

Governors' Annual Community Report



To: All Community Members

From: The Governing Board

Date: July 2021



Overview

As part of our commitment to openness and transparency, we have prepared a 2021 community report about governance at St Michael's C.E Primary School; we hope that as parents and members of the wider community you will find this summary both informative and interesting.

It would probably not be over dramatic to say that perhaps in the whole history of St Michael's school, the last year or two have been quite unique in the challenges we have faced, and our core school values of **Respect, Perseverance and Courage** have really come into their own. These values, together with a terrific team effort between staff, parents, carers, governors and not least, the children, mean that the school has emerged with greater resilience, strength and as a community and well-founded aspirations for the future.

The autumn term of 2020 commenced with eager anticipation tempered with caution. We had in place our new leadership team comprising joint headteachers, Hayley Leyson-Brady and Grant Mottram: their combined assets of experience, enthusiasm, creativity, sheer hard work and above all, a passion for the welfare and education of the children, was very evident in all they did. We were raring to go especially after the pandemic induced lockdowns of the previous six months. However, we were cautious about the future as well, for although the pandemic had abated, we knew it might reawaken in time – and indeed it did. All of the spring term was spent in lockdown with teaching being conducted at arms-length, and it was only in the summer that we were able to welcome the children en masse into the classrooms again.

The extended lockdown introduced us all to new experiences and it is a credit to the whole school community that we have emerged from this in a stronger, more resilient position. Perhaps the Governing Board had the easier ride, its meetings having to be conducted on-line, which despite the occasional technical issue, did not prevent it from undertaking its responsibilities effectively. More challenging was the prolonged inability for governors to visit the school in person, which meant the duty of monitoring school activities had to be conducted virtually. Despite this the Teaching and Learning governing team were able to continue to provide insightful reports, thereby enabling the full board to hold the Headteachers to account for the children's progress.



Far greater demands were placed on the teaching staff in delivering the curriculum, online as well as in the classroom, and sometimes in both venues simultaneously. Teaching virtually is no easy matter as the individual needs of the children, many at different levels of attainment, still need to be catered for whilst continuing to set the highest standards and expectations generally. Staff had to master new skills, and the intensity of lesson planning reached new heights. We are incredibly fortunate to have such a dedicated teaching team – classroom teachers and teaching assistants together - at St Michael's, and it is in large part due to their efforts many children made good progress despite the difficulties.

Parents and carers everywhere were thrown into the now familiar experience of home teaching and St Michael's parents and carers met the challenge head on. Everyone at the school is immensely grateful for all parents and carers did to support the lead given by teachers, and helped their children to continue to thrive in their learning. We are, of course, very aware that the pandemic has set overall progress back, but thanks to the efforts of all involved, not least the children who proved to be adaptable, cheerful and enthusiastic, that we can start the next academic year in a far stronger position than might have been the case.

When we were able to welcome the children back into the classroom, a 'covid secure' environment was essential. The headteachers worked long and hard at producing a plan that would keep children and staff safe and this included all the previously unheard of techniques such as bubbles, social distancing and sanitising. Never have so many little hands been so furiously scrubbed. Without wishing to tempt fate, as yet we have had no recorded instances of Covid amongst staff and pupils. A heart-felt thanks must go to the School Business Manager, Mrs Scaysbrook and her team of Mrs Ashford and Miss Bosley in overseeing many of these arrangements. Sadly, the precautions have prevented us from having our superb team of volunteers in the school to support the children in their reading and other areas; we are looking forward to welcoming you back in the near future!

Despite the restrictions, every endeavour has been made to provide some normality whenever possible and the children have enjoyed learning events such as a Pirate Day, Roman Day, a visit to the Natural History Museum, as well as a visit from local scientists to engage the children in STEM activities: the feedback from these visitors regarding the children was fulsome and in particular commenting that their questions were far more insightful than much older pupils. Given these efforts, it is most encouraging that attendance remains high at just under 97%.



What do governors do at St Michael's?

Governors at St Michael's provide strategic leadership and accountability. Amongst many other things, we hold the main responsibility for finance and work with Mrs Leyshon-Brady and Mr Mottram to make the tough decisions about how our budget should be spent. Each governor is a member of the governing board, which is established in law as a corporate body. We cannot act independently; decisions are the joint responsibility of the governing board and it should be remembered that both Headteachers and one staff member are also governors. For details of your school governors, [please visit the governor section of the school website.](#)

The role of the governing board is a strategic one; its key functions are to:

- ♣ Set the aims and objectives for the school.
- ♣ Set the policies and targets for achieving those aims and objectives.
- ♣ Monitor and evaluate the progress the school is making towards achievement of its aims and objectives.
- ♣ Be a source of challenge and support to the head teachers, as a critical friend.

How have Governors held the school to account?

