic leadership and of driving school performance and development.

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## METHOD OF REVIEW

The review was conducted in the following stages;

- **Scoping meeting**

A scoping meeting was conducted with the Chair of Governors, the Clerk to the Board and Headteacher where the need for and purpose of the review was discussed and particular issues of potential concern raised.

- **Document Review**

Relevant governance documents were reviewed and external enquiries made to obtain assurance in respect of Board structure, priorities, activities and effectiveness.

- **Individual Consultation**

Key individuals were interviewed to seek their views of school governance and to gain an understanding of their knowledge of the purpose and functions of governance in general.

- **Self-Review Workshop**

A workshop was held on the 13<sup>th</sup> September 2018. Governors, the Headteacher, Board Clerk, School Business Manager and members of the senior leadership team attended and fully participated. The workshop allowed participants to consider the strengths and areas for development of the Governing Board and to discuss the strategic direction and challenges it faces.

# REPORT OF FINDINGS

## The Willows Primary School Governance Context

The Willows Primary School (the school) is a local authority maintained school that has grown steadily. Numbers on roll have increased from a declared 468 in 2010 to approximately 660 at the time of review.

The last Ofsted full inspection took place on the 22<sup>nd</sup> - 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2010 where the school was assessed overall as good. There have been two further inspections (interim assessment and short) the latest being on the 8<sup>th</sup> June 2016. The inspectors highlighted several improvements to the school. Of particular note was the view that the leadership and governance was described as a *significant strength*.

Of the 660 pupils on the school roll 47% are boys 53% girls. 13% of children have English as an additional language, 10% are children in receipt of pupil premium support and 17% are children identified as having a special educational need of disability. Currently the school has a 95% attendance rate. It should be noted that as with all schools these figures are subject to fluctuation and are therefore approximate.

There are currently 22 members of staff who hold qualified teacher status (QTS) and one newly qualified teacher (NQT's) who joined the school in September 2018.

The Headteacher is supported by a non-teaching Deputy and a non-teaching Assistant Headteacher.

## Governance Framework

The Governing Board comprises 11 members including the Headteacher. The current Chair of the Board was appointed in September 2015. The Chair successfully completed the Chair's Development Programme in 2016.

Board members have a broad range of relevant educational and commercial experience.

The Board is supported by a Finance Committee and Link Governors to specified areas of the school.

The Clerk to the Board is provided through the local authority and holds the National School Clerks Diploma. (January 2018)

## Findings

### Strategic Leadership

The Governing Board has set out a strategic vision that clearly communicates its ambitions and intentions regarding its pupils and the direction of the school. This was created and implemented in consultation with key stakeholders. Clear evidence of the Board understanding its role in respect of ensuring clarity of vision and strategic direction of the school was obtained from documents, including the school development plan, meeting agenda and minutes and related supporting documents. These all demonstrated the Governing Board's understanding of and determination to, lead strategic change.

Documentary evidence was later supported by interactions during the review workshop where governors demonstrated their knowledge of this aspect of their role by questioning and challenge by and of the consultant.

Meeting minutes also provided unambiguous evidence of the Board's ability to robustly monitor progress towards achieving the school vision within the declared timescale.

The Governing Board demonstrated a clear and objective understanding of the strengths and areas of development of the school and has obtained external moderation and assessment of internal data to gain further assurance.

Although members of the Board and Senior Leadership team could demonstrate an awareness of the potential risks to achieving the vision when questioned during the review workshop, there was no evidence that risks had been formally assessed and mitigation actions identified.

### Accountability

The Governing Board receives relevant information and data from several sources both internal and external. The information provided by the Headteacher and School Business Manager are benchmarked where appropriate to enable comparative assessments to be made. This data is supported by independent external data regarding educational performance that provides the necessary additional layer of assurance.

The type of data provided by the school allows the Board to cross reference information and compare with national expectations.

There is ample evidence in meeting minutes and during the review workshop of the Board's ability and willingness to question and challenge appropriately. The challenge provided by the Board is robust, informed and probative. Appropriate challenge and questioning is a particular strength of this Board.

