

CHAIR OF GOVERNORS REPORT FOR AGM SEPTEMBER 2019

The AGM gives me the opportunity to review the last 12 months for Higham Primary School from a strategic perspective and to see what progress the school has made against the School Improvement Plan.

At our last Full Governing Body Meeting, in July, I reported on the effectiveness and efficiency of the Governing Body for the last academic year and I reiterate that in my opinion we collectively delivered fantastic support to the school and made the most important decision a Governing Body has to make, in appointing a new substantive Headteacher in Catherine Grattan.

To turn the clock back 12 months:

- 1) We had received a Good Ofsted adjudication in June 2018 but also had a period of uncertainty ahead due to Tracy Coombs leaving the role of Headteacher and Catherine Grattan stepping in as Acting Headteacher until January 2019.
- 2) We had a new Headteacher appointment to make.
- 3) There had been a growing undercurrent of dissatisfaction from parents regarding behaviour issues in certain year groups.
- 4) We had a vacancy at Office Manager following Mrs Michael's decision to retire.
- 5) There was a strong chance that Shorne School would switch caterers for their lunches within their Academy, which would impact on our budget.
- 6) We had Vanessa Levy Acting as Deputy Head until January 2019 and Clare Driscoll joining the Senior Leadership Team (SLT).

The September term started and I was pleased to see that Catherine and Vanessa immediately started to put their own mark on leading the school.

The decision to have at least one of Catherine, Vanessa or Clare at the school gates in the morning and after school set the tone for communication with parents and children which appeared to have an immediate impact in demonstrating that there would be changes.

Parents would be able to "grab a word" if needed with a member of the SLT and raise any fears or concerns directly. Naturally private appointments could still be made if required but it showed that communication would change. I do not think it can be underestimated the value of a smile or a "hello" from the SLT to the parents or children every morning and afternoon.

We would see that this would not be the only change made during the school year, but more of that later.

The Headteacher appointment process was duly followed, which has been documented at length, with the initial decision to extend Catherine's Acting Headteacher status for the whole academic year so that we could review matters half way through the school year. This could have been seen as indecision by the Governing Body, however due to the communication from the Governing Body and the impact made by the new SLT the parents accepted our reasoning without any dissention.

In fact one parent who had previously raised concerns about the behaviour in their child's class took the time at the Parents Consultation meeting to tell me that the SLT were doing a great job and the school seemed a much friendlier place.

Effectively our decision meant that Catherine had 3 terms to audition for the Headteacher role. Her teaching ability, professionalism and love of the school were never in doubt but she had to demonstrate her leadership skills. The school needed not only an excellent teacher but also an excellent leader. Sometimes an internal switch can be harder than an external appointment because the internal teacher may not be aware of changes that were needed.

Catherine and her SLT set about making changes where needed but also was able to build on our Good Ofsted foundations. We did not need to reinvent the wheel at Higham Primary School but we needed to review existing practices and be critical in finding ways to improve.

Over the year we have seen at Committee meetings some of the changes and seen the impact that these changes have had on the children, parents, staff and the community. I will not detail each one at length but I will highlight how the behaviour concerns were tackled.

As I said there had been concerns about the behaviour in certain classes which had seen a rise in complaints in term 6 of the previous year and children choosing to leave Higham Primary School.

The new SLT consulted with parents, staff and children to obtain their views and suggestions. Governors also assisted in this review and a new Behaviour Policy was put in place. The key to this was communicating to all stakeholders and then instigating the new policy to ensure consistency across all year groups.

The changes were introduced and followed. Good behaviour is rewarded and will continue to be rewarded but poor behaviour will be dealt with consistently. In extreme cases exclusions have taken place, which is never an easy decision to make, but rather than being seen as a negative sign has been seen as a positive sign that unacceptable behaviour will not be tolerated at Higham Primary School. Parents like this and I have not received one complaint about pupil behaviour in the whole academic year.

By March Catherine had been leading the school for 6 months, her SLT had assisted her for 6 months and the staff had adapted to changes for 6 months. Parents were happy from feedback that I had received and most importantly the children were progressing as we had the opportunity to see at Governors Day in March.

The Governing Body, following advices from the Headteacher Appointment Panel and the Local Authority Adviser, unanimously voted to appoint Catherine as the Substantive Headteacher from 2nd April 2019 and Vanessa was subsequently appointed as full time Deputy Headteacher following Catherine's recommendation.

I would like you take a few minutes to reflect upon the changes in the last 12 months:

- 1) The Behaviour Policy
- 2) The SLT at the gate in the morning and afternoon
- 3) The new style newsletters
- 4) The new menus for lunchtimes to encourage children to have school meals following the loss of the Shorne catering contract
- 5) Lunch Bags to give more lunchtime options.
- 6) The Colour Run organised by the PTA
- 7) Staff changes both permanent and due to maternity cover
- 8) Premises/grounds changes

- 9) New lunchtime and after school clubs
- 10) Clarity regarding staff appraisal cycles and expectations
- 11) Pay decisions overviewed by Governors Pay Committee
- 12) New Office Manager and changes in the Office work patterns.

These dozen changes are just a snapshot but I could have listed many more changes, some were small while some were highly significant.

It has certainly been a busy year at Higham Primary School and the coming year will no doubt bring some more changes and challenges.

I think our biggest challenge will be financial pressures on the school budget. We are not in a bad state financially due to years of careful budgeting (far better than many schools) but with prices generally rising, funding generally decreasing and national uncertainty regarding Brexit implications we have to watch the pennies and ensure that we receive the best value for our expenditure, whilst also exploring other income streams.

We cannot control costs, Central Government funding or Brexit but we can control our own destiny. There has never been a more important time for parents to support the school. A strong and active PTA is essential but also general parental support is needed, as evidenced at the Colour Run.

A sad result of the financial pressures will mean that the children's learning will be impacted. At Governors Day we were able to witness an external workshop to bring history to life with fancy dress and demonstrations which the children really benefited from. This type of workshop would potentially not be financially viable and so the children would miss out, which would be a crying shame.

As a Governing Body we need to keep monitoring the budget as it will be a constant point of discussion at Resources Committee and FGB along with the regular monitoring of teaching standards and pupil progress at the Curriculum and Standards Committee and FGB.

I am 100% confident that as Governors we will carry out our duties with dedication and support to the school. I would like to thank the Governors and Clerk for their dedication over the last year. The role of a Governor is a voluntary one but also one which should never be underestimated in terms of the impact it has on the pupils, staff and parents at Higham Primary School.

The coming year will have challenges and successes and I have full confidence that the Governing Body will work together to achieve the best outcomes for the school.

Brian Maynard
Chair of Governors