There are two key documents, which guide the governors in their work. These are the school Self-Evaluation, which defines the current state of the school in terms of strengths and areas for improvement; and the school Development Plan, which sets out the actions to be taken to ensure that these areas for improvements are tackled. Both documents are prepared by the headteachers, scrutinised and agreed by the governors and then used as the yardstick by which the leadership can be held to account. A number of techniques are deployed to ensure accountability and these include challenging headteachers at governor meetings, and conducting monitoring visits of the school when teachers can be questioned and children's work inspected in order to gather the evidence that objectives are being met.



The areas that governors have been focusing on are varied and numerous but include:

- To embed a mastery approach in mathematics across the school
- Improve the quality of writing in KS1 and KS2
- Improve the quality of assessment and tracking in order to inform teaching
- Governors to be more directly involved with all leaders for robust evaluation of the school – visits to be directly linked to whole school priorities for improvement.
- To develop a more distributive Leadership Culture, with a clear focus on quantifiable improvement of Teaching and Learning.

This is not an exhaustive list but a highlighted one, which reflects the strategy of the governors that the school should provide the highest level of teaching and learning for our children. The strategy takes a holistic approach, recognising that it is a combination of quality of teaching, an inspiring curriculum, accurate assessment of pupil progress, reflective learning by children, professional development of teaching staff, and effective leadership by headteachers and senior staff that will achieve our aspirations. In short, our vision is that we are to be a true 'learning school' where all members of our community seek opportunities to learn and improve, what ever our level of experience and expertise; to never rest on our laurels.

At times over the last year, our strategy has been diverted as we have taken the many measures needed to deal with the pandemic. However, much has been achieved. The whole school curriculum has been reviewed and reconstructed so that there is continuity through the year groups, where learning is reinforced through step-by-step building of concepts and knowledge. This will be launched in its complete state in September but the basic are already in place in writing and mathematics. Coaching and professional development of teaching skills has been provided by the headteachers and by outside consultants, and we are delighted to observe that increasingly, this role is being taken on by senior teachers. The SEND provision (Special Educational Needs) has been completely overhauled under the leadership of Mrs Sipson and, as part of 'learning school' strategy, SEND is embedded at the heart of our teaching rather than as a bolt-on. Such as the pandemic has allowed, we have re-appraised methods and skills of assessment so that we have an accurate and reliable basis for understanding where children are now, and assessing their progress in the future. The teaching of phonics has been reviewed and steps taken to ensure there continues to be an effective delivery in early years; likewise, a review of reading is also being undertaken with a view to increase the quantity and quality of guided reading. Finally, a new middle leadership team has been announced (details can be found in a recent parent communication) to fulfil our aim of having a more distributive Leadership Culture, with a clear focus on quantifiable improvement of Teaching and Learning. Again, this is not an exhaustive list but is intended to give an idea of our direction.



In more general terms, we are of course a Church of England School and the Christian ethos lies at the heart of all our endeavours. In this respect, the governors and the headteachers are engaged in reviewing what this can mean to children, staff and leaders and how this can be lived out in daily school life. With the support of our two lead governors in this area, Rev'd Phil Sutton and Kathryn Mendus, the school has adopted Jesus' teaching from the Sermon on the Mount recorded in the Gospel of St Luke, where he challenges us with these words: ***'So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you'***.

These are essential and worthy matters, but the governors must also consider practical affairs that underpin the activities of the school. This includes finance. We faced the year with the prospect of running the school at a deficit, a consequence of falling government income directly related to a drop in the school roll when these calculations are made in the autumn term. However, with prudent management by the leadership team and school business manager, experienced guidance from our school bursar, strong oversight by our lead governor, Nigel Goode, and wonderful support from parents, carers and wider community under the hat of the Steventon School Association, and also from SAYRINC, we will be able end the academic year with a small surplus. This achievement is a tribute to the efforts (and occasionally sacrifices) of the whole school community.

Looking to the future

We are optimistic that the worst of the pandemic is behind us and that come September, we will be enjoying much higher levels of engagement in person within the school buildings. There is a buoyant mood about the school and a keenness to be able to put into action all that we have been working on over the last year without the diversion of bubbles, masks and even worse, lockdowns. We are particularly excited that the efforts of all of us have been rewarded by a growing interest in St Michael's School and the fact that we are over-subscribed for the next academic year – at the time of press, the only school in the Abingdon cluster that is in this happy position. We know that the pandemic has set us back and that not all children are where we would like them to be; however, after the well-deserved rest of the summer holidays, the whole team – governors, leadership, staff and above all – you, our parents and carers, and your children – will be raring to go!

Conclusion

The governing board of St Michael's School has fulfilled all its statutory duties and, despite the background challenges, has made good progress in implementing its vision for the school. It is a joy to work with such an energetic set of teachers, parents, carers, children and a matter of great fulfilment for what is a voluntary role. We do have a vacancy on the board for a governor, if you would like to join our happy team, please contact me in the first instance.

And finally, we would like to thank our year six children and wish them good luck as they move onto their secondary school.