Review of the two sets of financial committee minutes provided indicate a less robust challenge and a potential for governors to become concerned with operational aspects of the school. It was noted however that the minutes examined were dated March and November 2017 and changes to the committee have taken place since those meetings. Additional consideration was given to this concern during the review workshop and assurance regarding questioning and challenge and strategic focus was received from governors and the School Business Manager.

The Finance Committee is provided with an impressive quantity of well presented, benchmarked information in an easily readable format.

### People

The current Chair is highly popular with her peers and senior members of the school leadership. She provides considered guidance to the Board and ensures meetings are efficient and effective. The relationship between the Chair and the Headteacher is professional, supportive and there is clearly a shared sense of purpose. The Chair is supported by a very capable and experienced Vice Chair.

The main strength of this Board is the wealth of educational and commercial knowledge and experience of individual Governors and the manner in which these skills combine through a shared commitment to the school. Governors are aware of the need for effective succession planning and have considered their recent skills audit as an objective means to identify potential future needs. Regular governance training is undertaken, governors interviewed were able to provide details of training received within the last 18 months.

The Governing Board is supported by a qualified, independent, professional clerk. Governing Board meeting minutes are of a high standard and meet all relevant statutory requirements and accepted good practice.

The Board and Chair meet, to a very significant degree, all knowledge and skills criteria contained in the Competency Framework for Governance January 2017.

## Structures

The Board has considered its structure in relation to its effectiveness and efficiency in delivering strategic leadership to the school. All committees were disbanded with the exception of the Finance Committee and link governors were allocated to, on the whole, school priorities. The Board is aware of the need to regularly review the link governor and committee position to ensure changing school needs are met.

There is clear delineation of operational and strategic priorities by the Board which is based on a sound understanding of the relative roles and responsibilities. This delineation actively supports appropriate communication between levels of governance and key stakeholders. Parent surveys address the question of governance effectiveness and the school website exceeds Department for Education requirements for publication of governance information.

The Board has adopted terms of reference for its committees and link governors and a code of conduct for governors.

## Compliance

The Board complies with statutory and contractual requirements and understands its responsibilities under education and employment legislation. There is clear evidence, both documentary and obtained from questioning, that demonstrates that the Board ensures key duties are undertaken effectively including in relation to safeguarding, inclusion and special educational needs provision. Governing Board minutes and supporting financial and educational information provided show a high level of oversight and monitoring of the impact of pupil premium and other targeted funding.

The understanding of the Board's responsibilities regarding the promotion of equality and diversity was clearly demonstrated during the review workshop when an unprompted discussion took place regarding the desire of the Board to recruit members that better reflected the cultural makeup of the school. This diversity awareness further is evidenced in the school vision.

## Evaluation

A skills audit that is aligned to the school development plan has been undertaken and, when questioned governors were able to explain its purpose in relation to identifying knowledge and skills gaps and in respect of directing recruitment.

The Board has commissioned external reviews of leadership from independent experts and the Local Authority and this review is evidence of a Governing Board that is not complacent but is willing to challenge itself. The Board reviews its performance and seeks the views of the senior leadership team and others when assessing its effectiveness. Governing Board improvement is a feature of the School Development Plan.

Discussions held during the review workshop demonstrated Governors have a realistic view of their performance. They are eagerly ambitious to develop still further and welcome external views and advice.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Board of Governors undertake the following actions to address the issues highlighted in this report.

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## Recommendation 1.

Ensure Financial Committee minutes are completed to the same high standard as those of the Governing Board, capturing Governors questioning and challenge fully.

Action: Clerk

## Recommendation 2.

Plan a structured training cycle for Governors based on the skills audit. Maintain a record of all governance training undertaken.

Action: Clerk

## Recommendation 3.

Review the Terms of Reference document to ensure relevance. Consider in particular the role of the Clerk and the Headteacher Performance Management criteria.

Action Chair of Governors/Clerk

## Recommendation 4.

Undertake a strategic risk assessment to identify areas of concern to the delivery of objectives including those identified in the school development plan and vision. Set the risk appetite for the organization and ensure intervention plans are in place.

Action: Governing Board

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The consultant would like to thank The Willows Primary School Chair of Governors, Headteacher, Governors, Board Clerk and members of the Senior Leadership Team for their assistance in conducting this review.

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25<sup>th</sup> September 2018