

Chair of Governors Annual Report September 2020

I usually take this opportunity to reflect on the previous 12 months and report on the successes of Higham Primary School with Key Stage 1 and 2 results, Community Events participation and sporting achievements. However, this year I find that replaced with talk about bubbles, hand sanitiser, deep cleaning, lock down restrictions and social distancing caused by the Global Pandemic that is Corona Virus.

2020 has been a year like no other right across the world with the word “unprecedented” used in every walk of life. Higham Primary School is no different and the challenges faced by the Governors and Senior Leadership Team in reacting to events and leading the school has been a huge undertaking.

The school rightly adhered to Government and Local guidelines with the safety of all staff, all pupils and their families being paramount in everything that was decided in our plans.

I am proud to say that the school was open for vulnerable children and the children of key workers right the way through lockdown from late March until the end of term in July. Lessons were set for home learning across all year groups initially and teachers were in contact with pupils through the lockdown period to check wellbeing through this difficult time.

As restrictions were gradually eased we welcomed back firstly Year R and Year 1, then Year 6 and finally Year 5. Not all children returned to school across those years through understandable apprehension from parents. However I viewed each of those landmarks when children returned to school for the first time. I saw the temperatures being checked, the social distancing guidelines in operation, the anxious parents at the gate but also I saw children running across the playground to get back to their classroom. They were clearly looking forward to being back in school.

School was a little different but it was also not too different that it frightened the children. The video by the Attendance Pup on the tricycle was a great idea and I am sure it gave parents peace of mind and gave the children an idea for what to expect around school.

We did manage to give the Year 6 pupils a send off from Higham Primary School as they start their new secondary education in September. They will be invited back later in the year for a presentation evening with shirt signing as these were just not possible in the circumstances in July. They were able to say goodbye to friends and have a socially distanced picnic. It is such a shame that their last months at Higham Primary School after 7 years did not culminate in the usual activities of Enterprise Week, trips, barbecue and the big goodbye on the last day of term.

From a Governing Body point of view school governance has continued via Zoom Video Meetings. Budgets have been set, policies amended due to Corona Virus measures, health and safety assessments and risk assessments for returning children have been completed and preparations made for the new academic year starting in September 2020.

My main considerations for September 2020 are the following 3 areas:

- 1) Integrating all pupils back into school with the “new normal” and operating safely with bubbles. Remember some of these pupils have not been in school for over 5 months and so there maybe some pupils who are apprehensive of the return. There will also be a new Reception class joining the school for the first time.

- 2) Providing Booster learning for pupils to gradually make up the classroom time that has been lost whilst still offering a broad, interesting and exciting curriculum.
- 3) The financial impact on our budget to ensure the safety of all staff and children. For example extra cleaning, extra equipment like hand sanitisers and bins plus the unplanned expenditure which may occur through changes in national guidelines. The budget is already tight and so we will need to focus on this as the year passes and assess accordingly.

The first 2 of these points I know are within the sphere of influence of the teaching staff and I am sure they will do all possible to make the transition back to school as normal as possible. I am sure they will identify and overcome issues for any pupils that are struggling.

The booster learning will be harder to gauge as every pupil is different. Funding for this has been promised by Central Government, but quite how this is implemented is unclear currently or when the funding will be received.

I will be interested to hear the staff observations by the end of Term 1 as to how things have progressed and any challenges that have cropped up. We must, of course, be mindful of children with special educational needs and those children who are classified as Pupil Premium to ensure that their progress is consistent with all pupils, in line with the extra funding received.

In terms of the budget, I believe our financial control is strong and money is not frittered away unnecessarily. We will need to keep a close eye on the monthly bench marking and make necessary decisions to react to unplanned costs. We cannot compromise the health and wellbeing of staff and pupils. The Government have made it clear that their expectation is for all pupils to return to school without exception, so it is our duty to make sure they are as safe as they can possibly be.

I do not have a crystal ball and so cannot tell what the next year will bring. We may return to the "old normal", a vaccine may be found to treat Corona Virus or we may have a positive case of Corona Virus at the school where staff and children have to remain at home for a period of time to isolate to prevent the spreading of the disease. We will tackle the future developments with a positive and practical view seeking guidance from the relevant authorities when needed.

The new academic year sees a few changes amongst the teaching staff with a new SENCO, new class teacher and a maternity cover class teacher.

The new academic year will also see a vacancy of the Governing Body and a new Governors Clerk with the departures of Stewart Mackie and Shirley Pearton.

Stewart has been a Governor for 7 years in which time he has been Committee Chair, Vice Chair of Governors, Governor responsible for training and SEN.

Shirley has been Governors Clerk for over 14 years with 3 Head Teachers, 3 Advisory Headteachers and 3 Chair of Governors during that time. She has supported the school through this period and welcomed countless new governors to the Governing Body. She has acted as a link between the school and national governors guidance and I hate to think how many meetings she has attended and minuted in her term as Clerk.

I would like to thank both Stewart and Shirley for their time and dedication to the school through its ups and downs and wish you both well in the future.

The Governing Body will change naturally as the years go by and will react to different cohorts, different teaching, different national strategies, funding challenges and curve balls like Corona Virus.

I would like to thank the whole Governing Body for their support to the school over the last unprecedented 12 months and hope that you will be as dedicated and focussed over the coming 12 months with whatever confronts us.

I have left my four final thank yous to members of staff who are also present at Governing Body meetings.

Firstly Shaun Walton as Site Manager has been impacted more by the restrictions than any other person, in making sure the school was fit for pupils to return in June and the rest of the school in September. Not only has he worked tirelessly with the existing class rooms, extra cleaning and building modifications but he has also taken on a major rebuild of the old bomb shelter area. It is a fantastic transformation and is also an advert for recycling materials. Plus also his film directing talents of Attendance Pup, as previously mentioned, placed parents and children at ease for the return.

Finally, Catherine Grattan our Head Teacher, along with Senior Leadership Team of Vanessa Levy and Clare Driscoll have led the school through the last few strange months. Catherine is the School Leader but I know is supported by her two lieutenants. The planning, changes in guidance, premises considerations and then the teaching have all been reviewed and amended, then amended again and again. All three have shown a real pride in their role and duty to the school in difficult times.

Not every parent will be 100% happy all the time and hindsight is a wonderful thing after the event, but I think at all times the safety of staff and children has been the top priority followed by the desire to open the school to as many pupils as possible and finally the return to a full school in September. Plans have been painstakingly made and adapted which have worked and will continue to work.

Let's hope that the 2020/21 Academic year is a little bit more normal and we continue to provide the optimum learning experience for all pupils of Higham Primary School.

Brian Maynard
Chair of Governors
September 2020